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DECEMBER 1919

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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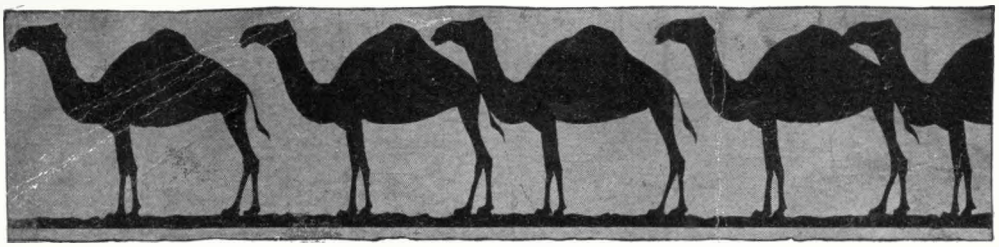

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December 1919

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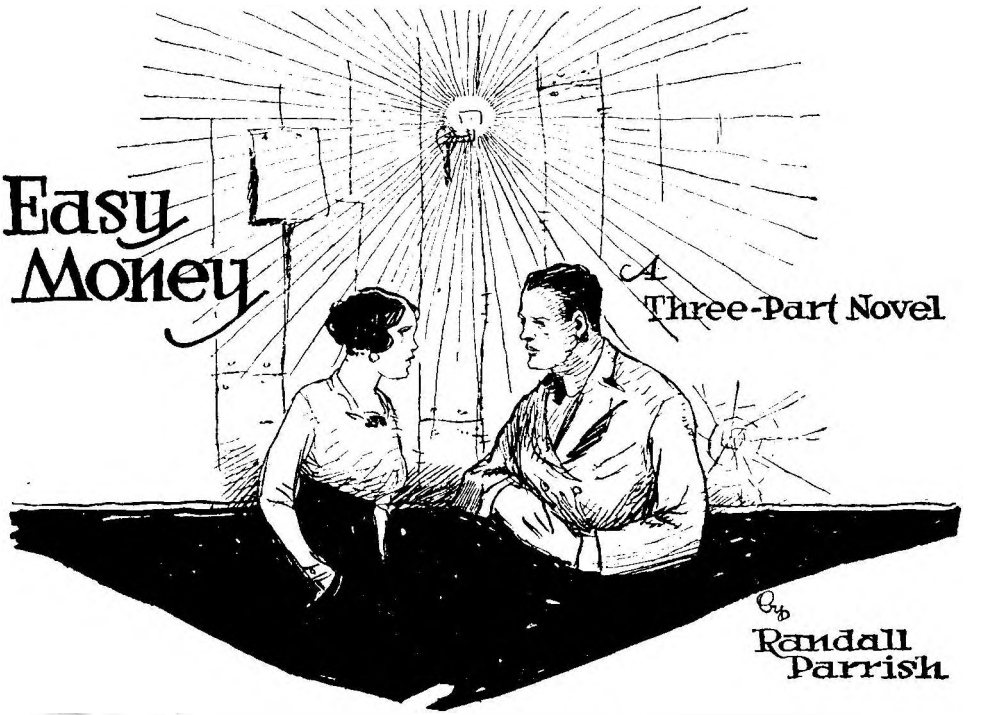

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CHAPTER I

The Message in the Box

ANTICIPATING the possibility of my train's arriving late, I had named the hour of meeting with Cummings as three o'clock and in consequence of our reaching the city exactly on time, was compelled to loiter idly about the hotel for an hour. However, in passing through the corridor my attention was attracted by a unique curiosity-shop occupying a small side room, and I entered.

I have always had a hobby for curios of all kinds, and have lived many years abroad in the consular service, with a passion for visiting new regions whenever possible. With awakening interest I began examining the stock exposed for sale. The proprietor joined me, but discovering that I was merely curious, permitted me to prowl among the cases undisturbed.

There were several articles I lingered over, tempted to purchase, but drifted on, rather undecided, until my eyes perceived a very quaint lacquered jewel-box, entirely different from anything of its kind I had ever noted before. It was evidently old, but of a workmanship quite unique. Indeed as I looked at it, endeavoring to trace the markings on its silvered front, I could not determine whether it had originated in Orient or Occident; seemingly it combined features of both schools, uniting the peculiarities of each. The proprietor, perceiving my interest, joined me.

"The jewel-box attracts you," he said pleasantly, opening the case and bringing it forth. "And the closer you examine the work, the more you will appreciate the design. You have love for such things?"

"A deep interest, at least," I admitted, taking the article from his hand. "A collector in an amateur way."

"You have traveled, no doubt?"

"Rather extensively; much of my collection has been gathered from foreign shops; but I confess this puzzles me. What is the workmanship—surely not Japanese?"

"No!"—smilingly. "Although positively I cannot answer as to its origin. I studied it for days, and even now can only make an intelligent guess. The inscription, which can only be read with a microscope,"—he traced the line with his finger,—"is ancient Arabic; but no wild Arab ever did the lacquer."

"Who, then?"

"My decision would be a Spanish Moor, a wondrous workman. There were such artisans, rare geniuses, indeed."

I turned the box over, whirling the gold key in the lock, and glancing inside.

"Yet so strange a curio must have a history. What is the story?"

"Positively none," he admitted regretfully. "Perhaps I am a poor salesman to admit this, but the fact is, this article was found by a chambermaid in one of the hotel rooms, and turned in to the manager. He made every effort to trace the guests, only to learn that they—two men, by the way—had registered falsely. He even advertised, but with no response, and finally after thirty days was persuaded to accept my offer for the article. No doubt there is a story, and an interesting one, connected with this box, but this is as far as my knowledge goes."

"You are too honest for your business."

"Quite probable; yet I have found frankness to pay in the long run."

"You have put a price on this?"

"Yes—ridiculously low, no doubt, yet bringing me a good profit. The fact is, strange as the workmanship is, only a few collectors appreciate it. You are only the second to show particular interest."

HE named a price, and still with the box in my hands, I yielded to the temptation and bought it. The article was sufficiently small to find lodgment in an overcoat pocket, and as Cummings appeared a little later, was soon forgotten in the earnestness of our conversation. The occasion of our conference, being merely a matter of business, has no direct bearing on this story, and consequently does not need to be dwelt upon; but we later had dinner together and attended the theater in company, my mind so occupied with other matters that I scarcely once thought of the strange purchase I had made, which remained securely hidden. It was only after returning to my own room, near midnight, that it was recalled to memory.

Only an idle curiosity, and a feeling of sleeplessness, induced me to draw the article forth and remove its wrappings; but the sight served immediately to increase my interest. It was certainly a wonderful find, artistically beautiful, and most unusual in design. It rested open on the writing desk, under the full glare of the electric light, its strange workmanship exposed to scrutiny. There was a mystery here that must have exercised a strange spell over my imagination, for I dreamed of the long-dead workman who fashioned it, forgetful of the passing night hours. A clock somewhere in the neighborhood struck, and I counted twelve, arousing myself. Perhaps I was already half sleeping, for as I turned to rise, my sleeve struck the box at the edge of the table, and it fell before I could prevent it."

There was no crash, no clatter, for the thick carpet deadened the sound; but as I stooped hastily to recover the overturned box, I was astounded to discover the bottom slipped partly aside, as though some secret spring had been touched, revealing so narrow a receptacle that the ordinary eye would never suspect the possibility of its existence. Closely as I had examined previously, no conception of any such secret hiding-place had so much as occurred to me; yet now I could not doubt the evidence of my own eyes. Not only was there a false bottom, but the opening revealed a closely folded paper. I grasped this quickly, a thrill running through me. What ancient and long-buried message was about to be unfolded?

BUT no! This was plainly modern—a clean white sheet, no folded parchment of old, but some mystery of yesterday. I spread it out, passing down the unsoiled creases. There was writing there, in Spanish, so faintly traced I could barely decipher the words, yet clearly revealed as of this day and generation. I know Spanish fairly well, having had a year in Mexico City; yet it required some time before I could puzzle out the message on this sheet. Even when I had carefully written down the translation into English, all was not clear to my understanding; yet there was sufficient to awaken both curiosity and fear. The paper had been torn, seemingly

sundered from a much longer letter, and preserved merely because of the specific address, and instructions it contained. Beyond doubt all else had been destroyed. Probably it had been preserved with this certainty—that, if discovered, it would be worthless without a key to unravel its mystery.

Yet it was modern, something relating to this very period, a menace—something to be grasped and understood. I put the words together, weighing each one with care as to its exact meaning, and read them over with increased bewilderment. The torn fragment began and ended abruptly; I could only guess at its meaning; yet the impression left upon my mind was both sinister and menacing. I wanted to know more.

108 sailed Saturday from Stockholm. Will deposit letter of credit with Krantz to your order. Amount ample all needs. See to this at once, and advise 876 Gans, so as to be no delay. Two raps, three — Cervantes. Waldron favors action this month; suggest Watonia. Can you be ready? Use South A code.

That this letter was authentic, I had no doubt. Otherwise it would never have been preserved and hidden in the false bottom of the box. Beyond question this fragment of a letter had been torn off and kept because of its definite instructions. Nor was its meaning altogether obscure in the light of certain events. Several allusions were familiar to me, and these were what caused my earlier suspicions to crystallize into probability. It bore all the earmarks of a plot, a revolutionary plot, and one not yet brought to consummation. To be sure, the note was undated, and the box had been left at the hotel thirty days before. Yet "Watonia" was certainly the name of a ship, and to my memory suggested Central American trade—a United Fruit steamer. This did not necessarily imply that the conspirators had abandoned their purpose. More likely they were not quite ready in time to operate on the sailing-date of that particular ship. Some delay had occurred, and possibly even now prompt action might overturn all their plans. I sat a long while, staring at the letter, raking my memory in determination to miss nothing, and becoming more and more firmly convinced that I was on the right track. Then I undressed and went to bed, but not to sleep, for the darkness brought thoughts and suggestions for the morrow.

CHAPTER II

End of a Blind Alley

I WAS still in Government employ, although at present unassigned, and felt this strange discovery to be a direct call upon my service. While my first inclination should naturally have been to turn the whole matter over to the proper bureau for investigation, two facts led me in another direction: I was sufficiently young to seek adventure, and I desired to verify my suspicions before creating any false alarm.

As I rested there, sleepless, staring up at the black ceiling, the words of the strange fragment of letter remained vividly before me. I began to analyze them and plan the operation of the next day. There was no reason why I should immediately leave the city; indeed I could not think of doing so until I had probed deeper into this mystery. It began to fascinate me, to grow more and more important, to dominate my mind. Little by little I dug at the truth, coming finally to this conclusion. "108" was no doubt the recognized number of some agent who had been dispatched to America on a special errand to the conspirators in this country. He had sailed Saturday, a month ago, or more, and must have long since arrived at some port, bringing with him instructions not to be intrusted to the mail, and sufficient money, in the form of a letter of credit, with which to finance whatever nefarious scheme of revolution or disorder might be contemplated. This money was to be paid out to the authorized party through a man named Krantz.

Who was Krantz? There was a well-known banking-firm Kulb, Krantz & Company, in Wall Street, and it was quite probable these might prove the ones involved, although to my knowledge they had no outward junta connections of this nature. However, no firm having South or Central American financial dealings could be entirely beyond suspicion under the circumstances. "Gans" was evidently a street, though I could recall none bearing so peculiar an appellation; the password was in itself proof almost positive as to the South or Central American sympathies of the conspirators. If not, it was yet further evidenced by the instructions to use the "South A" code in case any message had to be sent by wireless.

These facts were fairly clear as I thus

wove them together, but they were rendered more damning by the other name mentioned—Waldron. If this was Ivan Waldron, I had good reason to know the fellow, and to connect his activities with any scheme destined to embarrass the Government. He was not of South American stock, to be sure; nor had I previously heard of his being in company connected with revolutionary propaganda; but he was a professional agitator of the most pronounced type, an anarchist radical, who in the past had openly advocated opposition to all law and order. Moreover the fellow had a large and desperate following, to whom he was a high priest. I had met him twice, and realized that he would hesitate at nothing to achieve whatever end he had in view. I recalled him clearly—a tall, thin, bony man, with deep-sunken eyes and a strange personal magnetism which won him converts.

LATER I dropped asleep, but I woke early, and with plans fully matured for immediate action. At the breakfast-table this determination was strengthened by noting among the columns of the morning paper that a freighter, the *Lancashire,* had returned to her dock somewhat damaged by the explosion of a bomb in the coal-bunkers, and was found to be laden with war-munitions for Brazil. While nothing definite was hinted at in the report, I at once naturally connected this shipment with the fragment of letter in my possession. If this particular gang was not responsible, they were certainly planning something of a similar nature, which might prove far more disastrous.

As soon as possible I sought out Burke, the manager of the hotel, with whom I had a speaking acquaintance, and without confiding the extent of my discovery, questioned him relative to the mysterious box and the guests who left it behind. His memory of the incident was clear enough, and he took trouble to verify the date by reference to the hotel books. Two men, both well dressed, but with nothing particularly to distinguish them, had registered together late in the afternoon of Friday, September 27th, and on request had been assigned to one room with twin beds, and a bath. The room given them was known as E. 37. The larger man, who had inscribed himself as "P. S. Horner, Detroit," alone had a bag; his companion, known to the hotel as "Gustave Alva," Toledo, Ohio, was without baggage. Neither man made any deep impression on the hotel employees, and descriptions were extremely vague as to their personal appearances. The bill was paid the next morning by Horner, and the two departed together.

It was an hour later when the chambermaid on that floor reported finding the box in the room vacated. After holding it for a day or two in expectation that it might be called for, the hotel endeavored to trace the men, but to no avail. One P. S. Horner was located in Detroit, but easily proved he was not the person sought; and no Gustave Alva was to be discovered in Toledo. The fellows had either falsely registered or were entirely unknown where they claimed residence. The first was the most probable condition. After thirty days, and having exhausted all reasonable efforts to find the rightful owner, the hotel felt legally justified in selling the trinket. That was all Burke knew of the matter, and his interest in it was not keen. It was to him quite a commonplace.

I talked with the bellboy who had taken them to the room, but his recollections were extremely hazy as to their personal appearance—the big man gave him a quarter, and had a black mustache, and seemed foreign; that was about as far as his memory extended. The chambermaid had no glimpse of either one of the fellows. My investigations thus far were practically barren of results.

WHAT step to take next was a problem. I am inclined to think now, that I went at the problem without much system, and that any success achieved was through pure accident. During the forenoon I dropped in upon Clement Breckenridge, cashier of the Drovers' National Bank. We had been classmates at college, and I generally called on him when in the city. This time I led the conversation to Kulb, Krantz & Company, on the pretense that I had received mail from them relative to some recommended investment. Clement knew Krantz well and favorably, and my probing elicited the information that the man was Austrian by birth, but a naturalized citizen, rather deeply interested in political matters. Since the outbreak of war he had strongly advocated neutrality, even going to Washington on several occasions to impress his views on various members of Congress. If his

sympathies were at all antagonistic or revolutionary, he had carefully refrained from any open expression. The firm had made a specialty of handling South American business, and had intimate financial connections in both Rio and Buenos Aires. The company ranked high in financial circles.

"The present war must have cost them a rather heavy loss," I hazarded.

"No doubt of that," Breckenridge admitted, "but only temporarily. In my judgment Adolph Krantz is not the kind of man whose patriotism would be swayed by the loss of a few dollars. In fact, he could drop a million and scarcely miss it."

"Those are the very ones who suffer the most. However, this is nothing to me. By the way, Clement, do you chance to know of a Gans Street in this town?"

"Gans? That is a new one on me. Try the city directory—there on the edge of the desk."

THE name was not to be found, nor any other approaching it in sound or spelling! I finally drifted out onto the street, really no wiser than when I first entered. I made one more effort, telephoning to a detective sergeant whom I knew well, as to the present whereabouts of Ivan Waldron. He had not heard of the man for several weeks, but promised to inquire and let me know. He got me on the wire at the hotel an hour later—the last heard of Waldron he was in West Virginia, speaking to striking miners; that was less than a week ago; he had not been seen in the city since.

The whole affair looked hopeless. Every clue had failed, and I could figure out no other opening. I could not persuade myself that the fragment of letter was a fake; yet it contained so little information as to yield me no point from which to start an investigation. I sat in the room alone, thinking it all over, but finding nothing to encourage me to any further effort. About all I could do would be to send the torn note to the proper authorities in Washington, with a statement of how it came into my possession, and let them dispose of the matter in any way they deemed best. I wrote such a letter carefully on hotel stationery, and went down to mail it in the lobby. Before depositing it in the mail-box I encountered the manager, Burke, and stopped for a word. We were still talking when a bellboy came up hurriedly with a message. Burke turned.

"What is it, George?"

"That Gans Street party is on the wire, sir."

"Oh, all right. Excuse me, Severn, but I've been trying to get connection for an hour."

"But wait a minute,"—my veins tingling. "Did he say Gans Street? Where is that? There is no such name in the city directory."

"Gans! Why over in Jersey. Yes, I'm coming."

I thrust the unmailed letter into my pocket, and sat down, staring at the crowd in the lobby, but entirely indifferent to their presence. Here at least, was an opening, a chance—Gans Street was in Jersey City. Then it was not all a dream. I would at least look over the ground before I gave up in despair, for I had stumbled upon a way out of the blind alley—Gans Street, Jersey City.

CHAPTER III

A Man and a Woman

IT was late in the afternoon, the day dark with a chilly wind blowing off the river, when I reached Jersey City. The first policeman encountered gave me all necessary directions, so that I alighted from a street-car within a block of my destination. This was not a part of the city I had ever had occasion to visit before; it was largely devoted to small manufacturing plants, with ordinary workingmen's houses in between, and along the side-streets. Gans Street had been paved at one time, but was already badly guttered by heavy traffic, and inexpressibly dirty.

I walked up a block, and back, before I was able to determine definitely the number I was seeking, not feeling it best to question the few people I passed on the way. A saloon on the upper corner of the block furnished me the necessary clue, and, using it as a marker, I succeeded in tracing back until satisfied I had thus safely located "876." It was an abandoned factory, built of brick, two stories high, evidently extending over considerable ground at the rear, but with a frontage not to exceed forty feet. The lower windows were boarded up, a number of those in the second story broken; and the main entrance, large enough for the passage of

a motortruck, was tightly secured by an immense iron bar. A smaller door to the right alone offered any possibility of entrance, although it was tightly closed.

To all outward appearances the place had been unoccupied for months, and perhaps years. It was exceedingly dirty and disreputable, a mere vacant shell. I surveyed the place from both sides, but gained no information. A lumber-yard abutted it on the left; a small vacant lot, grown up to weeds, was at the right, with a corrugated-iron garage beyond. From the sidewalk it was impossible to gain any glimpse within. Only one discovery served to convince me that I might be on the right track. A small sign, so thickly covered with dust and dirt as to be almost unreadable, was nailed over the small door. It read:

Office
ALVA MALLEABLE IRON COMPANY

Here was a strange coincidence, if nothing more, for Gustave Alva had been one of the names signed on the hotel register. Beyond doubt this abandoned iron foundry was his property; and what better spot could be selected in which to meet and concoct a scheme of crime? What a place in which to hide arms for shipment!

I crossed the street, and hidden securely in the shadow of the building opposite, studied intently the dark outline of the old factory. It exhibited not the slightest sign of life, remaining black and silent from top to bottom. However the place might be utilized at times for secret meetings, or as a hiding-place for revolutionary material, it was plainly enough deserted now. Yet within, there might be found evidence that such gatherings were held there, or some clue revealed which would point the way toward a revelation as to the purpose of the conspirators.

The night was dark, perfect for my purpose. A slight drizzle in the air—no one abroad except from necessity. A dim light showed through a dingy window of the garage, where some mechanic was still tinkering, but beyond that, no sign of life was visible for the full extent of the block, until the saloon on the further corner came into view. Its gleaming hospitality invited me, and I strolled along the opposite walk, my coat-collar turned up to shut out the drizzle, and finally crossed over to where I could peer in through the dingy windows. The man behind the bar was unmistakably Polish, and of no very high type; and at first I saw no other occupants of the place except two roughly dressed men at a table just inside, who were playing cards silently. The room was clean enough, and quiet; yet I felt no inclination to enter. These were not fellows it would be safe to question; and I would have turned away, but at that instant I perceived the indistinct figure of a woman in the further corner, sitting beside a table alone.

FROM my position outside I obtained merely a glimpse; yet her presence stimulated my curiosity. She appeared to be young, not badly dressed, and her presence in such a place unattended, at that hour, rendered her of some interest. It surely could do not harm if I dropped in for a sandwich and a glass of beer. I crossed to the bar, furtively watchful, but no one except the proprietor apparently paid the slightest attention to my entrance. The two men never glanced up from their cards, and the girl—for she was scarcely more—merely turned her head and stared at me without apparent interest. I spoke to the bar-man in English, and he served me pleasantly, indicating a vacant table. We exchanged a few words, his own speech very broken, while he prepared the sandwich, and the only thing unusual I noticed was the passage of a slight signal between him and the woman across the room. I could not be sure even as to that, but gained the impression that he shook his head negatively, as though to some mute question.

I could perceive her very clearly now as I sat munching at the rye bread, and this view of her served to increase my interest decidedly. Unless it might be the intense brunette blackness of hair and an extremely clear complexion, there was nothing typically Spanish in her appearance. Indeed, she impressed me as thoroughly American in features, dress and manner—somewhere in the twenties I should judge, with brown eyes, and a face decidedly pleasant to look upon, although with a firmness to it, expressed by both mouth and chin, not to be mistaken.

Presently the proprietor approached me, leaning one hand on the table.

"There is nothing more?" he asked.

"No, this will answer very well."

He lingered.

"You have not been in before? Perhaps you do not live near?"

"I do not," I replied frankly. "I travel out of Boston, and sell lumber. I have been doing some business with the yard down below."

"I see. You just blow in on your way home. You are not from New York, I make it?"

"No; Boston has always been my home."

"Once I live there too—when I first come north from Rio. What you think about this war? We lick Germany—hey?"

"She seems to be holding her own."

"*Ach,* yes! But now this country go in, what then?"

I looked up quickly into his face, with a swift desire to test his real sentiment.

"This country! Why should it go in? There are Germans enough over here to stop that."

"Not Germans—no. But internationals, revolutionaries. They are more than you think. 'Tis now good time for them to strike a great blow."

"You are Polish, are you not?"

"Yah, from Warsaw. I come over six years."

"To America?"

"To Brazil. I like it better here."

"Naturalized?"

"I have first papers—why you ask? I always been good citizen, I guess."

"No doubt of that. I merely questioned from curiosity." My eyes wandered once more to the girl across the room, and he noticed the glance.

"You wonder what she do in here?" he asked. "I tell you. She was my niece, an' sit here to wait for a friend to walk home with her. It is not a good neighborhood, this, for a woman alone in the dark. So she wait here till her friend come. Soon he will arrive; then they go out together—see?"

"Her home is some distance?"

"Five—six blocks. It is a dark, bad way; often she wait here so, when she come from the city late. It was more safe she do so."

HE moved back toward the bar, apparently satisfied with his examination of me, as well as his explanation. I wondered grimly why he had taken the trouble to tell me all this, and ordered another glass of beer as an excuse to linger there awhile longer. What was the person like who was to call for the girl? Would it be a man, or a woman? I did not have to linger long to gratify my curiosity. The side door opened silently, and a man stepped briskly inside, shaking the raindrops from his coat as he greeted the bar-man cheerily.

"A dirty night, Jans," he said, glancing swiftly about, his eyes sweeping over me sharply. "Business not very good, I suppose?"

"Dead. It's no good now any more, with all the factories closing up because of the war. Just some salesman drops in for a beer. That makes me nothings."

The newcomer laughed, evidently put quite at ease by this quick explanation. I was watching him. He was rather thickset, with a turned-up mustache and a disfiguring scar on one cheek which gave to his eye a peculiar expression. His eyes were furtive, unpleasant, and his teeth gleamed prominently, with a suggestion of cruelty. Watching the fellow, I must have missed some signal, for he whirled about suddenly and confronted the girl, who had already risen to her feet and stood expectantly, one hand yet resting on the table. Instantly he stepped forward, bowing eagerly, with white teeth more prominently exposed.

"Ah, señorita! You were waiting for me to come!" he exclaimed. "Yet I have not kept you long."

"Oh, no," she answered quietly in Spanish, her voice so low the words barely carried to where I sat. "Only the surroundings are not particularly attractive. You were delayed?"

"A car-blockade at the wharf. No, thank you, Jans, nothing to-night. You would go, señorita?"

"There can be nothing to remain longer here for, surely."

I watched them disappear through the side door, marking his grasp on her arm, and her quick glance aside into his face. There had been something wrong about this meeting, something undeniably awkward and constrained. These two were not what they pretended to be—old-time friends meeting incidentally to walk home together. They were strangers, coming together there for the first time by appointment. Neither had previously known the other. I had even detected fear, doubt, in the expression of the girl's face.

Yet I dared not move or attempt to follow them. I could only sit quietly, my eyes on the window fronting the street. I watched intently, but no shadows passed

that way—the two had not turned down Gans Street.

CHAPTER IV

On the Right Trail

MY mind worked rapidly as I sat there motionless, afraid to make the slightest move lest it arouse suspicion. These two people were strangers; they had met in this odd spot by appointment, and for some secret purpose. My unexpected presence had disturbed their plan, and they had endeavored to deceive me by pretense at a previous acquaintanceship. Whatever the object of the meeting might be, Jans was more or less involved. He had signaled to the girl twice, and his words, however innocent they may have sounded, must have brought a warning to the man. Beyond doubt he had questioned me with the distinct purpose of thus discovering why I had drifted into the place. I dismissed utterly his statement that the young woman was his niece—her very appearance gave that the lie.

He had gone behind the bar, and was busily polishing the glasses, but his glance into the mirror enabled the fellow easily to observe my slightest movement. I must remain there, apparently indifferent, until he no longer suspected me of seeking to follow those two; yet I meant to trace them, if later I found the slightest chance. The strange circumstances of their meeting, the marked difference between them, their effort at secrecy, their conversing in Spanish, all combined to arouse me to action. I finished my beer slowly, and then selected a cigar from the case and lighted it deliberately. Jans leaned over the bar, speaking confidentially; and I had to remain, although I cursed inwardly at the delay. Yet I broke away at last, assured that I had finally lulled every suspicion to rest, and passed out through the front door.

The street was deserted and rain-swept, the few lights showing mere pin-pricks in the darkness. A half-glance backward revealed Jans, my emptied mug in his hand, staring out through the window as though to note which direction I took. I plunged straight across the street, as though headed for the nearest car-line, and then, in the shade of darkness, retraced my steps until I attained the side entrance.

Here, assured that I was safely beyond observation, I paused to gain some conception of my surroundings. This was not easy. The street was muddy and ill-lighted; indeed, the only light I saw was halfway down the block, a mere glimmer. Across from where I stood appeared the dim outlines of a long, ramshackle building, apparently a shed of some kind; beyond the saloon was a row of one-story dwelling-houses, seemingly exactly alike, and exhibiting no evidence of being occupied. There was nothing in the outlook to guide me.

In which direction had the couple turned after their exit through the side door of the saloon—to right or left? If the right, could they have crossed the street beneath the sputtering lamp without my seeing them through the window? I could not be sure; yet the feeling gripped me that in all probability they had turned the other way, down this black passage.

I threw away the cigar, a vile weed, and advanced cautiously, finding the narrow board sidewalk in very bad condition. One or two of the houses showed dim lights within as I drew near, but these were barely visible through tightly drawn curtains, and the street itself remained utterly deserted. It was only when I attained the end of this row of houses and came to the entrance of a narrow, dark alley, that I found the slightest proof that I was by good fortune upon the right trail. It was above this opening that the incandescent bulb flickered dimly; yet in spite of wind and rain it gave me glimpse of the mud underfoot. The two must have been the only ones passing that way since the drizzle began, for their footprints were yet visible in the soft mud of the crossing as they advanced beyond the safety of the board walk—the narrow shoe of the woman particularly noticeable and clearly defined. By bending low, and keeping my own shadow out of the way, I was able to trace their progress for two or three yards quite easily; and then, to my surprise, the footprints turned abruptly to the left, and disappeared entirely.

TO all appearances the two had proceeded down the alley. I searched between that point and where the sidewalk began again, but without discovering the slightest mark to show they had gone on. Uninviting, as that gloomy passage appeared, they must have turned into it and

groped their way forward. Where? For what purpose? I could think of but one object — the Alva iron factory, the mysterious meeting-place at 876 Gans Street. Beyond all question this alley would skirt along the back of that building, and there would be an entrance at the rear. I must have blindly stumbled on the truth, and even found the means of probing it.

Dare I go alone, unarmed as I was, knowing nothing of what I might encounter? I hesitated, my heart beating like a trip-hammer; yet, after all, the danger seemed more of the imagination than reality. There was little more than darkness to fear. If the iron factory was the place these two people sought, they were already there, and I would assume but little risk in stealing silently down the deserted alley in the endeavor to assure myself of this fact. I crept forward, enveloped in gloom, keeping as close as possible to the high board fence at the left. This was broken in places, and diversified by an occasional barn, or outhouse. The passage was so black, I lost all knowledge as to how far I had gone, and was only aroused to my position by finally coming up against a pile of lumber which completely blocked the further end of the alley. I recalled dimly that the passage swerved here, running along the side of the Alva factory until it reached Gans Street. Then the place I sought was to my left, behind the protection of this high fence, along which I had been so cautiously feeling my way.

It required a moment or two to study this situation out, all the surroundings appearing strange in that darkness. The silence was profound, stupefying, uncanny. Against the lighter lead of the upper sky I was barely able to trace the upper story of the building, but it was all black, a gloomy, deserted pile. Any faith I might have had that the two I had attempted to follow had come there vanished as I strained my eyes for some gleam of light or any other sign to denote their presence within. I still believed they had turned down the alley, but this was not their goal; beyond doubt they had entered some gate along the way and thus escaped me entirely.

So impressed was I with this probability that my interest in the chase failed; nor did I any longer feel the necessity of caution. I hardly know what impelled me to grope my way back along the fence blindly feeling for a gate — curiosity, no doubt, and a lingering desire to make certain of what was inside the barrier. The entrance was easily found, a mere wooden door, held by an iron clasp, which opened instantly to my touch. I stepped inside, closing it quietly behind me, and stared uneasily about through the enshrouding blackness.

MY eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom, made out dim outlines encouraging further exploration. A brick ell came within four or five feet of the fence, and I felt along this with my hands, locating a number of windows but no door. This ell was of one story, and not as wide as the main building, which towered up against the sky; and discovering ample space there, and what felt to my feet like a walk, I turned the corner in search.

At that moment the gate latch clicked sharply, and I sank down into the black ground-shadow, every nerve tingling with alarm. The gate operated almost noiselessly, yet my strained ears could detect its stealthy movement, and hear the crunch of a heavy footstep on the cinder path within. The fellow evidently knew his way even in that darkness, for there was no hesitancy in his movements, no uncertainty. He passed within a few feet of where I crouched, evidently feeling for the wall in guidance, because as his outstretched hand touched the bricks, he growled a word of satisfaction, and turned sharply away. To my eyes he was no more than a lump, a shadow, almost shapeless in the folds of a long coat. Only the heaviness of his step, and the gruffness of his voice in that single exclamation, identified him as a man. Then he faded away along the rear wall, and I became aware that the fellow had turned about the farther corner. That would naturally mean there was a door there. I had evidently been searching along the wrong side.

Assured the man had vanished, and that he sought entrance to the building through some passage well known to him, I crept forth along the end wall, crouched low in the shadow, and using every precaution against discovery. This was getting interesting, exciting, and I felt my blood leap with an intensity of emotion. All that was venturesome in me held high carnival, and nothing of danger now could have held me back. I reached the corner

around which the fellow had disappeared, but in the intense blackness could perceive no movement beyond, no sign of any presence.

I listened eagerly, scarcely venturing to breathe, and in another moment was rewarded by hearing the gentle tap of knuckles on wood a few feet away; there could be no doubt of the number—two raps, a pause, three raps—the very signal mentioned in the letter. I stood up, so anxious to hear, to confirm my discovery, as to forget caution. Yet what followed could not be determined—there was the low murmur of a voice, then silence. I heard no door open or close, and my eyes caught no faint glimmer of light. I waited, still breathless, uncertain what had occurred, yet convinced the man ahead had been given entrance.

Unable longer to withstand the strain I took a step forward into the darkness. At that instant the latch of the gate clicked behind me.

CHAPTER V

Within the Factory Walls

I STOOD as though paralyzed, with one foot uplifted, a hand pressed against the wall, unable to move. There was nothing I could do to avert discovery, no place in which I could crouch in hiding. If there had been, I was given no time in which to act. The newcomer moved swiftly, knowing his way through the darkness, and I had scarcely opportunity even to glance backward when he rounded the corner and bumped into me. His coming was so swift, so unexpected, I could do no more than throw up one arm, and even as I did that, all thought of resistance vanished with the sound of his voice.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed, startled at the encounter. "Why damn it, Charlett, what are you slouching here for? You're Charlett, aint you?"

"Yes," I muttered, the assent actually frightened out of me; then I added lamely: "I couldn't remember the signal."

The fellow laughed softly, releasing his grip on my coat.

"If you attended more meetings, you'd be letter perfect," he said, his English without an accent. "Where have you been the last month—out of town?"

"In Washington," I ventured, praying the swift answer might suffice.

"Oh, I see,"—more heartily. "So you were the one Alva sent? Did the woman come back with you?"

The woman! Whom could he mean but the same girl who had been waiting in the saloon? I had already ventured too far to draw back; I must take yet another chance, and answer.

"Not with me; that would be too risky. She is here, though."

"Good enough; that is what brought me out again to-night. That means money. Let's go in."

He pushed past, and I followed, totally unable to determine in my own mind what to do. If I broke away, the act would queer everything, undo all that had thus far been accomplished. The fellow in the darkness evidently mistook me for some one of the gang. His confidence in my identity as Charlett might win me entrance—but what then? That I was not Charlett would certainly be revealed by the first gleam of light, and I would be helpless. I was alone, unarmed, and these fellows, beyond question, were engaged in some desperate game. They might even murder to avoid exposure. My companion suddenly turned and grasped my sleeve.

"You saw Mendez, of course?"

"Sure."

"And he vouched for her; he says she is all right?"

"He chose her; that ought to be enough."

"I suppose so, but even Mendez has made mistakes. Here's the door."

HE rapped lightly, his fingers still gripping my sleeve in a grasp of friendship. I could have broken away, and run for it, but something mysterious held me, some odd fascination of danger. I saw nothing, heard nothing, yet had an instinctive feeling that a narrow wicket had opened in the door, through which our dim outlines were being closely scrutinized. I held my breath expectantly.

"Who is there?" The voice was a mere whisper, so close as to startle me.

"Gaspar Wine," was the answer in the same low tone. "163."

"What word?"

"Cervantes."

"But there are two of you."

"Oh, this is one of us. It's all right, Juan; I'll vouch for him."

The fellow inside grumbled something in indistinguishable Spanish, but opened the

door silently, just far enough for us to slip through, one at a time. It was as dark within as without, and I stood helpless, unable to venture a step. I felt Wine press past me, and was aware that the guard closed and barred the door, but could see nothing, not even my own hand before my eyes. Wine spoke.

"All closed?"

"Yes. Have you found the door?"

"Not yet. . . . . All right, here it is."

A latch clicked softly, and a dim ray of light broke in upon us from a revealed passage beyond. It was so faint as to scarcely render features visible, and as my coat collar was still upturned, I pressed forward close behind Wine without discovery. The fellow never glanced back or gave me any attention, although doubtless aware of my proximity. Indeed, he growled back across his shoulder an admonition to close the door as I entered. I could perceive something of the fellow now, a rather squat figure, concealed by a long, shapeless raincoat, and wearing a closely trimmed beard, and horn spectacles. His features were clearly foreign, yet failed to bespeak the fighting type. I placed him as a theorist, a professor, perhaps, in some small college.

BUT my thoughts were not so occupied with my guide as with the problem of how I was to escape from him. I dared not go on into the presence of others, where certain discovery that I was not Charlett would be immediate. A bright light, and the necessity of throwing aside my concealing coat-collar, would end the whole adventure swiftly. Even if the real Charlett did not chance to be present, he was nevertheless one of the conspirators, and consequently well known. At any cost I must avoid such exposure—but how? The place in which we were gave me little inspiration. It was a low passageway inclosed by rough board walls, instantly driving home upon me the impression that it had been constructed for the very purpose for which it was now being utilized—a secret entrance to prevent any gleam of light from being seen from without. Visitors were admitted into a totally dark entry, the connecting door not being opened until after the outer one had been first securely closed. This precaution awoke within me a new conception of the importance of this secret organization into whose midst I had come. This was evidently no common band of schemers, but men with a definite purpose in view, which they were carrying out with true secret efficiency. They were plotting revolution, destruction, fully aware of their own personal danger, and quite evidently in close communication with certain officials in Washington, as well as South America. Only a strange chance had given me the clue, and only a reckless persistency had opened a way before me. Now my life was no longer my own; it belonged to my country. I must live to expose those men. But how?

My heart failed me as I stared about at the bare walls, and forward to where a heavy curtain draped the end of the short passage. This widened as we advanced, so as to form what evidently had been designed as a cloak-room, for a number of outer coats and hats hung dangling from hooks on the wall. Wine stopped and removed his own, appropriating an unoccupied nail, and I followed his example, rejoicing to observe that he still remained so supremely confident of my identity as not once to glance around in my direction. The fellow seemed obsessed with some special desire, for he swept his eyes over the swinging garments and exclaimed:

"Not half of them are here yet. I want a word with Alva before the show opens, Charlett; so you better go right on in. You know the password, of course?"

"Cervantes."

"That's correct, but it will be changed again to-night. See you later."

He pressed something in the side-wall, sliding back a panel, and disappeared, the rough boards returning instantly into place. I was left alone, staring at the spot where he had disappeared. It was no secret entrance, for now that I knew where it was, the spot could be clearly enough perceived, and even the catch with which it was operated noted; yet I was not expected to follow into what was evidently a more private apartment. Beyond doubt the entrance awaiting me lay straight ahead, concealed by the hanging curtain. I stepped cautiously forward, listening for some guiding sound from beyond that barrier.

I could detect the murmur of voices, several of them speaking Spanish, yet in such low tones I could distinguish only an occasional emphasized word. It was a rumble rather than a conversation, yet with expression sufficiently distinct to make me judge there might be eight or ten persons present. There was no door

between us, only that thick, hanging curtain; and I ventured far enough to draw this aside sufficiently to peer through with one eye. Beyond was a large room, so dimly lighted as to be scarcely visible from end to end. I could discern men present, a number of them, lounging about on chairs, their outlines being fairly revealed; but the light was not sufficient to give me any impression of their faces. It seemed quite possible that I might slip in unobserved and pass among them unrecognized except through accident. The one thing which restrained me was Wine's questioning if I knew the password. This must mean that it was the duty of some guard beyond that curtain to make sure of the identity of everyone entering, and it would be rash indeed to face scrutiny, even in that half-light. The risk of discovery was too great. I must find some other point of entrance.

My eyes anxiously searched the side-walls. The private doorway through which Wine had disappeared gave me the thought that there might also be others. I dare not follow after him, but if there was another opening to be found, I was perfectly willing to explore into its mysteries. The search was brief; yet the very nature of the rough board wall made concealment impossible. Behind the dangling coats I uncovered what I sought, and not a moment too soon. Even as my hand touched the exposed latch, a murmur of voices in the outer entry reached my ears—there were new arrivals being admitted.

The panel slid back silently in its grooves, and I peered through the revealed opening into absolute darkness. All I could be sure of, as exhibited by the dim light of the passage, was a single step downward, and then apparently a strip of earth floor. Evidently this was part of the unused, desolate factory, more than likely the molding room; but it offered immediate concealment, and as I dared not wait and meet those entering, there was but one choice of action. I pressed through the orifice, forced the panel back into place, and stood erect in the intense darkness.

CHAPTER VI

A Sport of Fate

I WAS still motionless, my heart beating fiercely, when several men entered the passage I had just left. I could hear the shuffle of feet on the wooden floor, and the sound of their voices. Pressing my ear against the thin crack, I even distinguished words so as to piece together scraps of conversation. It seemed to me there were three voices—one speaking Spanish entirely, the others using English. One of the latter spoke first, shaking the raindrops from his coat.

" 'Tis a dirty night out, but good for our purpose. You came by motor, Alonzo?"

"No. Wine said that was too risky. I walked from the car-line. What's up? Do you know, Captain?"

The fellow addressed exploded in Spanish.

"Why you call me that? I tell you my name!"

"It's safe enough in here, but I'll be careful outside. What was this meeting called for?"

"Alva did not tell you?"

"He only sent the code signal; that fellow takes no chances."

" 'Twas better he do not. He was trained in the army. But I know—yes. It was a message from Washington, orders maybe, that we act soon. I hope it."

"From Washington? Is Mendez here?"

"No! Can he move without a dozen spies at his heels? You not know Washington to ask so fool question. He dare not write even, or send an aide. The Ambassador have him watched every minute. He is smart enough to know that; so he find a messenger no one ever suspect. She bring us the final word."

"She? A woman?"

"Sure! That was better. No one know her; no one ever see her with our people. It was a good trick, and it fool the pigs."

"And she is actually here? You know she is here?"

"Sure. Else why did Alva call us to come?"

"But who is the woman?"

The other uttered a gruff exclamation of disgust.

"If I know, you suppose I tell? Not much, but I do not know. They trust her —is it not enough? 'Tis my guess she come special for to do this."

"She is a Chilean, then?"

"Maybe; maybe American, maybe Spanish. What difference if she be in our service? They know what she is; to-night she is Marie Gessler—it has the sound of Switzerland. Beyond this I care nothing."

"But you have seen her, perhaps?"

"Not a sight; none of the boys have. She was to meet Alva at Times Square this noon. I went with him, but no girl—just a messenger-boy there with a note in code. Something had frightened the lady, and she made a night appointment over here."

"Here! How did she know the way out?"

"She didn't, for the matter of that; but she had been piped off on Jans' place, and agreed to be there as soon as it was dark. I'm wondering if she showed up; let's go in and see."

THE three moved off down the passage, still conversing in subdued tones, the sharp accent of the Spaniard most prominent, and I became acutely aware of the black silence in which I stood. It was hard to realize my situation; to comprehend that I was not alone in this building, in the very midst of desperate men, planning some mysterious act of treason and revolution. My inclination at that moment was to escape, to get away unobserved. I had already overheard enough to make my earlier suspicions positive; enough to enable me to tell the story to a Government agent in such a way as to convince him of its truth and importance. My sole duty was immediately to report what I had discovered; then the prompt arrest of Alva, and a few others, would end the whole scheme. It seemed simple enough, if I could only find my way out from there safely.

But escape unobserved was far from being assured. I was never in a darker hole, and the necessity of moving with the utmost caution was the thing uppermost in mind.

I accepted the only course possible and began to feel my way to the left, skirting the wall of rough boarding until it widened out into what was apparently the larger room beyond. I was walking over a hard-packed earthen floor, and encountered nothing to yield me any idea of what the place had been originally intended for. If it still contained machinery, none was in evidence within the reach of my hands; nor did I discover any sign of an opening through the wooden barrier.

Yet one fact became more and more clear—the deliberate purpose with which this deserted factory had been prepared for a secret rendezvous. It was a lesson in efficiency, an illustration of a fully developed plot. I began to imagine that the whole arrangement reached back through years of preparation; that the man Alva had originally established this factory with no other aim in view, but as a screen to his real activities as an agent of the revolutionaries.

At that moment I had no thought but to discover some means of escape. The knowledge of the danger I was in robbed me of all courage. I was like a child afraid in the dark. I moved forward, inch by inch, feeling my way along the rough planking with one hand, my limbs actually trembling under me. If I could only find some opening, see some gleam of light, break away from this terrible silent darkness. The partition wall I followed narrowed into what was apparently a mere passageway; then as suddenly it widened out once more, as though inclosing another room. I had to guess at the meaning of this; yet the most natural conception would be that the place had thus been divided into several apartments, so separated as to permit of private conference. That other doorway, through which Wine had disappeared in search for Alva, doubtless led to some such more secret room. And this which I was now skirting was yet another. At first I thought it extended as far as the brick wall of the factory, but finally discovered a narrow passageway running between.

I supposed I was moving with the utmost caution, every nerve on edge, feeling a way forward with hands and feet. Once I stepped upon a shell of some kind which crunched beneath the weight; and again my groping hand dislodged a small block of wood which fell with a slight clatter. I halted both times, my heart in my mouth; yet nothing happened, and I moved forward again, confident of not being overheard. There was no opening in the rough boards, and I had rounded the corner into the narrow alley before anything occurred to cause alarm, or block my passage.

Even then I could not have told what it was that halted me—some strange consciousness of another presence, felt but unseen in the intense darkness, a mysterious premonition that seemed to grip me with hand of steel. I remember I stopped as though shot, my very breath suspended, one foot still uplifted in a step forward, my eyes staring helplessly into the black void. The silence was that of a tomb. I could feel the perspiration flow down my face in a stream; it was an instant of tor-

ture. Then an unseen hand gripped me, and an electric flash-lamp glared into my eyes.

CHAPTER VII

I Become a Well-known Thief

THE sudden attack, the burst of dazzling light in my eyes, rendered me for the moment utterly helpless. I was blinded, and so tightly grasped at the throat as to be nearly strangled. I only dimly realized that my assailant was a man, his grip that of a giant. Then, to my surprise, the fellow laughed oddly, snapping out his light and releasing his grip.

"Well, if this don't beat hell!" he said, in a tone of cheerful disgust. "Come on in here, and let me look you over."

His hand closed on the sleeve of my coat, and almost before I found time to catch my breath again, I had been dragged through a narrow opening, and became aware that a door shut silently behind me. I stood there not daring to move, not knowing in which direction to turn, unable to guess what had occurred and completely mystified by that odd exclamation. Who was the fellow? Had he recognized me in the sudden flare of the lamp? What was his purpose now?

He gave me little opportunity either to act or think. A match flared and was held aloft to a gas-jet which instantly broke into a dull flame sufficient to render visible the full extent of the small room in which we stood. In some semiconscious way I was aware of bare walls, of a small table opposite, with some writing materials on it, and a short bench covered by a blanket. I suppose I saw these things; yet all that I seemed to perceive was the man fronting me, who stared in my face, a quizzical smile on his lips, as though still half uncertain of the reality of my presence. He was tall, a trifle angular, but exceedingly well-dressed, with closely trimmed iron-gray beard, and peculiar eyes deeply set in a rather chalky face. I could guess neither his age or race, but was absolutely convinced we had never met before. He broke the silence, evidently inclined to look upon this meeting as a joke.

"Don't recognize me, I reckon? Well, that aint to be wondered at, for likely enough you never saw me before. Beats the devil, though, why you should drift in here; now I suppose it will have to be fifty-fifty."

HIS words and manner gave me a new lease on life. I began to feel cool, cautious, my mind awakening to the situation. Whoever he might be, he was seemingly friendly enough. I must meet the fellow in that same spirit, and endeavor to extract from him some knowledge of whom he supposed me to be.

"I do not quite get the drift of all this," I ventured. "You imply that you know me."

"Lord, yes! Over in Bow Street, on the other side. The Hartlebury robbery-case. I'd been hearing about you for years, and when that came on, I took a chance and drifted into court one day just to see what you looked like. Naturally I didn't make no great display with all them Scotland Yard guys about."

"Of course not."

"Just slunk into one o' them back seats, and hung on quiet. You was testifying fer yerself at first, an' so I had a good look at yer. Say! That was sure some defense, and it made them Britishers blink. I knew they'd never be able to hold yer on the evidence. But it queered you over in Europe, I reckon?"

"Yes," I admitted, realizing now what he probably took me to be, and prepared to play the character. "The system made it too hot, so I got out."

"The sensible thing to do. There is nothing over there now, since the war, anyhow. That's why I jumped for the U. S. You've shaved your mustache, and look ten years younger, but I knew you, all right. I never forget a face. Say, who put you onto this game—Waldron?"

I nodded, taking a chance. "I'd have bet my life he was the guy—the damn' sneak. I might have known he would double-cross me in some way. Say, he's nothing to you, is he?"

"No; I haven't any use for his sort."

"I thought as much. Of course a tip's a tip, in this game, and I don't blame you any for horning in. Naturally you never knew this was my game—how could you? Waldron never said a word about me, did he?"

"Not once."

"That is how I had it sized up; so I don't hold any grudge against you. Now, listen!" He bent forward confidentially, lowering his voice so that I could barely

distinguish the words. "We'll talk it all over later, when we're alone. 'Taint exactly safe here, for these walls are thin, and there is quite a bunch around to-night. But understand I've got a cinch with these Spanish suckers. It makes me laugh, the way they take the hook. There'll be plenty for the two of us, if we only play the cards right, and we'll let Waldron hold the bag. What do you say, Daly?"

SO my name was Daly. Well, that was interesting, at least, although it gave me no new light.

"That's mighty handsome of you," I said. "What's the figure?"

"A million! Can you beat that? And like taking candy from a kid. Wait until I get a chance to explain the plan; it looks like Providence had just handed us out the money."

"Why not explain the scheme to me?"

"Not now; there aint no time." He glanced at his watch. "And besides, for all I know, some guy might be listening in to what we say. You see, there is a bunch o' hell-cats back in there waiting for me to give them another song and dance. I'm the big end right now, but I've got to sing rather low until I'm sure what word these guys have got from Washington. After that, I'll know how to trim sail."

"The woman, you mean?"

"Sure. Some foxy guy, that fellow Mendez, to send a skirt. This is a ticklish business for them legation fellows to get mixed up in, and anyhow they are piped off everywhere they go. I know that. So he picks up this female, and nobody thinks about following her. Of course, Mendez knows she is his kind, and all that, but the wise ones aren't on. Still, she's foxy enough herself, for the matter of that; likely an old hand at the game. She wouldn't even meet Alva over in town. Not much! It was over here in the dark, or not at all. You know the sort, Daly—the South American revolution stuff—it's hell to buck against."

"You put her down as a secret agent?"

"What else? And a damn' good one, to my notion. The truth is, I am more afraid of her than all the rest of the bunch combined. She's got brains and nerve, that girl. I had ten minutes with her, just now, and fairly sweated blood; but I got by. It was like the third degree, only I'd rather face any bull I ever saw than have her eyes search me—they're pretty enough, but they're sure wide open."

"I saw her, I guess—rather young, and a brunette; the last type I would expect to find in such work."

"You never can tell; 'tisn't what they look like; it's what they've got in their heads; and this one has got plenty, believe me. Mendez knew his business when he picked her up. Where did you glimpse her?"

"In a saloon at the end of the block. A man joined her there."

"That was Alva. He's at the head of things here. You wait until I come back, Daly, and then we'll plan this thing all out. I'll know the lay of the land then, and how to work. You think I'm aiming to play fair, don't you?"

I looked at him doubtfully.

"Well, of course, I've got to think so," I admitted, hoping to gain further enlightenment, "but you leave me pretty well in the dark. What do I really know? Nothing. You talk about a million you propose going fifty-fifty with me on. That naturally sounds good, but it would sound better if I even knew who I was dealing with. I have some idea of what is in the wind from what Waldron told me. That is why I came here—to get a crack at it. But you've got the advantage—you know me, but I never saw you before in my life."

"That's so," he grinned cheerfully. "I forgot I wasn't talking to an old pal. Just to be sure you're Harry Daly was enough to make me cough up, but that don't help you out none, does it? You don't place me, then?"

"No."

"Ever hear of Gentleman George in your travels?"

"George Harris!" The name leaped to my lips in inspiration; only the day before I had chanced to read a magazine account of a famous criminal exploit. His eyes gleamed in genial appreciation.

"I thought maybe that would fetch you," he said exultantly. "There aint many of the old boys but have my number, and they all know I play square. How is it? Will we shake hands, and call it a deal? I've got to get back in with that bunch."

CORDIALLY I took the extended hand, feeling the iron grip of his fingers. I do not believe I was ever more frightened

in my life, although outwardly cool enough, and my brain perfectly clear. Never had any man drifted into a stranger position, with danger of exposure fronting him on every hand; yet there was no retreat possible. I must go on, acting out the strange character in this drama to which I had been assigned.

"But you are not known by that name here?" I ventured.

"I should say not! I'm Horner, P. S. Horner of Detroit. See! That's the guy who had the papers first. He was English, all right, but pretended to be United States, and had a passport to come through with this bunch. So I've got the bull by the tail—for a cool million, old man, a million. All I'm afraid of is that woman—they always did get my goat."

"Keep still, and let her show her cards," I suggested, feeling the necessity of saying something.

"What I'm aiming to do. Well, so long, Daly! I'll be back presently with everything figured out straight. Better turn out the light, or some one might wander in here."

I was alone again, in the dark, but under vastly different circumstances than when wandering blindly about between those imprisoning factory walls. This thing which had occurred to me was about the oddest that could happen to any man. With no effort of my own, purely by blind chance, I had been given a new name and identity, and as instantly inducted into a revolutionary criminal plot as fascinating as it undoubtedly was dangerous.

What should I do under these peculiar circumstances? Seek to escape during his absence, and thus frighten the covey? Or remain, and trust fortune to show me a way to both expose their villainy and save myself? I was young, adventurous, and I instantly chose the latter, thinking less of the danger, I admit, than of the mystery of the case, and—yes, the girl.

CHAPTER VIII

A Little Overheard

I SAT there in the dark after this decision, endeavoring to piece together the various discoveries of the past hour. My mind reverted to the fragment of letter which had sent me on this mad chase, to its mention of a letter of credit to be deposited with some banker named Krantz, to the credit of the recipient. The writer had stated that the sum would be found ample for all needs. But a million dollars! Could it be possible that so large an amount as this would be thus advanced? If so, then the result hoped for must be proportionately important. What could it be? Such a sum was not to be advanced by financiers anywhere, without a certainty of profit, and the most consummate trust in the agent. Who was the agent? To whom had this letter been sent—Alva, who apparently was the active leader here in New York? For the revolutionary representative in Washington was seemingly known as Mendez.

So far the matter was fairly clear—Alva was the local revolutionary agent and had been intrusted by the junta with this money to spend in a certain definite way; but he must nevertheless work under strict orders coming from the headquarters at Washington. He dare not assume the initiative without the "O. K." of the man higher up—Mendez. Something had occurred to delay action; that made no difference, but now the time had come. Mendez, unable to be present in person, and even fearful to permit any of his well-known junta representatives to appear openly, had chosen to send a woman, who would be unsuspected, to deliver to the conspirators his definite plan of action. All this seemed reasonable enough, and in no way surprised me.

But the personal appearance of the woman did, and also the close intimacy of this man Harris. I could not reconcile her face, her manner, her personality, with the playing of such a rôle. In spite of all evidence as to the truth of the matter, nothing harmonized. She did not belong—the gulf was too wide.

There came to me an insane desire to overhear what she had to say, to watch her once more, when free to study her unnoticed, and to see this gang to whom she brought her message. Almost without realizing my action, I crept in the dark out into the narrow passage, and felt my way along the rough board walls. As I advanced cautiously, the full ingenuity with which the place had been prepared for its purpose became more apparent. The narrow passage I followed, my hands touching either wall, was not straight, but curved to the right, and it dawned upon me that it skirted the main apartment, where in all probability the conference was

being held. This accounted for the fact that no gleam of light was visible, and that, in anticipation of their use, separate, and small rooms had been constructed, connected together yet so isolated as to permit of the utmost privacy. One of these Harris had left me in, and now I found that the passage led me not direct to the main apartment, but to another smaller room, the door of which barred my progress. This, I figured out, might be the same into which Wine had entered in search of Alva, when he deserted me in the front hallway.

I listened intently, but heard no sound within, and satisfied the room was without occupants, ventured finally to gain a glimpse inside. With eye at a narrow crack I could perceive most of the interior, which was lighted by a dim gas-jet. It was a room not altogether unlike the one I had just left, though smaller, and containing a chair or two in addition to the writing-table. A blanket on the floor served as a rug, and in one corner were shelves containing several bottles, and a box of cigars. I noted these things quickly, my gaze straying to a partly open door in the board wall to the right, through which a brighter glow of light streamed. My ears caught the sound of voices, the words indistinct.

THOUGH convinced the small room was without occupants, I was some moments screwing up my courage to enter. Yet there was no other way in which I could learn the meaning of all this, or be prepared intelligently to play my part later with Harris.

Once inside the smaller room, I found that the door thence to the larger apartment opened toward me; but it would be suicidal to attempt viewing the room beyond through that opening. However engrossed those gathered within might be, some restless eye would be almost certain to detect my presence. The only thing I dared venture was to gain such survey as was possible by means of the narrow crack below the hinge on which the door swung. This afforded me the merest glimpse of one side of the room, revealing four or five men sitting motionless on a bench against the wall, evidently listening intently to what was going on opposite them. With the exception of Wine, who was third in the row, no face I saw was in the least familiar—two being pronouncedly Spanish, the others not so easily recognized as to nationality. That which impressed me most strongly was their well-groomed appearance, and the cut of their clothes. This was no gathering of vulgar criminals; these fellows seemingly were successful business men.

But if my range of vision precluded my seeing these few in whom I was most deeply interested, I had no difficulty whatever in overhearing their voices, and grasping the sense of what they were saying. As a general thing the words used were English, though occasionally some one requested an explanation in Spanish, which was immediately given. I drew the impression, from something which was said, that there were those present who did not understand the latter tongue. However, almost the first sentence overheard convinced me that I had arrived too late to learn directly the nature of those specific instructions received from Washington. Alva was asking a question.

"But we are ready to act now," he said impatiently, his foreign accent faint yet plainly perceptible, "have been ready for a month past. What necessity, then, is there for further delay?"

The woman, whom he evidently addressed, must have been very close to the door; her voice, soft, but speaking with clear enunciation, sounded almost at my ear.

"The reason is Valparaiso, of course," she said; "it is not Washington at all. When you strike, the people must be ready down there. This is not rapine; it is war. I said ten days yet. I do not know positive; the real aim may not be what we suppose at present. The final orders might arrive to-morrow, even to-night. You say you are prepared, señor. That is what I was sent to learn, and I find you are not prepared."

"Not ready! We are organized and sworn to service."

She seemed to lean forward, her voice changing almost to a whisper.

"I see that—your eagerness, your devotion. But that is not readiness for such a duty. Who has been chosen for the act itself—the post of danger? No one. Until the man I need not name dies, we can accomplish nothing. You have taken no ballot. If the single word was flashed to-night, 'Go,'—and it may be,—who among you is authorized to execute the order?"

SHE paused, but no voice spoke.

"Nor is that all; the money from England yet lies untouched. Surely your instructions were clear, and nothing is being accomplished for the cause while it rests idle in the vault. It will require all of thirty days to distribute this into the proper hands, here and in Chile; yet nothing has been done. We supposed it was already in circulation. What caused the delay?"

One of the men on the bench spoke, a heavily built fellow with a long gray mustache, and horn spectacles shading his eyes.

"All I know iss ett vait on der order of Gustave Alva to be indorsed by Señor Mendez. I hol' ett so in trust, from the agent."

"In the bank vault, Mr. Krantz?"

"No; dat would not do. Ett was in a private safe, a package of currency, only I know where. The bank have nothings to do with der deal."

"I understand. The agent gave you personally the letter of credit, which you immediately cashed, and you now hold the currency subject to call?"

"Certainly; dat vos how ett vos."

"Your instructions were to turn this into cash?"

"Not in writing—no; dar vos no writing. The agent he tell me."

"The agent? Oh, you mean 108? What about that arrangement, Mr. Horner?"

I recognized Harris in the reply, his voice perfectly calm and confident. In all probability he lied, but it was done most convincingly.

"Those were my positive instructions in London," he said coolly. "The banking house there was not to be involved in the slightest degree; no trace of the transaction was to appear on their books. I explained it all to Krantz, and he said that was much the safer way."

"But why has the money not been drawn and used?"

"That is for Señor Alva to say. I tried to get him to act, but he refused without another authorization from Mendez, and special instructions."

"You never received these, Señor Alva?"

"No. I asked by code; I supposed he would answer by messenger."

There was a pause, a silence. I imagined I could understand something of what Harris was endeavoring to accomplish in this delay, this getting the entire sum transformed into currency in private hands. It was one more step in his intricate scheme of robbery, but so cautiously concealed as to arouse no suspicion. What else had he done to this end already? Had his verbal instructions to the banker been false? Did he know exactly where this fortune was hidden? To achieve delay, and thus gain opportunity, had he intercepted, or even changed the code message sent by Alva to Washington?

All this was possible enough; yet it was evident the woman accepted the explanation as satisfactory.

"I do not know how true all this is," she said at last slowly. "Nothing was said to me about such a code message. I was told the money was already being used. I do not believe there is any necessity of any further indorsement, for Señor Alva is working under direct commission from the junta, with full authority to act. However, I will verify this to-morrow. I am going to retire now, *señores,* and leave you alone to discuss the matters I have presented. Above all, it is necessary that I should know at once whom you select for the important work, and when we may expect results. This information I must positively take back with me."

"When do you return?"

"On the midnight train. I have three hours yet."

CHAPTER IX

A Strange Appointment

I MUST have failed to grasp the full meaning of what she said, or else it never occurred to me that her retirement would be made through this particular door. At least, she had pushed it wide open before I realized the necessity of retreat, and I was hemmed in behind its barrier, fortunately securely hidden from the eyes of those in the larger apartment. Some one—Alva, no doubt, from his words and voice—was beside her as she emerged; and indeed, it might have been his hand that swung the door back against me. I stood there startled, unable to move, afraid that my very breathing might be overheard.

"You leave at midnight, you say, señorita," he protested in Spanish. "But surely you intend to remain here at present?"

"Until you reach some final decision—yes; that is my mission."

"I shall see to that at once; we will draw lots. You can wait either in this room, or another just beyond. Promise you will not go until I see and talk with you again."

"I promise that—so you are not too long. I must make that train."

"You shall make it. My car is only two blocks away, and I pledge myself to have you there on time. All this business can be attended to in half an hour."

He stepped back; partly closing the door, while she turned, her own hand on the latch, facing me. Her eyes stared directly into mine, her face whitening under the light, her teeth shutting down close against the red lips as though to repress a scream. She was startled almost beyond control, yet mastered the fright instantly. Her eyes darkened; one hand pressed convulsively against her heart; then she glanced about at the partly open door and silently closed it tight behind her.

"What—what are you doing here?" she gasped in English, her voice trembling. "Listening?"

"No," I lied, seeing but one possible means of escape, and hoping thus to prevent her sounding an immediate alarm. "I was waiting for a friend who is inside. I just came into this room."

"From where?"

"Back yonder. I got tired of sitting alone in the dark."

She glanced past me into the mouth of the black passage. Her courage was quickly coming back, and with it a flush into her cheeks.

"You actually belong here, then? You are one of these men?"

"Not exactly," I had to admit. "I know one of them very well, and he stationed me out there."

"Oh, I see—on guard?"

"That's about it."

"You were told the word?"

"Of course."

"What was it?"

"*Cervantes.*"

SHE appeared puzzled, doubtful, yet to my surprise still held the door tightly closed, her eyes searching my face.

"Who is the man you know—your particular friend?"

I hesitated an instant, the name escaping me.

"Horner."

"Oh, indeed! You were not very prompt to answer."

"Well," I said, and managed to smile, as though it was of little consequence, "you see, I have not always known him by that name. There are times when names need to be changed occasionally."

"True," she admitted soberly. "In this case I believe he had to arrange his identity to fit a passport. Is that it? Do you mind gratifying the curiosity of a woman as to what his real name might be?"

"I could not, if I so desired. Ever since I knew him, he has been called Harris. That is all I can say."

"Harris! Then he is not Chilean, and never before pretended to be. I thought that from the first. Is the man American, English or Irish?"

I shook my head.

"You wont answer. That may be ignorance or it may be pretense. Never mind. I recognize your face now. You were the man eating in the saloon an hour or so ago. Were you waiting for this Horner—alias Harris—then?"

"We met later."

Her lips smiled a little, and her eyes.

"Did I merely dream that you appeared somewhat interested in me at the time? Or was it true?"

"It was true," I answered honestly. "You did interest me."

"Yet you had no knowledge as to who I was, or why I was in such a place?"

"Absolutely none. Perhaps that was what most greatly interested me. You didn't appear the sort to be making a rendezvous out of a saloon, however respectable it might be. The proprietor even volunteered to me the information that you were his niece."

"Did he, indeed? That was very nice of him, wasn't it? Rather odd, is it not, that you should later drop in here, and find me again. What do you think of me now?"

I LOOKED at her for a moment before I answered, unable to frame my words to any satisfaction. What did she mean? What exactly was she driving at? Her whole manner puzzled me exceedingly. Was she playing me for a fool? Was she attempting to lead me on for some secret purpose of her own? Did she believe my explanation? And if not, why did she

fail to throw open that door, and denounce me at once as a spy?

"Frankly, I do not know what to think," I answered at last. "Your mission here to-night, as I understand it, somehow does not fit in with my natural conception of you as a woman."

She laughed, but so low as to be inaudible to those beyond the closed door.

"You amuse me. Cannot a woman—even a womanly woman, if you please—love her country and be willing to sacrifice in its behalf?"

"Not to the extent of treachery and deceit, not to the end that innocent men and women suffer," I returned hotly, forgetting caution.

"And is that my purpose here, you think?"

"Is it not? This is a neutral land; yet what else can this conspiracy contemplate but destruction? Can you answer that?"

"I refuse to answer—here and now, at least. Nor do I know why you should ask. Why are you here, and how? Do you realize the ease with which I could open this door and give you over to the mercy of those men in there? After what you have just said, why do you suppose I fail to do so? Because I am such a womanly woman, perhaps?"

"Rather because you have no reason so to act. I may denounce your connection with this affair, believing it no fit work for any true woman to be engaged in, and yet myself be no traitor to the cause."

"You still hold me a true woman, then?"

"Yes; I may be blind, but I retain faith."

"That is good—yet do not trust too much in any woman. So you are the friend of Horner, alias Harris? Do you know I hold that to be quite a distinction. What is your name?"

"D-Daly, Harry Daly."

"You seem to have some difficulty tonight in remembering names. Does this mean you also possess a variety? Evidently I have fallen among a very interesting community."

She stopped, listened intently, her head tilted back so as better to hear what was occurring behind the closed door.

"Be quiet," she whispered, one hand held forth in swift warning. "They are through in there, I think, and Alva will be out in a moment. Now, listen! Don't ask any questions, but listen. Will you pledge yourself to do whatever I say?"

"Within any reasonable limits—yes."

"Limits! Don't talk limits! You say you are blind, but retain faith. Act on that faith blindly. I cannot speak here; there is no time, no opportunity. To-morrow at two o'clock, come to 247 Le Compte Street. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Do not mistake the number. Ask for Miss Conrad. Now go back there and wait for Horner. Quick—they are coming out."

CHAPTER X

Harris Tells His Story

I PLUNGED hastily into the passage, and groped my way back between the narrow walls to the secluded room in the rear. I was too confused, too startled even to think clearly. My conception of this woman, her nature and her purpose, had been changed a dozen times during this brief conversation. Even now I was utterly in the dark. Was this engagement for to-morrow a decoy—a shrewd effort to detect me, and lead me into a trap? Or was it extended honestly and with some real object in view? Did she hold me as friend or enemy? If the latter, why was I not immediately exposed?

The situation was impenetrable. No explanation I could conjure up, brought any satisfaction. I could only sit there in the dark on the bench, and wait the return of Harris, without so much as a clear thought to guide me.

I began to think Harris had gone away with the others, and left me there alone. I heard voices speaking earnestly in the distance, but without venturing forth from my hiding-place. Nothing was to be gained by exposure, and as these sounds grew less, and finally died away altogether, I became convinced that most, if not all, had left the building. Then suddenly Harris appeared, bringing in his arms a bottle from the shelf in the other room, and the box of cigars.

"Touch a match to the gas-jet, Daly," he said, feeling for the table in the dark. "That's better. I hung around until the gang all got out, so as to be sure we were safely alone. This is a safer place to talk over private affairs, than downtown in a hotel."

"There is no one about, then?"

"Not a one—saw the last guy slip out ten minutes ago. They go one by one, you

know; that's what takes time. Have a drink, and light up, old man. We are as secure here as we would be at the bottom of the sea. This is Alva's whisky, but good—I sampled it before."

HE sat on the table, nursing his knee, rather pleased with himself, I thought, a cigar thrust between his lips, the blue smoke curling up before his face. I ignored the invitation to drink, but helped myself to a weed, waiting for him to open conversation.

"Well," he said finally, "everything is going according to Hoyle, but there is a knot or two yet to be untied, before we squeeze that million. What do you say, Daly?"

"I don't know how I can say anything until I get a glimpse at your cards," I returned, "and am on to the game."

"That's true enough. Did you hear what was said in there?"

"No; you told me to stick here."

"Still, in a way you're on; Waldron must have spilled part of the scheme to you; that's what got your foot in the mess. I know Ivan Waldron, the damned Russian; he'd double-cross his best friend. I used to know him when he ran a fence down in Mulberry Street when I was a kid. I'll bet that was about where you met him first. He's playing up with the big ones now, but he is the same liar and sneak he was then—always after some one else to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. Then he comes along, and grabs them, and you go over the road. What was it he told you?"

"Not very much," I said, wondering how far I had better go, yet feeling it necessary to relate enough to convince him that I was really conversant with the situation, and endeavoring to imitate his style of speech. "He caught on to my being here, and met me at Halligan's. After a bit of footwork, he coughed up what he was after—a safe hand for a big job. According to his story there was a gang of conspirators here—birds from South America, mostly—who had been rounded up by this fellow Alva to pull off some frightfulness or other. I didn't catch on to just what it was, and perhaps Waldron himself didn't know, or care. Some revolution, I took it to be.

"What interested him most was the amount of money certain guys in Europe were sending over for this fellow Alva to spend. Waldron explained how he got hold of the scheme. It seems he's in with the bunch to some extent; that is, they use him whenever they need to, and occasionally hand him a bunch of money—it's never too dirty for him to touch. Anyhow, he knew enough to put me wise to this dump, gave me the password, and all that. It looked as though there might be something in it; so I blew over here tonight just to take a look. I didn't know there was any powwow on, of course, but just wanted to see the layout. I was merely prowling around, when I ran into you."

"I see," he muttered as I came to an end, chewing savagely on his cigar. "Did the Russian say anything about me?"

"Not a whisper. I supposed I had a clear run for the money, except for his rake-off."

"The dog! Because I didn't show up on the dot, he was ready to ditch me. Oh, I don't blame you, Daly. Naturally, when you was shown a good thing, you started to cop it. Any gun would do the same; but I'd like to get my mitts on that Russian. Now, listen, and I'll tell you the straight story. I'm going to need you, and we'll divide fifty-fifty, leaving this guy to suck his thumbs. Is that a go?"

"He's sure nothing to me—shoot."

HARRIS poured out a stiff drink and put it down, then touched a match to the extinguished cigar. The flame lighted up his face, revealing its deep lines, and a pair of watchful eyes. Somehow he had the appearance of a fox.

"Waldron sent me a cable in England about a month ago," he explained briefly. "He didn't make the thing very clear—only that he had a big deal on, and wanted me in on it. I wouldn't have paid much attention to him if business had been worth a darn over there, but it wasn't. It was rotten. Besides, I was getting in bad, and had to lie low; so I took this as a lifesaver. I had made enough to get back on, and took a second-class passage on the *Vulcan*. It was not a big boat, and to escape close inspection, I went aboard at Queenstown. At that time I had no more notion what was up than a blind rat. I was just desperate enough to take a chance."

He paused and relighted his stub, with an oath at finding it again useless.

"Then things begun to happen. I was

room-mate with a bird named Horner, who claimed to live in Detroit. He had a bit of Spanish accent—which only cropped out now and then—that made me think maybe his name was a fake; and so I got to watching the guy, for lack of something better to do. He must have cottoned to me, for we got a bit chummy, and in that way I picked odds and ends out of him which set me thinking—his stories didn't quite dovetail; and so finally I said to myself: 'Old boy, you've got something up your sleeve; this voyage aint no pleasure-trip for you, and it's up to me to find out what your game is.' He was quite a foxy bird, though—one of these tall, rawboned, secretive cusses who talk a lot but never say nothing, and he came near getting my goat. I went through his baggage, of course, but that was just ordinary stuff—he only had one grip, which he left unlocked; but I did get onto a pocket belt the fellow wore around his waist. He never let that get away from him night or day. I studied every way I could think up to get a peep at it, but nothing gave me a chance. I came near going bugs over the thing."

He laughed, exhibiting a row of rather ugly teeth behind his thin lips.

"Then the devil must have helped me. One night—five days out, for we were a slow boat—we ran into a hell of a storm. I've been across seven times, and never struck a worse shindig than we ran into. We both of us tumbled out, and began hustling on our duds. I was close beside Horner, when a wave struck us that must have been a monster. He was trying to get a shoe on, and went plunging head-on into the side of the ship. I reckon it nearly brained him, but to make things sure, I handed him one to the jaw before he got his senses, and he went out for the count. Then, believe me, I didn't lose no time in frisking the guy—and say, what do you think I found?"

I shook my head, unwilling to interrupt, fascinated with his description.

"The fellow was a revolutionary agent. I didn't get onto all of it then—I didn't have time; but I found a letter of credit for a million dollars, and a memorandum of how it was to be delivered. The thing wasn't any good to me—it was to be paid to this fellow Alva by a banker in New York named Krantz; but it sure made my mouth water just to see it—a million dollars, good old U. S. currency! Can you beat it?"

"Looked easy—you had it, and you didn't have it."

"You said it, Daly. I never was in such a pickle. I didn't dare keep the thing, and it wouldn't have done me any good if I had; there was no way of my cashing the paper. What could I do? I had to think blame quick before that guy got his head back. If I denounced him, the game was all off; if I held on to the stuff, he'd report his loss as soon as he landed in New York, and that letter of credit wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on. Say, I was in some boat; but believe me, I had no notion of giving up that million—it looked darned good."

"I should say yes!" And I leaned forward to show my interest. "And from what I know of you, Harris, that guy had no show on earth. Did you croak him?"

He grinned, evidently pleased at the note of admiration in my voice, and tossed down another drink.

"That never aint been in my line. Of course I was tempted to—a cool million would tempt any guy. But right then I couldn't see just what good it would do; it wouldn't get me the coin. No, I just shoved everything back exactly where it come from, and fetched the steward. Between us we hoisted Horner back into the bunk and dosed him with water till he come to. First thing he did was to feel for that belt, and he never got wise that it had ever been touched. Anyhow, he never let on to no suspicion."

CHAPTER XI

Plans of a Thief

I WAS impatient for him to continue, but he sat there chuckling to himself and toying with a fresh cigar.

"Well, what did you do?"

"Played it safe and sure. I'm too old a bird to be caught napping. I put in most of that night holding wet cloths to Horner's head, and thinking out some plan of action. Before morning he thought I was the best fellow he ever knew, and I had the guy where I wanted him. For one of his breed, he was rather a friendly cuss. This was how I mapped it out: That letter of credit had to be turned into currency before it could do me any good, and the only way that might be done was through this guy Alva. I must get to him somehow in a way that would put me next

his scheme, so I'd know when he had the cash. Once I got these details attended to in little old New York, the swag was as good as my own. I knew a dozen guys that would bump Horner off for a hundred, if it come to that—so the price wasn't high. A million! Oh, man, and it had dropped right into my lap! But to do this it was necessary that I should be Horner. That was as plain as the nose on my face; as Horner, coming with credentials, and a letter of credit, Alva would be bound to receive me with open arms—see! He couldn't suspect but what I was all right, and would naturally cough up all necessary information. After that I figured it would be easy enough. But how was I to become Horner?"

"You couldn't divvy with him?"

"I should say not; he was a square guy. It didn't take me five days to find that out. So there wasn't but one way out of it—I had to put Horner out of commission and cop his belt. It was either that or lose a million."

I looked at him with a sickening feeling of horror I found hard to suppress, but he went on indifferently in the same cool, calm voice.

"There's no use going into details, Daly. We landed good friends and Horner was in a strange land. You know New York pretty well, and I lost him the first afternoon down on the East Side. I never did know just what became of the fellow, but the next morning I was alone in a back room in Greenwich, and had his belt with me." He chuckled grimly. "There wasn't much in it, except the letter of credit, but all I needed to know—a small code-book, a few memoranda of some deal in London involving nitrate concessions in Chile, two hundred dollars in English money, and a notation as to where and when this fellow Krantz could be seen privately. This last gave me a clue as to why Horner had been in no hurry to hunt him up, but was so willing to drill around with me awhile when we first came ashore. It was the next night he was to call on the banker up in Le Compte Street.

"Le Compte? What number?"

"247 Le Compte. Do you know anybody there?"

"No—only Le Compte is an old stamping-ground of mine. Go on; you went there, of course."

"Sure! Krantz didn't know me from Adam, not even my name. I was just '108' to him, but he was mighty nervous, just the same, and anxious to get away. I could see that. I don't think it was his house, either—just an ordinary-looking shack, brick, three stories and a basement. There wasn't a light showed in it when I got there, but that guy was looking for me, all right—he had the door open before I had time to rap, even."

"You saw no one else?"

"Not a soul, and I didn't waste no time looking, either. That banker was business all right, and he put me through the whole bundle of tricks before he'd even let me sit down. You could get into a Masonic lodge easier than into that front parlor with him at the door. I had to lie some, but mostly I was posted well enough so as to give him what he was looking for. Anyhow, I passed, and after that he was rather decent. Took me into a room, and gave me a drink, besides asking me about affairs in Europe. I didn't know only what I'd seen in the papers—but I gave him an earful, and on the strength of his name cussed England for all I was worth—which at that time was about a million bucks. Then I handed over the letter of credit, and he jammed it into his pocket like it was a scrap of paper. I don't remember that he even looked at it.

"AFTER that he was for getting rid of me, the sooner the better. But I needed to know where Alva was, so I hung on, telling the old guy I had a private message that I had to deliver personal—straight from them financiers in London. So, after skirmishing about awhile, he jotted down an address on a bit of paper, and the next thing I knew I was out in the street, with that gripped in my mitt. Maybe I was lucky not to have got beaned; only if he had made a crack, I'd 'a' got him first."

"And then, of course, you hunted up Alva?"

"The next morning, before any bank opened. I thought over it all night, and got up a peach of a story. I needed it, too, for this Alva was sure a smooth guy. It took some nerve to get him, but I knew, through Horner's memorandum, some things about him he never supposed was known up in this country; so when I sprung them, natural-like, he quit being offish and gave me the glad hand."

"Who is he? A crank?"

"Not by a damn' sight. He's a captain in the Chilean army, military attaché to

the Embassy at Washington, intrusted with certain work. But he's really working to overthrow the present Chilean government—gettin' up a revolution down there. He's no cheap skate, by a long ways. Say, after I finally got him loosened up, he was a prince. I lied until I was black in the face, but I must have kept within bounds, for he got to liking me real well. He was a high-roller, and I put him onto some things in New York he had never been steered up against before. That made a hit with him. There wasn't nothing said about cashing up all day long, and early the next morning we breezed into a downtown hotel and went to bed."

"What hotel?"

"Search me! We'd been tanking up on champagne, and were drunker in the morning than when we turned in. That's the honest truth. All either of us wanted for breakfast was a cup of coffee. We got that at a little dump on some side-street, and then took a taxi and rode around for an hour, so as to brace up a little." He paused to laugh at the recollection, helping himself to a third cigar.

"And you actually retain no knowledge of where you spent the night?"

"Not the faintest glimmer. Can you beat it? A little later we tried to figure the thing out. Alva lost part of a letter somewhere, and a curious sort of box he had picked up in Chinatown. He put them both in his pocket, so he says, but that was the last he ever saw of either. Queer-looking box, that was—nothing I cared about, but it cost the guy a hundred bucks, and he was daffy over it. Anyhow, that night put me solid with Alva."

"But the money? He's never drawn it?"

"Not a dinky red. He claims the time hasn't come yet, and that it's safer with Krantz. But I've stuck to him like a brother, and he's took me in with his gang, so now I know every move that's going on. I'm on the inside, all right, and now it's beginning to get hot."

"What do you mean? They are ready to act?"

"Sure; that's what the meeting was about to-night. The junta in Washington says they must begin to produce results. Alva will have to pry that stuff out of Krantz to-morrow, and get busy. Personally I think the fellow is half afraid; but it's up to him now to fish or cut bait."

"What are they after?"

"Mostly arms; then there is a big guy down there who's got to be croaked. I don't care what it is; when the time comes, they wont find a handful of change to act with. I'm some patriot, I am, and I'll put a bigger crimp in their sails than the whole United States Government secret service."

"But see here, Harris," I said soberly. "How do you know you are going to get this? Of course, I see the game the way you've mapped it out, but suppose Krantz pays Alva in check or draft. That spikes your gun."

"Yes; but he wont. I've sized up this man Krantz. He's in the game for money. I don't believe that bird gives a whoop for this or any other cause—this is just business to him. He's advancing this coin out of his own pocket on a commission—see? He don't care who wins the revolution, for he gets his share out of the pot right away. He's got oodles of money, and this is no bank-investment he is handling. He's playing the game secretly on his own account. Get that? He expects it may be a year, or perhaps two, before he can cash in on the deal; but when it does come, his share of profit will be likely a hundred thousand. That beats bank-interest, and the old bird is willing to take the chance."

"Quite likely that's true; no bank would finance such a wild project."

"Of course not—the directors would throw a fit. Well, now that kind of a guy, in on a raw deal like this, is going to play safe, isn't he? He isn't going to leave any evidence lying around to hang himself with—any drafts or checks to pass through the clearing-house? Not on your life! He's too smart a fox for that. Krantz knew this was coming, and he's been cashing in for six months, or more, to be ready for it. Now he's got the currency stored away—nobody knows exactly where but himself. When Alva comes for it, it will be handed out secretly, and that old bird will crumple up the receipt in his pocket, and wait till he can cash in, through those guys in London. Now it's up to us to locate the dough; we've got to separate it from either Krantz or Alva—and I'm for Alva."

"Why?"

"Because the job looks easier. He's human, and no money-grubber. He's just as liable as not to carry the whole wad around with him. I think that's just what

he will do, for he wont dare deposit such a sum anywhere. That's why I have laid back so long, without attempting to strike —I'm banking on the army captain to offer me a soft thing. What do you say?"

I HAD the whole story now in a nutshell, and it was one to think over. That Harris had played his cards well was sufficiently evident. Now I must be fully as cautious in playing mine. I felt the fellow had given me his full confidence, actually believing me to be Daly, and on the same trail with him, desiring to use me in what was probably the biggest job of his life, he had been led into the indiscretion of confiding to me the full truth of his scheme. If I kept my head and nerve, I had it in my power to block everything and thus bring the whole gang to swift justice.

"A slick piece of work, Harris!" I admitted admiringly. "And so far as I can judge, you've figured out the chances about right. They look good. If we can locate the swag, and cop it, there wont be much need for any get-away. Those fellows wont dare put up any strong hurrah, for if they did, the Government would be down on them like a ton of bricks. I'm with you, old man—shake!"

Our hands clasped, and Harris, evidently gratified at my words, helped himself to the bottle and poured out a liberal dose into the clean glass.

"That is what I thought you would say, Harry," he said more familiarly. "Come on now, and drink with me."

I put the stuff down, rather feeling the need of it, and desiring to establish our intimacy more closely.

"Then that's settled, George—yes, I'll have another cigar. By the way,"—as I lit up,—"there was another thing I wanted to ask you about. You said there was a woman here from Washington. What's the idea?"

His face darkened, and he let out an oath.

"Hanged if I know, but I guess it's all right. Still, I don't quite cotton to the dame. She's square enough, as far as that is concerned, but I would rather she hadn't horned in just now. This is how I get it from Alva: Those junta fellows —the big ones you know—think this New York bunch is moving pretty slow; they want some action for their money. So Señor Mendez, who seems to be engineering the deal, decides to send somebody over here to stir up the animals. But he's watched every minute; secret-service men are as thick as flies, and if one of his underlings was to leave for New York, he'd never get ten feet without being spotted. Mendez is wise as to this; so he gathers in privately a skirt he believes is all right, and sends her. It's not a decent job for a woman, and that's what makes it safe. He made a good guess, too; that female is as smart as a steel trap. She gave me the cold shivers."

"You don't think she suspects you?"

"No, I don't; there aint no reason why she should; but she gave me the once-over, all right, and I'm perfectly willing to know she is on her way back to Washington. I never did play in any luck with a woman in the game—perhaps that's what makes me afraid of 'em."

"What's her name?"

"Gessler, so Alva said, Marie Gessler—South American, I suppose; anyhow she talked that language like a native. I steered clear of her most of the time. Somehow she got my goat. However that's nothing to worry over." He glanced at his watch. "The dame's safely off by this time. What do you say—let's go home."

I signified my willingness.

CHAPTER XII

The Deserted Automobile

AS we passed out together through the narrow passage, extinguishing the lights behind us, the one overpowering desire in my mind was to be once more alone, so as to think over, and piece together as best I might this fabric of villainy with which I was confronted. The situation was fairly clear, yet there were strange lights and shadows in it I found hard to reconcile. Moreover, what should I do? How could I serve best—by immediately telling my story to the officers of the law, and thus washing my hands clean, or by continuing to enact the rôle of Harry Daly, and in this way entrapping these fellows red-handed? I had had enough of Harris for the present. His boastfulness and pride of crime disgusted me. I had no desire to be associated with the fellow, or pretend, even for a worthy purpose, to be his companion. Yet all this had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly I

could not determine the best course to pursue. I remained dazed and confused, the only clear decision being an eagerness to bring him, and these others also, to justice.

We were the last of all to leave the place, and as we emerged from the building into the deserted yard, left everything in silence and darkness behind us. The door closed tightly, secured by a night-latch, and we stood motionless in the drizzle. By that time I was ready with a suggestion, but by good fortune he took the initiative.

"We better slip out of here alone, I reckon," he whispered. "That's the way they all do, for occasionally a bull prowls along this alley. I'll go up this way, and then you take a sneak through the lumber yard. Likely we'll catch the same car going down. If we don't, look me up at Costigan's place—you know where that is?"

"Sixth Avenue, isn't it?"

"Sure. Jack is a good fellow, and the bulls never bother him. Ask for Parker, and it will be all right. If I aint in, leave a note where I can hunt you up. I got to keep my eye on Alva to-morrow, so he don't get away with the stuff."

"You expect him to draw?"

"Not before night; but just the same I want to know for sure. You wait here five minutes, for I've got the longest trip to make. You'll show up, all right?"

"You can't lose me; it looks too good."

He chuckled and patted me on the shoulder in an excess of friendliness, evidently feeling to some extent the whisky he had been imbibing so freely.

"That's the talk, Daly. Well, so long."

He slipped out through the gate into the dark of the alley, leaving it slightly ajar for me to follow. I sheltered myself behind the high board fence, and listened to the soft slush of his feet in the mud. The sound vanished, and all about was silence and darkness. I waited only long enough to be sure he was safely out of the way, and then followed, eager to be off. One thing was certain, I would make no effort to join him on the car; I would use the remainder of the night to decide the future, working out the problem alone.

TO make certain that I avoided any possibility of encountering the fellow again, I passed directly through the deserted lumber-yard before emerging upon Gans Street. This thoroughfare was at this hour desolate enough, not a light showing in the houses, or a moving figure visible as far as I could see in the dimness of the street-lamps. The rain was steady, the pavement shimmering with moisture, the only sound the pattering of the drops as they fell. If any policemen were abroad, I saw no signs, and, with collar turned up to my ears, I chose to walk, rather than seek the block to the east and the possibility of catching a street-car.

The factory-district ended in a row of houses, dark and silent at this hour, but the walking was good, and I pushed forward briskly, so buried in thought as to become practically insensible to the unpleasant surroundings. The night had been a full one, far exceeding my expectations, yet left me more puzzled than ever as to my own duty. While there was in my mind no doubt regarding the facts,—the existence of a conspiracy to foment revolution, and destroy property,—while I could even name many of those involved, and lead officers of the law to their secret place of rendezvous, while I had actually overheard some of their devilish planning, yet I had no proofs to submit outside of my own unsupported testimony. So far I knew of no act of crime with which these men could be connected; they were merely proposing a future attack on a neutral government. If, however, I consented to play my part with Harris, I would not only be in ample time to circumvent any damage Alva and his gang might contemplate, but also gain ample evidence for their conviction, and expulsion from this country. In addition to this I would be in position to block the daring plans of this international thief. Altogether it seemed to me that the wiser course for me to pursue at present was to wait, and watch, ready to act at any moment, but keeping my own council until certain that the specific moment had arrived.

Nor in this decision was I oblivious to the strange impression left upon me by my encounter with Marie Gessler. She had interested me oddly, and I could not drive her memory from my thoughts. Our moment of conversation had been peculiar, and her words and actions remained as a constraint. Why had she so deliberately saved me from discovery by those others —her companions? Why had she stood there, her hand on the door, and talked

to me in that mocking way? Had she a purpose, an aim? Did she believe my explanation? Or was her suspicion aroused into a determination to verify it in some way? While I could not decide, yet doubtless the latter theory was the more probable. That was why I had been pledged to call at "247 Le Compte Street" and ask for "Miss Conrad." This was the same place where Harris had secretly met Krantz. Evidently it was another headquarters for these precious villains. Once there, and safely in their power, the truth of my identity could easily be established. Was that her idea?

If so, who then was Miss Conrad? Not Marie Gessler certainly, under another name, for she would have returned to Washington. There was no doubt as to that, for Alva had agreed to take her direct to the depot in his own car, and would scarcely leave until she was safely on the train. Probably the other woman was a confederate, with whom she would communicate by telephone. My clearer judgment told me all this, made me fully conscious of the danger of keeping this appointment, yet never swerved me from an intention to do so. Marie Gessler's eyes were frank, and honest; they had looked directly into my own,—pleadingly, I imagined,—and I retained a blind faith in her no ordinary circumstances would overcome. She was involved in this criminal conspiracy—there could be no doubt as to that—but why? Under what conditions? What could ever have driven so womanly a woman to such an association? Was her appeal to me an effort at assistance? Was she blindly endeavoring to learn in this way if I were worthy of trust and confidence?

This hope would not be downed; it remained insistent, persistent. I would keep my word; I would go to the place designated at the hour set; I would go armed, prepared for whatever might occur of treachery—but I would go. Perhaps here was the key to the whole mystery; and once I solved her connection with the plot, particularly if it absolved her from blame, and the necessity of exposure, I could go forward with clear conscience, and land these others where they justly belonged.

I must have covered four or five blocks immersed in such thought, almost forgetful of my surroundings, my head bent low before the rain, my feet carelessly slushing through the water in pools on the sidewalk. I met no one, heard no sound to arouse me; all about was dark, desolate, forlorn. Then suddenly I became conscious of some unusual obstruction just ahead. It was at a black corner, where the street-light above had been extinguished, and the consequent gloom rendered objects grotesque and unfamiliar. At first I took it for a wrecked wagon lying against the curb, but another step forward revealed the truth — a deserted touring-car, its red tail-light plastered with mud, and barely visible.

I APPROACHED with relief; it was not wrecked; no sign of accident was to be noticed. The front wheels rested against the curb as though its owner was visiting somewhere near and expected to return at any moment. Even in that dim light I could see the machine was no common car, but a sedan, its glass brilliant in spite of the rain-splatters, and its paint gleaming brightly.

I stared about wonderingly, but could perceive nothing to account for the presence of such a car, or its apparent desertion. One side of the street was a vacant lot, and the only semblance of a dwelling opposite was a one-story cottage, the outlines barely distinguishable, with no gleam of light showing anywhere. Up and down both streets not a figure moved; not a sound reached me, but the slough of the wind, and the patter of the rain. I shivered with the loneliness of it all, as curiosity led me to cross the muddy parkway, to assure myself as to what this strange desertion meant.

There was no one in the car. I could look straight through the dimmed windows, against the glare of a street-lamp a block away. One of the rear doors stood half open, and tempted by it, I bent over, and felt within. My hand touched some object on the floor, and I instantly straightened up with the thing gripped in my fingers. It was a long, thin-bladed dagger—an ornament rather than a weapon, with an odd, fanciful hilt. There were stains upon the polished steel; and the moment I saw it, I knew where it had attracted my attention before—as a pin in Marie Gessler's hat.

The second of the three big installments into which this thrilling secret-service novel has been divided will appear in the next, the January, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Deep Water Men

The Hatching of a Pirate

By Culpeper Zandtt

THERE was a time, not so long ago, when many of us had the hotel habit — Medford included. We thought we were hitting the high spots when we ate masses of indigestible stuff at all hours in various hotel restaurants, paid enough for one meal to feed a laborer's family for a week, and put up with intolerable insolence from foreign waiters, imported under contract. Since then, however—times have changed. Many have been in France or on some other front. The scale of values has been readjusted, even to the estimate of one's fellowmen. We were sitting, one evening, in the Italian dining-room of New York's newest hotel—just to look it over; and Medford's order was bacon and eggs, with a chaser of *café-au-lait*. That constituted his entire meal. The taste with which the main architectural motif had been carried out in the hotel subconsciously appealed to him—but the man was unusually silent. As we lighted our cigars, a word or two indicated the drift of his thoughts.

"There were times, over there, when the chow didn't get to a front-line trench for two days straight—or coffee either. But there were four million men along that line—hard as nails. These fellows here look soft. They think they know life—but they haven't touched the edges. Their breed is going to be unpopular, but they'll never know why. . . . . H-m-m! I'd shade that opinion concerning the chap at that second table—and the two in the corner who seem to be watching him when he isn't looking. Those three belong in the open air—not in a place like this. They've all given orders, and they've obeyed orders—*pronto*. Know any of them, Tony?"

THIS is the first of a series of fascinating after-the-war sea-stories, by the author of that famous BLUE BOOK series "Mysteries of the Sea"—a man who knows whereof he writes.

Anthony Farnel, of the Players' Club and the National Protective Association, puts in certain hours each day as star operative of the United States Secret Service, and is to be reached more frequently on the Custom House telephones than at either of the other places mentioned. We three had been classmates in high school.

"The two over yonder," replied Farnel, "claim to be Swedes, in the shipping business, but there's a hunch down at Bowling Green that they were born a darned sight nearer Hamburg. By morning I'll know pretty much where they go to-night, and what they do. But I'm rather interested in this other chap myself. That pair are back of him—if he's on to them, he hasn't shown it. But he's not entirely comfortable, just the same, if I'm any judge. He's dawdling through a dinner as if he enjoyed it, but he's looking for something to happen, any minute. Has

the appearance of a navy man. Might be English, German, Russian—but not American or Latin."

Jim Medford was studying the man speculatively, through half-closed eyes.

"I've seen him—somewhere. Can't locate it. W-e-l-l,"—smothering a yawn of evident boredom,—"I guess I've had about enough of this for one while. Let's go!"

"What do you figure on doing now, Jimmy? Going back?"

"No. I'm fed up with the Continent of Europe—for life, I guess. Didn't go into the Service, because I simply wouldn't stand for army discipline and red-tape—worth more to the Allies on my own. But I mixed in over thirty actions. Saw things that—none of us talk about. Don't want any more newspaper jobs—don't need 'em! I've got enough to live on—and I'm footloose. But—somehow I don't see myself sticking around where nothing happens. I'm spoiled for that sort of thing!"

When we were out on the sidewalk, Medford offered no suggestion for the rest of the evening—and we could think of nothing likely to attract him. The man had lived too keenly. Presently he disappeared—toward the East Side.

PEOPLE who like to be considered New Yorkers don't foot it from the "Library" neighborhood to the foot of East Seventy-seventh Street, if some unusual errand takes them to that part of town. They use a taxi or a trolley, according to their social status. But the big New Englander swung easily along at a gait which covered the distance in twenty-two minutes flat. At the end of the street he crossed the inner court of a big apartment-building in the John Gray Settlement and climbed one of the exposed corner stairways to a fifth-floor studio overlooking the little park, the River and Blackwell's Island. Inside, the place had atmosphere—and the girl who lived in it had personality. She had driven an ambulance in France, stayed a few months at Cannes, recovering from shrapnel and shell-shock—then had come home to mix with the colors of her illustrations a something which they lacked before. It was said in the editorial offices that "Jess" Appleton must now be making seven or eight thousand a year.

Another man was lounging by the window in a big easy-chair as Medford came in—forty-five, straight as a lance, iron-gray mustache and hair, piercing gray eyes, rather spare, but with the flexible muscles of a cat. Satterlee was a distant cousin of Miss Appleton's—who had lent her the money to study in New York and Paris. Nothing definite was known as to his business,—something in the line of speculation and shipping, it was said,—but it was supposed to have netted him a million or so.

Though they had never met before, Medford had heard of the man—and liked him at sight. There is a wordless free-masonry among those who have lived, faced death under varying conditions. And their congeniality was shown by nothing quite so much as the way each of the three settled down in perfect relaxation with tea or tobacco, offering merely an occasional remark as things occurred to them. Bits of personal experience—Europe, Africa, the Sea Islands, the Orient.

PRESENTLY, through the open window of her little kitchen, they caught the sound of running footsteps across the flagging of the court below—a scraping and low vibration as they raced up the iron stairway of their particular corner. Then—other footsteps padding after them, as though shod with rubber. For an instant there was a fumbling at the door of the studio which opened upon the skeleton landing; then something was pushed through the letter-slit and fell with a light thump on the floor, the sound being deadened by a confused jumble of scuffling noises which indicated that the pursuers had been close enough behind the man they were chasing to force their way into his quarters—and close the door behind them. The walls of the building had been deadened to some extent, but a murmur of quarreling voices reached Miss Appleton and her friends. Then came the sort of shuddering groan with which they had all been quite familiar—a heavy fall, the sound of furniture being overturned, a general ransacking of the other studio.

With the prompt efficiency which had won the strip of ribbon pinned to her waist, Miss Appleton reached across the low table for her telephone—calling the office of the Settlement Manager.

"Send a couple of officers up to Fifty-nine B, Number Six-eighty-two East Seventy-seventh! Something wrong in there! Sounds like a man being robbed and killed! Miss Appleton talking—Fifty-seven A. Send the officers quickly, please!"

The neighborhood was orderly, as a rule. But in it there were hundreds of professing Bolshevists, anarchists of various breeds and nationalities. So a few extra "ward men" were usually detailed within a six-block radius; and it was under four minutes when two of them came running up the stairs. When they had reached the floor below, two men bolted from the next apartment and ran up to the roof—with the detectives close after them. Shots were fired—one of the police badly wounded. But the murderers got away, though a man was arrested on suspicion as he came out of an apartment farther up the street. In Fifty-nine B the still warm body of the occupant was found—and presently recognized by Medford as that of the man he had seen in the hotel dining-room earlier in the evening.

WHEN the morocco-bound memorandum-book dropped from the letter-slit into Miss Appleton's vestibule, Medford had stepped noiselessly across the room to pick it up. As the sounds of the quarrel and the groan came faintly through the wall, he instinctively started for the door—but Satterlee motioned him back.

"Too late, Medford—the man's dead, or dying, now! If we mix in this, it involves Jess, who lives here. Messy legal proceedings—possibly under suspicion ourselves. She's called the police—let them handle it."

"Hmph! You're dead right, old man! Guess I wont examine this book just now, either—it looks to me as if it might be what those brutes expected to find when they killed him!"

"Very likely. And we'll be out of here with it before any of that gang come back for another search. I want to look at our unfortunate neighbor before we go—but the ward men know me, and wont detain us. Jess, those fellows meant business. If they didn't get what they were after, they'll come again—police or no police. You'd better stay with some friend in another part of town for a few days—everybody will understand that you couldn't sleep for a night or so after a murder in the next room. Medford—I've an extra bed in my suite at the Club. Suppose I put you up, eh?"

When Medford told the police of the two strangers who had been watching the dead man at the hotel that evening, and suggested calling up the Secret Service office with the information, they left the building. Miss Appleby went to stay with a friend in an apartment on the river-bank and the New Englander accompanied Satterlee to his luxurious quarters in one of the leading clubs. An hour later, secure from observation, Medford took the morocco book from an inner pocket and sat down to examine it. If the thing contained any definite clue to the murderers, he preferred handing it over to Farnel and the Secret Service—having an impression that the affair might prove more political than a mere police case. But the more he studied various entries upon the pages, the more it seemed to him that there might be considerations against parting with it at all.

MEDFORD presently leaned back in his chair and lighted a fresh cigar Everything he had read was written in German—with a choice construction which indicated the upper-class officer, presumably of the navy, making out a more or less detailed report of certain articles and occurrences. And the amazing features of these entries were the familiarity of the handwriting—the appearance of a name which he had unusually good cause to remember. Aside from this, the book quite evidently had been soaked in sea-water, for some hours at least. After a little more thought, he tossed the thing over to Satterlee, asking him to look it over carefully. As the millionaire was a man of wide and varied experience, it took him but a little while to form an opinion.

"Hmph! You'll remember our impression that this was what those murderers were after in our late friend's quarters? Reckon there's no question about it! I don't know German as I do French, Spanish and the East Indian dialects—but this appears to be a record of noon positions during a thirty-eight-day cruise of some craft under command of a navy lieutenant, Wilhelm von Breitnach, together with a list of stores and munitions on board at the date of the last entry. The other memoranda, I'd say, might be gauge-records of certain storage-tanks or batteries—and chemical or other formulas. Some of these figures might be compass-bearings of certain objects on coasts or islands. The entry *'Unterseeb—119,'* I should infer to be the German submarine, *U-119*. If that is actually the craft this memorandum refers to, then Miss Appleby's murdered

neighbor—who had occupied that other apartment for nearly a month, she said—was presumably the German navy lieutenant von Breitnach—commander of a submarine."

"Y-e-s—that inference is so obvious that the 'crime experts' in Center Street would enter it in their memoranda on the affair as established fact, and base all their investigations upon it—if I were fool enough to hand over this book as Exhibit A. Only—you see, that dead stranger *wasn't* von Breitnach, nor anyone even resembling him!"

"Eh? You *knew* him, did you?"

MEDFORD nodded.

"I happened to be on the *Skillton Castle* when she was torpedoed by *U-119*. Von Breitnach shot our boats from under us when we piled into them, but took a dozen on board from the bits of wreckage. His craft wasn't the largest cruising type, but she was the last word in what they had for speed, radius and efficiency with a crew of sixteen. I saw her handled for hours with just five men on duty, all told. Before von Breitnach could get back to his base at Zeebrugge, the British fleet nearly had him out of current and smothered, on bottom—off the Orkneys. He was getting mighty short on chow and drinking water. We figured he'd put us out on deck and then submerge, as the easiest way to conserve his stores. But the fellow weakened, somehow—hadn't the cold-blooded nerve to do it after playing cards and eating with us for a couple of weeks. So he ran in fairly close to one of the harbors at night, and gave us a collapsible life-raft.

"I guess I'd know von Breitnach on a fairly dark night in Equatorial Africa. This writing is his—no doubt of it. But the man who slipped the book through Jess Appleby's door wasn't even a German, as far as I could tell. I'd seen him in some other place within six months—France or England, probably, though it might have been on one of the Pacific steamers. Came home through Siberia, you know. What interests me is how the man got this pocket logbook of von Breitnach's—and what happened to the Lieutenant. I'll swear he wasn't either of the brutes who killed this fellow, because I had the door a few inches open when they jumped for the roof with the cops after them. Now, who else would have any object in committing murder to get this thing—and why? The German subs were all surrendered to the British navy shortly after the armistice was signed—"

"H-m-m—what's the date of the last entry in that book?"

"Eh? . . . . . The devil! *February twelfth,* by Jove!"

"And the boat's position at that time?"

"Why, if these figures actually refer to that U-boat, she was then in one degree and four minutes, north, by one-fifty-four and forty-five minutes, east—somewhere in the sou'west Pacific!"

"Exactly! And that, Medford, you may take as the main fact upon which this whole affair is based. What did you figure on doing with that logbook—if I'm not too inquisitive?"

"W-e-l-l—I put it about like this: those brutes were after something in dead earnest. Looks as if this book was *it*. Now, if I were in their place and had tools enough for the job, I wouldn't quit until I got what I went after. I'd be back on the job as you suggested, cops or no cops, until I'd gone through every apartment near that one—supposing, of course, I was reasonably sure the man had this on him when he ran across that court and up the stairs. Jess told me anybody could get up to those roofs from an apartment on Seventy-sixth Street. If they've been spotting that chap for a day or two, they know who occupy the neighboring suites. If they were laying for him when he came along this evening, they know that you and I were in the next apartment—and if there were enough of them on hand, one very likely trailed us to this club. Under the circumstances, I guess I'll jot down bits of these memoranda on the back of an envelope, in a short-hand of my own—then get out of here in the morning by a back door, if there is such a thing, and hike downtown on the subway—put the book in my safe-deposit vault, and leave it there indefinitely."

Satterlee grinned appreciatively

"Medford, along some lines, your mental processes are very much like mine. That's exactly what I was going to suggest your doing! But you'll be safe enough going down to Wall Street with me in my landaulet. My chauffeur is rather a wizard in dodging traffic when I want him to make time—and it's doubtful if that crowd get after us until they've searched the apartment-building a little more thorough-

ly. You see, they've no valid reason for imagining that either of us may have that book—not yet. It'll be a process of eliminating other possibilities first. Meanwhile, if the police don't stir up something, the reporters may."

NEXT morning, Tony Farnel called me on the phone to ask if I knew where he could locate Medford. He'd tried to find him at the apartment in St. Nicholas Place which Jim had shared for several years with Stanley Emmons, when he happened to be in the United States—but their Chinese butler-valet said that he hadn't been home since the previous morning. While I was trying to remember some of his haunts, Jim got out of the elevator on the third floor of the Custom House and walked into the office—so I hung up and started downtown to lunch with them.

All through that meal, which we ate in a private room where we might talk without risk, I had a feeling that Jim Medford was in possession of information which he had no intention of sharing with us—for what he considered sufficiently compelling reasons. But later, I couldn't get Farnel to agree with me. He was too full of his own discoveries, too certain that anything Medford knew would be merely supplementary to his own facts. And there was no denying that what the Secret Service had dug up made the affair of the previous evening a rather absorbing mystery. Farnel began at once to give us the night's developments.

"Say, Jim, it was after nine o'clock, wasn't it, when you had the Central Office bulls phone us your identification of that chap as the one we saw in the hotel dining-room? Just by luck I happened to be in the office at the time. I got busy trying to locate the operatives who were shadowing those Swede shipping men—and struck one of them within half an hour. He said the Swedes had met three other men at the corner of Fifth Avenue, then separated. He followed two who went down Forty-second Street, but lost them in a house on East Forty-ninth. Then I went up to the precinct in a fast car and saw the fellow who was arrested coming out of that other apartment in Seventy-seventh Street. Identified him as one of those we'd seen at the corner table watching the dead chap, but the lieutenant wouldn't hold him. The fellow told a perfectly clear story about having been with a family on the fourth floor, for dinner—playing cards with them afterwards until he left. They corroborated his statements—apparently no evidence but mine to hold him on, and the lieut' said there was nothing against anyone's eating a dinner in the same hotel dining-room with a man who happened to be killed a few hours later. I couldn't prove they were really watching him, or even unusually interested in the chap—so they let the fellow go, but not until after I left the precinct—"

"And you just naturally shadowed him yourself?"

"Rather! Trailed him to a respectable brownstone residence in West Eighty-first—and ran up against our other man coming out of the house next door. He'd managed to get in from the roof and overhear a pretty interesting yarn. Boiled down, it's about like this: Two steamers of four thousand tons were loaded with a lot of mysterious cargo—at Stockholm, as near as he could locate the port, though it might have been some other one—and sent with picked crews to some designated rendezvous, different for each ship, to be anchored there and abandoned until the proper time came for them to start out in the business for which they were intended by this gang of Swedes who chartered and loaded 'em. The inference was that they were anchored in hidden bays on an uninhabited coast where they'd be safe until wanted—and their cargoes may be some exceedingly valuable commodity which they mean to spring upon its market after peace has been signed—holding out for a corner. Or it may be a new wrinkle in what might come under the head of piracy—any old thing."

"HOW long," inquired Medford, "were those ships to be left in the unknown bays?"

"Until some proper moment to be determined by the syndicate. Anyhow—their plans appear to have gone all right with one ship—all wrong with the other. The picked crew of one got back to Stockholm, or wherever it was, and are being kept up-country on full pay until they're needed again. The master and crew of the other had a long pull in open boats and landed on some island where there was an agent of a pearl-shell company, with an English friend visiting him. The steamship-master got all lit up and had a row with them over cards or something—was shot, but not

killed. The agent, with his island natives, forced master and crew into their boats and made 'em clear out. The master died at sea two days later. Crew died of thirst or were drowned, crazy—all but one illiterate bo's'n, who was picked up by a steamer and eventually brought the news back to the syndicate.

"Now, they're plumb up against it, as far as their second steamer is concerned. She's lying in some unknown inlet that was undoubtedly entered by the master upon papers he fetched away when he left her. But he's presumably in the belly of a shark, and his papers with him. The bo's'n couldn't navigate—couldn't tell within a thousand miles the location of that boat. She's lying there, perfectly equipped and loaded for whatever they meant to do with her,—cargo probably worth millions,—and she might as well be at the bottom of the ocean! Know what *I* think? I'll bet a hundred dollars that gang of Swedes located some man whom they had reason to believe either the pearl-shell agent on that island or the Englishman with him—and have been following the chap with the idea that he might have their ship-master's papers! Of course, it's only a hunch—not a shred of real evidence to support it. But that's the only theory which seems to connect those men in the hotel with the chap who was murdered."

WHEN Medford left us that day, we assumed that we would see him within a day or two at the outside. But it was a good many months before we even heard of him, so completely did he drop out of our everyday world. In that time, Farnel's investigations of the supposed Swedes had produced no evidence upon which they could be detained. The house in West Eighty-first Street was presently vacated, and all trace of those who had occupied it was lost. The studio-murder passed into the police records as a mystery with no clues.

From the restaurant where we had lunched together Medford got in communication with Satterlee and arranged to meet him at the club an hour later. When they had locked themselves into his luxurious suite, Jim gave him the additional data obtained from Tony Farnel and his Secret Service operatives. Then they looked at each other in silence for a moment or two. Presently Satterlee said, reflectively:

"From what you tell me, the Secret Service has no suspicion at all that the steamships referred to by those presumable Swedes may be actually U-boats—of the latest, most effective class built at Kiel?"

"None whatever! I infer that the Swedes, even among themselves, were mighty particular to use the word *steamships*. They had obvious reasons for such a precaution."

"But if ordinary steamships, the loading with such a mysterious cargo and dispatching them to a hidden rendezvous—abandoning them for an indefinite period—is too beastly absurd on the face of it! They must have cleared for some regular port, with a manifest and other papers that would bear inspection! Did your friend, Farnel, actually swallow a yarn like that?"

"Not until he'd had a talk with Lloyd's people and the London Salvage representatives. They admitted that scrap-iron and even dirt had been frequently shipped in packing-cases labeled 'pianos' or 'expensive machinery, upon certain overinsured ships. He also was shown a list of ships reported as missing during the last quarter. Two of them were of a size and build which might easily correspond to those mentioned by the Swedes. Of course, the whole yarn is improbable, if you're going by everyday activities in the shipping trade—but it's entirely possible."

SATTERLEE grinned reminiscently.

"Oh, I grant you anything's possible! H-m-m—this proposition is kinda getting hold of my imagination; let's see what it actually amounts to: Presumably there were two mighty effective submarines which were never surrendered—which simply disappeared, and probably were reported to the Allied governments as having been sunk by the British fleet at one time or another. That's perfectly simple and plausible. If they didn't return to their home base after their last departure, even German naval officers would accept that statement without question. Now, we have no evidence to show that the men in whose possession they now are have relations with any government—or to indicate what they intend doing with them in the future. We can surmise the obvious use, of course—but at that, we may be quite wide of the mark. One guess is really as good as another. What we do know is that one of those subs is where they can put their hands on it when they're ready to move. And with that one we have noth-

ing to do—for the present, anyhow. I'd say it is probably on bottom in about ten fathoms somewhere—practically no possibility of anyone's discovering it by chance. With the other, however,—the one whose insides and general operation you know so well,—we seem to have a little the edge on everybody else, if we keep from being wiped out because of that knowledge. After you turned in last night, I looked up that last position given in von Breitnach's log—"

"One of the isolated atolls down near the Solomon group, isn't it? The position would be in that neighborhood, as I recollect the chart."

"Greenwich Island—isolated, as you say, three hundred and sixty miles north of the Solomons. . . . . Wait a second! I'll get the Admiralty 'Pilot' for the Western Pacific groups—then I can explain better. . . . . Here it is! Now, then! 'Greenwich Islands—reported in eighteen-eighty-three. Twenty-eight small islands covered with coconut trees on east side. Reef triangular—fourteen miles by nine. Boat-entrance to lagoon through southeast corner. About a hundred and fifty natives.' That covers practically all the official data. My business interests, however, require as detailed reports as is possible for me to obtain—from a good many out-of-the-way corners of the world—particularly the South Seas and East Indian Archipelago. Ten months ago one of the Island traders who is really in my employ—though he doesn't know it—sent in this little typewritten note: 'Natives on Greenwich Island group thinned out by epidemic—two hundred and twenty-nine survivors accepted proposition of copra-dealers and were moved down to a cove on north coast of New Britain—leaving Islands abandoned. A pearling company said to have lease—after a 'taboo' which has still two years to run. Passed this group in schooner last month—appear to be deserted.' "

"Hmph! That would give a good deal of color to this submarine theory. One of the best-developed naval bases Germany had before the Australians took it was Friedrich Wilhelmshafen on the east end of Papua—about six hundred and fifty miles from this Greenwich group. There are thousands of Germans all through Papua and the Solomons; it's pretty generally admitted that a German radio is doing business from some of the Papuan mountains in spite of the British occupation. . . . . Satterlee, there's practically no question as to *U-119* being in the lagoon of that deserted group or in one of the reef-channels between the islands. And we're the only living men who know it!"

"WELL," said Satterlee, "I'm not disputing the fact. What's on your mind? A few years ago I'd have said: 'Let's you and I go get her!' I used to risk my life—jump headlong into adventures, as if I had as many lives as a cat. Four times, before I was thirty-five, I was 'on the beach'—flat broke. In between those times worth a hundred thousand—half a million—fifty thousand. Reckon, to-day, I'm considerably over the million mark—and I'm no longer young. Crave adventure as much as I ever did—but not at quite so much risk of being snuffed out before I'm ready to go. But I'm interested in this proposition sufficiently to get that sub entirely beyond the reach of those Swedes, or whatever else they may be, if I can. If you care to risk your neck on a gamble of this sort, I'll back you with money—and perhaps half a dozen men who can be trusted to the limit under any conditions. Frankly, Medford, —though I know nothing of your resources, —I don't believe you could pull it off without my assistance."

"Possibly. But—why?"

"You've got to have some kind of a steamer capable of staying on top in Pacific hurricane weather, and rigged with pretty heavy derrick-booms—that's your first requisite. With the demand for tonnage what it is to-day, in every country, I doubt if you get one for half a million! Too vast an amount of tonnage has been destroyed. You've got to have quite a lot of diving and wrecking equipment before you get that sub to the surface and under her own power. How far do you suppose you'd get, in these times, attempting to purchase anything of the sort—before the secret service in two or three different countries would be asking rather pointed questions which you couldn't answer without giving your whole game away? You'll need at least six other men —navigator and engineer among them—who'll obey your orders without question and keep their mouths shut under all conditions—who'll stand by you to the end of the deal as long as you keep your agreement with them. How many of such men

could you put your hands on within, say, a week?"

"I pass! With anything like a time-limit, I'm out of it."

"Fortunately, I'm not. I own a fifteen-hundred-ton menhaden trawler on the Pacific Coast—rigged with derrick-booms that would answer your purpose very well. Fourteen knots—sixteen at a pinch. Had her engined for another sort of work if the chance offered. The Shipping Board released her to me last week, and though we've had three offers for charter, she's neither the size nor equipment most in demand at present. I'm known in most of the Pacific and Oriental ports as a man who has made a pile of money in salvage and keeps considerable of the latest equipment stored in Seattle. So I could fit out that trawler for a supposed wrecking-cruise in the Pacific without much question from the authorities, and with perfectly legitimate papers.

"In regard to the men—well, a good many have been under obligations to me at one time or another. One I have in mind is a Naval Reserve lieutenant who has no immediate family and who received his discharge, minus six months' back pay, two weeks ago. He's literally on the beach—can't land any sort of a job under the present conditions, and he's really a genius in navigating and diving. Another, a warrant machinist, held a chief's ticket before he enlisted. He can not only run any sort of motor, turbine or reciprocating engine, but repair them as well. He's in the same fix—there are more good men stranded than there are ships with berths for them. I can get in touch with half a dozen others right here in New York who are hardened scrappers from the trenches and the navy—and who'll carry out any agreement with me until they drop. Each of those men has been tested until I'd gamble on him as far as I would on any human being; of course, there's a limit in human nature, but that's a chance you've got to take—sort of makes the gamble worth while. Now, what do you say? Does a partnership with me in a game like this appeal to you?"

"Very much. But somehow—hanged if I can figure where you come in—what you get out of it!"

Satterlee trimmed a fresh cigar with some deliberation—took a few reflective puffs.

"First place, I'm a pretty good American. Three hundred years ago my folks were English. I'd gladly pay every cent this little gamble may cost me to snuff out even one U-boat that is likely to menace either country! I'd spend a darn sight more to find and sink that other one which we know is up to mischief of some kind!"

TWO weeks later a group of men sat around the beer-stained table in an upper room of a second-rate hotel in San Francisco, overlooking the lower end of Market Street, not far from the Ferry. The air was stratified with eddies of stale tobacco-smoke, and three of the men had the appearance of such weariness as may be produced by a good deal of night work and too little sleep to make up for it. The fourth was evidently a personage of authority—accustomed to prompt obedience; he had been an army or navy man—no question as to that. The one who seemed to be leader of the other three had lived in America long enough to lose the inborn fear of the governing class in certain countries of Europe, or else was of sufficient importance to maintain his ideas in defiance of anybody. He had been summing up their activities for a month.

"There's no question whatever as to the identity of Marshall, or that he was staying for some time with the British agent on Carpenter Island in the Admiralty group. We'd been cruising through the Bismarck Archipelago in an island schooner, looking for some trace of von Breitnach—and reached Nares Harbor a few days after his row with them. The agent gave us a detailed account of the whole affair, which coincided with the wrtten one he sent down to Sydney. Von Breitnach was pretty drunk—and out of business for an hour or so after the shooting mix-up. They could have gone through his clothes; but from the bo's'n's account of the way he talked in that open boat before he died, there wasn't a word to indicate that they did—and there was certainly no reason why such an idea should occur to them. If anyone got the log from him, it was Marshall, the Englishman—not the agent. We saw and talked with Marshall, so that we'd know him anywhere. We knew just when he left the Island—followed him to Frisco, to New York—saw and identified him there. His taking that apartment at the foot of Seventy-seventh Street was the first suspicious thing—his attempts to get in touch with

some of the biggest men in the shipping business the next. Then—he was seen in the Metropolitan Museum, studying penciled entries in just such a morocco-bound book as we know von Breitnach had. No trace of that book was found in his room before or after he was killed. It's practically certain he *did* get the book from von Breitnach—and that he hadn't it then. The whole question is, who has it—and where?"

"You say the neighboring apartments were searched?"

"Down to pins and wastebaskets. We had the building fairly terrorized, in spite of the police—you see, a new janitor was in our pay and could do a lot of searching while the tenants were out—even admit one of us in several instances. The circumstantial evidence—eliminating everything else—sifts it down pretty closely to three people who were in the studio-apartment next door, when Marshall was croaked, and who telephoned for the bulls: that woman artist Appleton, her millionaire cousin Satterlee, who lives at one of the leading clubs, and Medford the war-correspondent—just back from Europe, an old friend of hers. Either one of them was in a position where he or she might have obtained possession of that book under certain conditions. It's pretty clear that the Appleton woman didn't—or she'd have turned it over to the police, whether she guessed what it was or not. Satterlee is a different proposition; he's known as one of the luckiest adventurers in the Orient, and he's no fool. But he hasn't made a move of any sort which might indicate a knowledge of that book or what it amounted to. Medford—"

"Yes, what about Medford? He's the man who saw Marshall eating dinner in the hotel an hour or so before he was killed—looked pretty closely at us too—as we were studying him!"

"Well, Medford has dropped out of sight as completely as if he had walked down the Coney Island Pier and stepped off! Not a trace of him anywhere since the following evening—which he spent with Satterlee again, at his club."

"H-m-m! We assume, let us subbose, that Medford hass the book—*ja!* What goodt will it for him do? How can he with us inderfere—eh?"

"Dev'lish little, if he thinks he's smart enough to play a lone hand! There may be actually nothing in von Breitnach's book to give him the exact location of our boat, and he can't get a wrecking-steamer to go after it if there is,—or any sort of diving outfit,—without being compelled to explain why he wants it. Of course he *can* blow the whole thing to the Government, but I'll bet a thousand dollars they wouldn't believe a word of it. The greatest harm he can do us is to prevent our getting hold of our own boat and using it as we had planned. We can do a lot with the one we have, but we'll be hampered and hounded to cover more frequently than if we had two, operating thousands of miles apart. We couldn't build other boats to replace them now, or any time within the next few years, unless the materials were taken by different steamers to some unknown base where we could put them together without being seen—there will be much too close a watch kept upon every shipyard in the world! That boat was left in perfect condition, with batteries charged, fully stocked with stores of all kinds, waiting in some perfectly safe anchorage for us to use her. Von Breitnach was to be governed by circumstances in selecting the place when he found where the British cruisers were. If there's no other way of finding the location, we can search every atoll in the southern groups with a gasoline schooner, but that may put us off for a year or more."

ONE of the men had stepped over to a window, glancing down at the street traffic. In a moment he gave a low but sharp exclamation.

"Come here quick, will you! If that isn't the very man we're talking about, I'm a liar! It's *Medford*—walking down to the Ferry! And he wouldn't be out here on the Coast just now if he wasn't on to our boat in some way. Come on! He doesn't know either of us three by sight—we'll go over to Alameda on that ferry-boat with him. And there'll be something doing—*ja!*"

Now, Medford, all his life, had been a fool for luck—which is a fool's way of saying that he was unusually observant, knew opportunity when he saw it, and had a cat's instinct for sudden, unseen danger in his immediate vicinity. Subconsciously, he had noticed the face of a stranger in a third-story window as he strolled along the sidewalk on Market Street—noticed something like sudden recognition streaking across it, and the motion as if the man were

calling some one else to look. Consequently, when they reached the street, he was nowhere in sight. A man who resembled him was just entering the door of the ferry-house, but they didn't find him there —or on the Alameda boat which was just leaving.

Medford had casually stepped into a saloon which had another door on a side-street—had gone through, hurried around the next corner, returned to Market Street five blocks farther back, jumped a jitney, driven to the St. Francis, paid his bill, come down again with his luggage to a taxi and driven to a garage at the south end of the city. Hiring a chauffeur and touring-car, he then had been driven to a station on the Southern Pacific, sixty miles away, where he caught a San Diego express and took a stateroom in the sleeper. In San Diego he got a small launch to put him aboard one of the yachts in the bay. When the launch returned and the yacht's sailing-master was sending his luggage below, supposing him a recently arrived guest of the owner's, Medford stopped him. He gave the appearance of carrying a trifle too much liquid ballast, and held out a twenty-dollar bill.

"Look here, ol' man—some mishtake! Thish aint my boat! I'm jush a li'l' pickled. Mashter that trawler over there —see! Only trawler in whole bay! . . . . Mush be that one! Jush takin' c'mand of her. Shay! Put me aboard of her like goo' feller—hey?"

AS the sailing-master didn't care to have any of his deck-hands cut in on the twenty, he lowered a dinghy and pulled the soused Captain over himself—putting him aboard on the lee side, where it was impossible for his own crew to see just which craft he approached. At midnight the trawler quietly steamed out past Coronado. As the port authorities supposed they understood her business perfectly, nobody gave her a thought, after a little preliminary speculation as to which of many wrecks she might be going to salve. As for her crossing the Pacific—well, the two steamers which did sight her naturally assumed that she'd been purchased by some Australian fisheries company and was being taken across for delivery—a not uncommon occurrence.

From the time he left New York, Medford had put in every spare minute concentrating upon a study of navigation with an absorption which enabled him to use a sextant and work out a reckoning with the tables in a nautical almanac before they were halfway across the Pacific. Not one of the half-dozen men sent on ahead by Satterlee to load and clear the trawler had the slightest idea where they were going or upon what sort of adventure. They had been introduced to Medford at the club—had studied the war-correspondent from every side until they were sure of recognizing him under almost any conditions, and understood that they were absolutely under his orders for an initial period of eighteen months, at wages for which they were entirely willing to risk their necks and keep their mouths shut concerning what they saw, heard or did.

Torrey, the ex-navy-lieutenant, acting as mate and navigator, had merely been told to make for a position in the Pacific five hundred miles from their real destination, by the safest and quickest course at that season of the year. When he realized the amount their commander had absorbed of his own pet science, in a few weeks, Torrey spared no pains to make him an expert capable of working out stellar observations without the assistance of prepared tables. And when they reached the position Medford had indicated, he was entirely able to take his boat anywhere on the Seven Seas.

As the assistance of each man would be necessary in getting away with the submarine, he now told them enough of the story to fire their imaginations and make them as keen as himself actually to pull the thing off. In cases shipped as cargo and wrecking machinery there was a complete supply of Admiralty charts, diving-suits, arms, and all necessary equipment for raising a hulk from any moderate depth—also two radio sets, one for the trawler, and a much more powerful one which Satterlee had foreseen they might be able to erect at some isolated spot ashore.

THE finding of the submarine and getting it to the surface would make an absorbing narrative if given in detail. The only entrance to the lagoon in the Greenwich group is a boat-passage through the southwest corner of the reef—a channel with several coral ledges a scant eight feet under water at average high-tide. Yet the U-boat somehow had been worked through it and was resting on bottom in nine fathoms. Even though he knew the

secrets of her most improved appliances,—from close observation while a prisoner aboard,—Medford had little hope of being able to raise her without the assistance of the trawler, and he made a quick decision concerning what the other men figured as a job of months. Going down in a diving-suit, he estimated that by the removal of four projecting ledges in the boat-channel he would be able to get a minimum depth of sixteen feet clear through at high tide. With her water-ballast pumped out, the trawler drew just under fourteen.

Blasting the ledges and removing the debris took ten days of excessively hard work, but they got the trawler into the lagoon without a scratch and anchored her directly over the submarine. If her batteries were still fully charged, Medford knew there was power enough to start her pumps and clear the water from a chamber in her bottom through which men in diving-suits might get in or out of the hull. But if the power failed, once they were inside, there was no way in which they could recharge the batteries until the boat came to the surface, where her Diesel motors could be used. He remembered, however, a provision which had been made for just this emergency. In a recess of the upper shell, closed with a water-tight hatch that could be slid back with a lever, there were twenty fathoms of heavily insulated copper wire connected with the batteries inside. It was by no means a difficult matter for them to open this hatch, haul the cable up to the trawler, attach it to her dynamo and send down current until the cable began to heat, showing that the batteries had absorbed all they could take. After that Medford and Stevens, his engineer, got into the U-boat through the air-chamber in her bottom, pumped out the displacement-tanks and brought her to the surface under her own power and buoyancy. As there were but seven of them altogether, the trawler had to be left there in the lagoon—after they had transferred oil, munitions and stores enough to last them during a three-months cruise; but they didn't leave the immediate vicinity of the atoll until they had experimented in handling the submarine under every condition they could think of.

WHEN they were finally at sea, making seventeen knots on the surface just to prove what the boat could do, Medford called his men together in the chart-room for a conference, the helmsman and engineer being given the gist of it afterwards, when relieved.

"We've got this sub, gentlemen,—blocking those scoundrels to just that extent,—and it is thoroughly understood that we sink her in deep water if ever there seems to be a chance of their getting her again. But she's a pretty handy sort of craft for a good many purposes, and we'll not part with her except as a last resort. Now, there's little question that the other sub is where they can get her in a hurry as soon as they're ready to go ahead with whatever scheme they have in mind—and it's a safe gamble that it'll be something which is a menace to every honest ship on the ocean. The possibilities of what a few unscrupulous men can do with a craft like this are too obvious for argument. You catch the idea, of course? It's open season for us on that other sub. To attempt a search for the place where she's now hidden—under water—would be more of a job than finding a black pin at a colored funeral. But I figure that they mean to use her in a very few months—so I'm going to play a hunch that *may* hit plumb center and can't leave us any more up in the air than we are now."

Torrey had been thoughtfully considering future possibilities as he began to realize the sort of craft they were on.

"You don't want to forget, Captain, that we're going to need a safe place to hole-up ourselves—a place where oil and supplies can be left for us by one of Satterlee's boats. That point has got to be definitely worked out before we run short of what we now have aboard. We're calculating a three-months supply—better figure on two instead! We can't run into any port and buy what we need, you know!"

"That's part of my hunch, Sam. On the coast I'm bound for there are coves where we can lie up with very little risk of discovery. Here's the way I figure it! Do any of you know the Dutch Indies—really know what their coasts are like and the sort of natives who live on 'em?"

Torrey and Stevens both spoke up. Danby nodded.

"Sam was down there surveying for the Hydrographic Department on the *Des Moines*, out of Manila—and I was second for a few trips on a 'B. P.' boat, running up from Brisbane."

"Then you know what Lombok is like on the charts, even if you haven't been

there. Forty-five miles one way, thirty-eight the other—about fifty thousand people altogether, mostly bunched in the cultivated valley which runs across from east to west; but it's absolutely one of the least-known spots on the globe—under the rule of its own native rajah, with merely a resident commissioner to represent the Dutch Government—not over thirty whites on the island. On the south coast there are two entirely landlocked bays, with hills from five to nine hundred feet high all around them—steep-to. The larger one, Telok Awang, is five miles wide by six long, and with water enough to accommodate the navies of the world—has communication with the middle of the island only by two footpaths through the jungle, but it has three small fishing villages around its shores. The other, Telok Blongas—in the southwest corner—is miles away from any settled part of the island, has but one footpath leading down into it from the hills, through pretty thick undergrowth—and it has a hidden inlet with nine fathoms of water, two miles long by a thousand feet wide. Of course, there may be a few native huts where that path comes out on the shore, but there's no village of any size within miles, and there are probably months when not a soul visits the place. As late as 1913 the Admiralty charts note that the whole south coast of these islands, and Java, 'have only been partly surveyed'—which shows how completely isolated they are."

"Wasn't there a story going about the China Sea and the Moluccas that Cap'n Sam Nickerson found a German masked battery of naval guns on the Head at the entrance to one of those bays—and succeeded in blowing it up one night, in 1915?"

"I've heard that story, and I believe it had some foundation. Germany certainly intended to fortify Telok Awang as a naval base as soon as she had taken over the Dutch possessions—because it is one of the very finest harbors in the whole East Indies. The chaps in the British navy all believe that it was the *Emden's* base, and that the Germans paid the Rajah of Lombok something very satisfactory to have those three little fishing-villages abandoned for a few years. It is said also that one of the navy supply-boats, disguised as a tramp, put in there for water one night, found the bay apparently deserted, and a long corrugated-iron shack hidden in the brush on the east side, full of oil and ship's stores. Might belong to the Dutch government, of course—not the slightest evidence against that supposition, or even that it may be the property of the Koninklijke people, held there as emergency stores in case they are needed by one of their Lombok and Sumbawa steamers. But not a single steamer of any description touches at a port on the south coasts of those islands or goes within miles of them!"

"Hmph! Reckon I'm beginning to understand your hunch, Captain! You're figuring that the massive German mind always moves in the same way regardless of circumstances or human variability—eh? You think that having once used Telok Awang as a perfectly safe hidden base for the *Emden* and other raiders, having oil and stores already waiting there, so concealed that no cruiser poking her nose between the Heads would be likely to see them, your U-boat syndicate intends to use the place again, because it would be very difficult to find another place as good without running much more risk of discovery? Isn't that the idea?"

"You've struck it, Sam. We don't know that those fellows have anything to do with the inside crowd which is actually running Germany to-day, but we do know that possession of these two subs implies pretty close relations somewhere—close enough for them to get all the valuable hints in regard to hiding-places that anyone in Germany could give them. There's practically no question that they know all the inside dope there may be concerning Telok Awang and the *Emden's* secret activities—and if they know that, there's little chance of their wasting much time searching the charts and Pilots for some other place as good. I'm heading straight for the south coast of Lombok, and I'll bet the other sub turns up there within sixty days!"

AS the submarine raced around the north end of Papua and down through the Moluccas, there were many discussions concerning their quarry and their possible future proceedings—but the actualities of their own position never really dawned upon them until one morning when they were forced to slow down because of fog so thick they could see but thirty feet of their own turtle-deck from the conning-tower. Medford and Torrey were stand-

ing in the open hatch—it hadn't occurred to either that they were crossing the main steamer track from Thursday Island up to Manila and Hongkong. Suddenly, the air-currents shifted a trifle. They heard voices so close that a collision appeared almost certain; then a little breeze thinned the fog sufficiently for them to see the superstructure of a N.Y.K. boat within four hundred feet, crossing their bow at a sharp angle, but safely clear of them.

In a moment the Japanese officer on the bridge and several passengers along the starboard rail saw the submarine. There was a chorus of alarmed shouts and a fusillade of revolver-shots. Some of the shots struck the conning-tower and glanced from the steel plates. Then the fog shut down again. The voice of the English captain was perfectly distinct as he asked his Japanese mate and one of the passengers what all the row was about. They could hear him shouting: "Nons'nse, man—nons'nse! There are no subs which are not in possession of the Allied fleets—certainly none in these waters! What you saw was prob'ly some ship's boat, floating bottom-up! Why, if I thought there was really a U-boat within ten knots of me, I'd go out of my way to ram and sink her! The submarine is an outlawed craft till the end of time—don't you know that? Suppose it belonged to our own navy? Nons'nse! They'd not have it in these waters without due notice being given! And any shipmaster would sink one if he saw it!"

As the voices died away in the distance, the two closed the hatch and went below without a word. Lighting cigars, they went aft to where Stevens and two of the other men were sitting in the motor-compartment. When Medford gave the others the details of what had happened, there was considerable food for thought.

"It hadn't occurred to me," observed Medford, "that we were actually pariahs without having done a single thing to merit any such reputation! Say! Know what I think? I'm wise to the sort of feeling the Flying Dutchman and the Wandering Jew must have toted around with them day after day!"

THE more they considered their situation, the more difficult it seemed, from any point of view. But leaving all that as a future problem, Medford kept steadily to his purpose of catching the other submarine first. They made the coast of Lombok in better time than they expected, and drifted imperceptibly into the big landlocked bay of Telok Awang with nothing but their periscope showing, and not way enough on the craft to create a noticeable wake from it. The little steel pipe might have been a limb of a tree floating in a partly submerged position, as far as anyone could tell from the shore without a powerful glass. Slowly, as if a two-mile current were setting it in between the Heads, the little pipe drifted clear up to the extreme inner shore of the Bay—then back along each side.

There was no sign of life anywhere. The huts of the three little fishing villages stood just as they had been abandoned by the natives, with evidences in the way of accumulated dust and débris that they had not been occupied for several months at least. And although Medford searched the sky-line through the periscope, then let the conning-tower emerge until he could get halfway out of the hatch with his prism-binocular, he could discover nothing to indicate the presence of any men left to watch the place. So the sub was presently brought to the surface near the east shore of the Bay, and a landing-party went off for a more careful search—which resulted in their finding a long corrugated-iron shack concealed in the jungle-bush, in which there was a large quantity of oil and ship's stores.

After a little consideration Medford decided to remove these to a spot where no other submarine or raider would be likely to discover them. Taking aboard as much of a load as he dared carry, submerged, he ran down to the smaller landlocked Bay of Telok Blongas twenty-three miles to the westward, and made as careful a reconnaissance there, before coming to the surface. There were no indications whatever of human life or occupancy. Running up the hidden inlet to a spot where the bank was ten feet above the water, and "steep-to," he landed the extra stores, then went back for more. In a week he had not only transferred all the stores, but the iron shack itself—and so thoroughly concealed it in the jungle at Telok Blongas that anyone not in the secret would have searched a long time before discovering it. Then they took the sub back to Telok Awang, concealed its turtle-deck and conning-tower with a lot of dead brush and driftwood—and sat down to await developments. They

had an abundant supply of food and good water, did considerable fishing and exploring along the shore; but it was a long wait —in a bay as unruffled as a lagoon except when the wind blew from due south, and a stillness broken only by the occasional shrieks of tropic birds or the chattering of monkeys.

Finally, on the thirty-fourth day, another submarine came slipping in between the Heads with her decks awash. The *U-119* was prepared for her—with torpedoes in her tubes, and her six-inch gun loaded, under its pile of dead brush; but unfortunately, two of them happened to be coming off in the dinghy, and there was some unavoidable movement behind the brush as they climbed aboard—enough to attract the attention of the other submarine commander and cause him to order a torpedo shoved into its tube while he was investigating through his glass. When the target was moving fairly up to his sights, Medford released his "Whitehead." Seeing its wake darting toward him and knowing that he couldn't dodge it at such close quarters, the other commander let loose his own torpedo—which struck the deeply shelving beach a hundred feet astern of *U-119* and raised her almost out of the water with the tidal wave it created. The two explosions were almost simultaneous. When the smoke and spray cleared away, there was no sign of the other submarine—save a widening film of oil on the water.

AFTER their craft was again on an even keel, Torrey and Stevens had hurried below to see how much damage had been done them. In a few moments, the mate came up on deck to report.

"Some of the light stuff has been smashed, but the only serious damage appears to be a starting of her seams in one or two places. Water's coming in—nothing but what the pumps'll take care of; and in a few months we could rig up a marine railway to haul her partly out while I calk those seams. Nothing but what we can handle, I reckon, long as we stay on the surface—but we can't submerge until those plates are fixed."

"And we can't travel anywhere on the surface without being sunk by the first steamer that sees us and carries a gun! Lovely—perfectly lovely!"

Just then Stevens poked his head up to say that he had put on a "head-frame" to see if there might be any radio talking near them which would indicate that the explosions had been heard by other craft north of Lombok. Apparently they hadn't —but to his amazement some high-powered outfit was calling *"Medford! Medford!"*

"Hmph! Probably some message from Satterlee, trying to locate us! If it's high-power installation, they wont be able to hear anything from our short aërials and small dynamo, at all!"

"But other ships between us are getting that message too! If we answer, they'll relay it!"

"Bully for you, Stevens! I didn't think of that! Tell 'em we're getting 'em clearly!" In a few minutes, Stevens had taken down the message—relayed from Honolulu.

Submarine reported by Kokura Maru, *Molucca Sea. If successful, deliver your boat naval authorities, Port Darwin.*

J. S.

Medford considered it thoughtfully.

"H-m-m—he can't possibly know where we are or the shape we're in just now—but he's a damn good guesser. Darwin is just about the nearest port we can make, on the surface, without being seen and fired at—practically no travel south of these islands!"

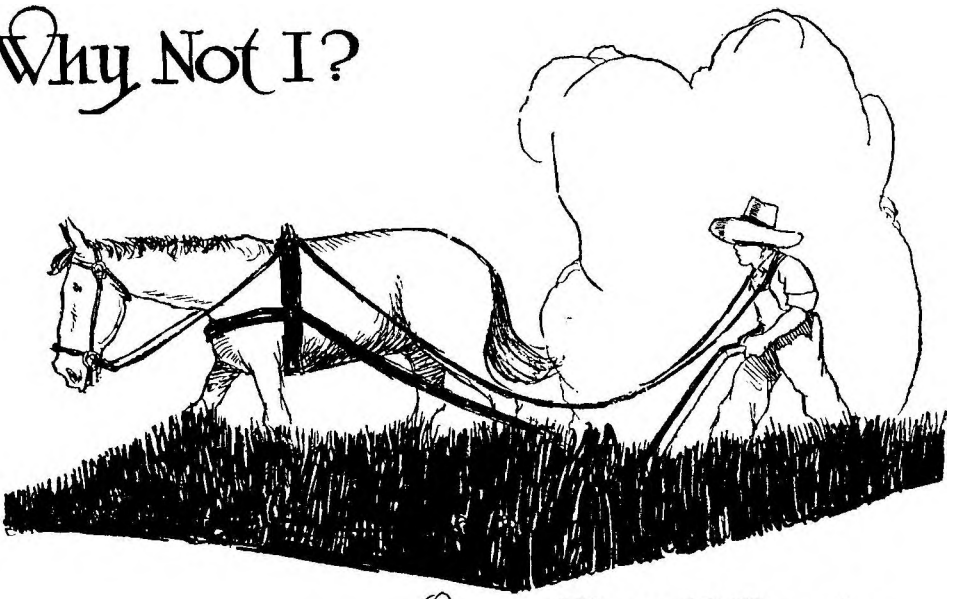
"But why not chance sending us to our own naval authorities at Zamboanga or Manila?"

"Terms of the Armistice. They stipulated delivery of all submarines to the British fleet. Satterlee's foxy! No international complications for him!"

In less than a week—without having been sighted by another ship—they ran at a leisurely gait into the landlocked harbor of Port Darwin, on the north coast of Australia—with the American flag at their jack-staff, over the German naval ensign upside down. One of the Koninklijke steamers was just pulling out for Batavia, her decks crowded with passengers who waved handkerchiefs and cheered as long as they could be heard. Medford and Torrey stood on their turtle-deck, saluting in a bored way as if catching pirate submarines was all in a day's work. As a matter of fact, the whole crew were a bit glum. The return to law-abiding life seemed rather flat.

There will be another story of the "Deep Water Men" in an early issue.

Why Not I?



By Elmer E. Ferris

THE life-story of a born salesman—a business romance of the sort Mr. Ferris describes so attractively.

"YOU are of age, Steve, and you can go on a wild-goose chase if you want to," said Jake Deering to his nephew, "but you had better stay here with us on the farm. How did you git seeh a pesky notion into your head, anyway? What makes you think you could sell goods?"

"Other people sell goods. Why shouldn't I?" retorted Steve.

"Because you don't know nothin' about it!" asserted his uncle testily. "What do you know about business?"

"Other people go into business and make good—why shouldn't I?" persisted Steve.

"How do you know you kin do what other people do?" cried his uncle in disgust.

"I don't know—I just *think* so, and I am going to try," replied Steve grimly.

And so the matter was decided. Two days later Steve took the train for Chicago. He had never been in Chicago; nor had he ever sold any goods; nor did he have any idea what particular line of goods he was to sell. He had no acquaintances or friends in Chicago; nor did he have any letter of introduction. His total worldly assets consisted of good health, common sense, courage, and ninety-five dollars in cash. He was twenty-one years of age. He had been brought up in the country by an uncle—a farmer; his parents were both dead. His education consisted of an elementary course in a country school. His only employment had been work upon his uncle's farm. His habits were wholesome; he had a vigorous physique, and the expression in his gray eyes was both confident and kindly. So much for the personality of Steve.

Now, a young man who is leaving home and going out into a world of strangers might be excused for feeling a bit apprehensive about his prospects; and as a matter of fact, Steve was in a somewhat uncomfortable state of mind, but not because of any of the facts stated above. The disturbing factor in his thoughts was a girl—Miss June Morgan, the daughter of a neighbor. June and Steve had been playmates and friends from childhood. They had attended the same district school and had been in the same classes. As they grew older, he often acted as her escort upon sleigh-rides and to singing-schools and donation parties.

She had plenty of other admirers, for June had personality. She enjoyed life; she was blessed with good health and beauty and a certain joyousness of spirit that made friends and admirers. The other young men were by no means insensible to her charms, especially young John Southworth, a son of the leading

farmer in the township; but for the present Steve Deering stood highest in her favor.

STEVE had never spoken to June about marriage, but he had intended to do so some day, and upon the evening before his departure for Chicago, he called upon her with that thought in mind. He outlined his plan of employment to her, and she approved it because she believed in him.

"When I git to make thirty-five dollars a week, June," said he, "I would like to come back here and get married and then go and live in Chicago."

June nodded.

"I will earn more than that after a while," asserted he, "but two people could start a home on thirty-five a week—don't you think so?"

"I think so," she agreed and thus had June and Steve become engaged, if indeed it could be called an engagement.

The next day, as Steve sat in the railway coach speeding away from the home town, he wondered if it had been fair for him to ask a lively, attractive girl like June to tie herself up to him when he was about to leave for such an indefinite period—and here he was without even a job! What right did he have to speak about getting married? It made him uneasy.

It was an all-day ride to Chicago. In the afternoon the train filled up with new passengers. A young man shared the seat with Steve, and they struck up a friendly conversation.

"Going to Chicago?" inquired his companion.

"Yes."

"Live there?"

"No, I live on a farm up in Buffalo County."

"Going down on a visit?"

"No, I am going to get a job in Chicago."

"What at?"

"Going to sell goods."

"What line?"

"I don't know yet."

"Holy smoke! Are you going to Chicago without knowing what you are going to work at?" asked the other.

"Sure!"

"Well, you've got your nerve. I had a chance to get a job in Chicago once. My cousin got me a chance, but I didn't take it. Ever been in Chicago?"

"No."

His companion gave a low whistle.

"What kind of a job was you offered in Chicago?" asked Steve.

"An office job. My cousin is assistant bookkeeper with the Interstate Dairy Company. He gets seventy-five dollars a month. They offered me fifty dollars to start in. My cousin says that some day he is going to try and get into the selling department. Some of their traveling salesmen make three or four thousand dollars a year."

"Do they manufacture their own goods?" asked Steve.

"Sure. They own about twenty-five big factories and creameries. They make a big line of fancy package cheese and different brands of fancy print butter."

"Must be a pretty good line," suggested Steve.

"My cousin says it is the best line in the country. They do a big business."

"Why didn't you take the job?" asked Steve.

"Oh, I don't care about working in the office of one of them big companies. The clerks have to work like the devil and don't have much chance for promotion. I like a smaller business in a smaller town like Michigan City. But how are you going to get a job selling goods? Got any pull with anybody?"

"No, but other people get jobs selling goods. Why shouldn't I?"

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed his companion, as he noted the uncouth appearance of Steve. "And you never even been in Chicago? You've got your work cut out. That's all I got to say."

ARRIVED in Chicago, Steve went to a small hotel near the Dearborn Street Station and paid one dollar for his room. That evening he consulted the telephone-book and secured the address of the Interstate Dairy Company; and promptly at nine o'clock the following morning he appeared at their offices. He told the office boy that he wished to see the man at the head of the sales-department.

"Have you got an appointment?" asked the office boy.

"No. Tell him that Mr. Deering, from up in Michigan, wants to see him."

"Does he know you?" asked the boy.

"No. Tell him I'm from the country. I want to see him about butter and cheese." It was apparent enough that

Steve was from the country. However, one can never tell just how important such a call might be. The boy went out and presently returned and ushered Steve into the office of James Hargreaves, assistant sales-manager of the Company. Hargreaves was opening the morning mail.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he inquired briskly after a scrutinizing glance at his visitor.

"I want to get a job selling goods," replied Steve.

Hargreaves smiled. "Ever have any experience?" he asked.

"No. I was brought up on a farm."

Hargreaves surveyed Steve quizzically. "What makes you think that you can sell goods?" he inquired.

"Because I want to—I guess," responded Steve.

"Sorry, but we haven't any opening just now." And Hargreaves turned to his letters, signifying that the interview was closed. But Steve did not understand that the interview was closed. He waited a few moments, and as Hargreaves gave no indication of reopening the conversation, Steve reopened it himself.

"Are you selling all the goods in Chicago that you want to?" he asked.

"All that we want to?" echoed Hargreaves. "I should say not."

"Then why not hire a man who is willing to take all the chances himself? All I ask on the start is enough wages to pay my board—about eight dollars a week. I can sell the goods, all right."

"How do you know?" You never tried."

"But other men sell goods—why shouldn't I?" persisted Steve.

THERE was something about Steve's quiet confidence and persistence that impressed Hargreaves.

"Take a seat, Mr. Deering," he said. "I will tell you something about our sales-organization. We have three classes of salesmen. One class is what we call our wagon-men. They sell to the small stores and delicatessens. They deliver when they sell. Then our next higher class of salesmen we call our automobile-men. We have ten automobiles, each in charge of a salesman. They also carry their goods, mostly fancy package goods. These automobile-men are more in the nature of specialty salesmen than the wagon-men. Then our third and highest class of salesmen are sample-case men. We cover the whole United States with our sample-case men. Can you operate a machine?"

"Yes, a little. I can run a Ford."

"These machines of ours are Fords. Now, then, here is what I am coming at: we have an automobile-route over on the West Side that has always lost money for us. We have put some pretty fair men on that route, and they all fell down. Nobody is covering that route now. We had about made up our minds to drop it. Now, the chances on that route would be mighty poor. I don't wish to recommend it at all, but if you would like to tackle it at a salary of ten dollars a week, you may do so."

"Those other automobile-men sell goods—why shouldn't I?" responded Steve.

"That is for you to say," rejoined Hargreaves.

"All right, I'll take it," said Steve.

"Very well, I'll introduce you to Tom McIntyre, our superintendent of the wagon- and automobile-men. Tom will train you and start you off."

Hargreaves rang a bell.

"Tell McIntyre to come in here a minute," said he to the boy. Presently McIntyre entered the office and was introduced to Steve.

"Mr. Deering is going to take Route Nine," said Hargreaves. "He knows nothing about our line and has never sold goods. I wish you would train him for two or three days and start him off."

McIntyre shook hands cordially with Steve and told him to report at seven-thirty in the morning. McIntyre waited a moment after Steve took his departure.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Hargreaves, with a grin.

"Fresh from the country?" queried Tom.

"Yes—was never in Chicago before."

"Right off the farm?" asked Tom.

"That's it," admitted Hargreaves.

"Well, I call it murder," asserted McIntyre, "to steer a country guy up against a proposition like Route Nine. For the love of Mike—"

"He is steering himself," interrupted Hargreaves. "I told him all about that route, and he wants it."

"Then it's a case of suicide," said McIntyre. "Well, the boy will sure get some experience off it, anyway. I'll do what I can for him."

STEVE appeared promptly the following morning, and McIntyre took him in charge. At the end of three days Tom

reported to Hargreaves that he had done all he could in the way of preparation.

"How is it going?" asked Hargreaves.

"He is a bright fellow, and you can't help liking him," replied Tom. "He knows how to run a Ford, and he sure is a hustler; but Gad he's fresh! Why, that guy hasn't any doubt that he is going to bowl 'em over like a row of bricks. He seems so cocksure that he can do what anybody else can and then some."

"Well, that's better than to be afraid," said Hargreaves.

"Sure, and he'll get his soon enough, after he strikes Route Nine."

"He may make a dent in it," responded Hargreaves. "Now, then, some one ought to ride the route with Deering for a day or two; could you get away?"

"I might for one day."

"All right, go ahead. Let's give him the best send-off we can."

Two days later McIntyre again reported to Hargreaves.

"Well, how does it start off?" inquired Hargreaves.

"Say, that guy has got me guessing," responded Tom. "I started out with him, and I did all the selling at first, and I put over everything I had, and of course, got some results. Well, just before noon I thought I would let him try his hand, so I picked out Morris Levy's delicatessen store. Levy is a hard nut, but not any harder than the average in that route.

"Well, Deering goes in and introduces himself. Levy says he doesn't need anything. Deering tells him he ought to buy from us because we manufacture the goods. Levy says he doesn't want anything now. Then Deering goes out to the machine and brings in a tub of butter and takes the cover off. Then Levy gets kind of excited. 'What you doing that for,' he said, 'when I shouldn't want anything? Why do you show me butter? Don't I know butter?' 'Sure,' says Deering, 'and that's why I want to show it to you. Just smell of that, Mr. Levy.' 'Why should I go to work and smell of something I don't want?' says Levy, kind of hot. 'Shouldn't it be plain enough, Mr. Deering, when I says I don't want no butter?' 'Sure,' says Deering, 'but how can a man get that sweet, nutty smell and not want the butter? We make that in one of our best creameries, and our price is right; and say, Mr. Levy, somebody is going to supply you with butter—why not I?'

"Well, sir,—I don't know,—there was something so cocksure about the way Deering put it that Levy asks him the price; and Deering tells him, and Levy says: 'Well, so long as you got it in here, I'll take it.' And then Deering gets him to take a couple of boxes of cream cheese too. What do you know about that?"

"Starts off pretty well," laughed Hargreaves. "It would seem as if the way to get things in this world is just go and take them—how about that, Mac?"

"Yes, sometimes," admitted Tom as he scratched his nose reflectively, "but some fellows would get their pants kicked off."

"Let me have a report on his work every week," said Hargreaves, "and also give me at the same time a comparative statement of what the last two men did on that route."

AT the end of the week McIntyre brought in the first report.

"Well," commented Hargreaves as he glanced it over, "the boy is making a better showing than the other men did."

"He is that," assented Tom, "and believe me, he is earning all the business he gets. He checks out every morning half an hour ahead of the other boys, and checks in at night about an hour later. He's a bear-cat for work."

"How is his nerve?" asked Hargreaves. "Are they getting his goat?"

"Nerve!" echoed Tom. "*Nerve* is his middle name. He starts out every morning cocksure that he is going to unload all the goods he has in his machine, and by heck, he usually does!"

"So you think he will make good on that route?"

"My money is up on him," responded Tom.

A philosopher once made the observation that the greatest happiness in life is to be found in the process of finding what one can really do and doing it. And perhaps the surest indication that one has found his work is the fact that he enjoys it. Be that as it may, Steve Deering enjoyed his work. It was a laborious job. His boarding-place was about three miles from business headquarters. It was necessary for him to get up at six in the morning, but his country habits of early rising made this easy. He reported for work every morning at seven-thirty, with his machine outside ready for loading. Then came the task of getting the right

quality of goods. There is a difference in goods, but they must all be sold. Steve found that the first man on hand in the morning had the best chance at the goods.

"Hold on there, Deering," the foreman would object. "Don't gobble up all the best cuts of that Swiss!"

"Somebody is going to have this—why not I?" Steve would ask in bland surprise.

"Oh, well, let him have it," the foreman would concede. "God knows he needs it on Route Nine."

Steve would start for his route with much the same eagerness that a crack baseball pitcher walks out into the box. And so it was that the wrangling and bickering and vituperation and backing and filling incident to selling dairy-products to the small delicatessen trade of Chicago became to him a matter of fascination and keen enjoyment.

HOWEVER, it must not be supposed that Steve met with instant and continuous success or that he became a star salesman from the outset.

"Things are so constituted in this world," said the philosopher whom we quoted above, "that any task worth doing is going to take life out of us. Success must be paid for out of our blood and bones and nerves."

Steve was no exception to this rule. At the end of three months the report handed in by McIntyre showed that Deering stood next to the top among the ten automobile-men.

"When Deering comes down to-morrow morning, tell him to come to my office," said Hargreaves after inspecting the report.

When Steve appeared next morning, Hargreaves motioned him to a seat.

"Well, how is it going?" inquired Hargreaves.

"Fine!" responded Steve. "Say, Mr. Hargreaves, how about a sample-case?"

"I thought you were going to say how about salary," laughed Hargreaves.

"All right—salary and sample-case both," agreed Steve with a smile.

"How much do you think you ought to be getting?" asked Hargreaves.

"Twenty dollars a week?" suggested Steve with a rising inflection.

"Very well, we will make it twenty a week," agreed Hargreaves.

"Thank you," responded Steve heartily. "And how about the sample-case?"

"That will come along. Don't be in a hurry. Go ahead with the automobile, but eventually we want you on the sample-case force—you may be sure of that."

IT was only two months later when Hargreaves again sent for Steve.

"Speaking about a sample-case," began Hargreaves, "—by the way, Deering, excuse me for being personal, but I believe you would present a fine appearance if you would give a little attention to your clothes. Merchants are liable to judge a company by the appearance of its salesmen. Now, if you should get a derby hat and a pair of dark tan shoes and a nice sack suit, believe me, you would be a nifty-looking salesman."

"Yes, but Mr. Hargreaves, I am waiting to get that sample-case before I dress up," protested Steve. "A man can't take care of a machine and pack butter and cheese on and off and keep his clothes looking—"

"Quite right," agreed Hargreaves, with a wave of the hand. "And now about that sample-case. We have a territory open—a hard one, too, but it seems to be your luck, Deering, to tackle the hard ones. Part of the territory is here in Chicago and part of it near Chicago. We never got good results on it. Now, if you wish to try it, you may. It's a tough proposition."

"What makes it tough?" asked Steve.

"Too much competition, and the towns are so near to Chicago that the merchants run in and hawk their orders around to Tom, Dick and Harry. They don't stick to any one house the way they ought to."

"But they buy from somebody—why not from us?" said Steve.

"They certainly should," laughed Hargreaves. "Would you like to take on that job?"

"Sure."

"Very well, we will start you at twenty-five per week. You can increase it. Come in to-morrow, and we will go over the matter."

WHEN Steve presented himself the following morning, he was dressed in an up-to-date suit, a derby hat and tan shoes.

"That's the stuff," commented Hargreaves as he surveyed Steve approvingly. "I see you mean to put up a front."

"Sure," agreed Steve.

"Now, then, before we map out your territory," said Hargreaves, "I have a matter that I'd like you to handle. Barnheimer Brothers' department-store up here have a big grocery-department and a fine delicatessen business. The head buyer of the department, Mr. Bartow, is a hard man to see; he requires a salesman to make an appointment. The man in charge of the delicatessen, Mr. Mueller, usually gives the orders for dairy products. He is friendly to us and handles our goods, but he is equally friendly with two or three of our competitors and also handles their goods—especially the Coldbrook brands. We ought to get most of that business, but we can't do it unless we get Bartow interested. What he says goes. But even if you should get to see him, he would probably turn you over to Mueller, and Mueller would say yes, yes to everything you tell him, and then give you a small order, and you would be right where you started. There is the situation. Handle it in your own way."

"May I have one of these new booklets?" asked Steve.

"Certainly—take as many as you like."

Steve put one of the new booklets into his sample-case and started for Barnheimer Brothers' store.

During this conversation the door between Hargreaves' room and that of his superior, Mr. Morrison, the sales-manager of the company, was ajar, and after Steve's departure Morrison came in.

"What's the big idea?" grinned Morrison. "Do you think your man Deering can bowl Bartow over? Isn't that a pretty stiff game for a green salesman to tackle?"

"It is so," agreed Hargreaves, "but Deering wont look at it that way, and he has a faculty of getting over difficulties. I am curious to see whether he can make a dent in it."

TWO hours later Steve returned to the office.

"Well?" queried Hargreaves, as he motioned Deering to a seat.

"I got a proposition from Bartow," began Steve. "He said that if—"

"How did you get in to see him? Tell me just what occurred," broke in Hargreaves.

"Why, the office boy was busy," grinned Steve, "so I went right in to Bartow's room. He seemed surprised and asked me how I got in, and I said that I walked in, and that seemed to amuse him, and he asked me what was on my mind, and I told him it was a special matter, and I took out that booklet and told him to look at the finest line of fancy package cheese that was ever collected under one roof.

"He was quite attracted by the booklet, but I told him the booklet wasn't in it with the cheese. 'Oh, well,' he says, 'I leave all that buying to Mueller. You go and see Mueller. We carry your line, don't we?' 'Yes,' says I, 'but I want to see you about something that Mueller can't handle.' 'What is it?' he says, and then I told him that he ought to have a demonstration going in such a big store as that; so I told him that if he would display our whole line and let us put in a demonstration there, we could increase his package-cheese trade fifty per cent. and I turned to that page of the booklet where we give a bird's-eye view of the whole line.

" 'Some cheese!' he says. 'But a demonstration is no good unless you have an expert demonstrator on the job.' 'That is just what we can furnish you,' I says. 'What do you offer on prices?' he says. 'We offer rock-bottom prices,' I says. '—which is just what you are getting now. We guarantee the prices to be the lowest that anybody gets. Your costs are all right, but you don't display any one line enough to do it justice.' 'Why should I give preference to your line?' he says. 'Because it's the best one,' I says; 'and besides, you ought to display the whole line of some manufacturer—why not ours?'

"Then he sat back in the chair and rubbed his nose a minute. 'Tell you what I'll do,' says he; 'if you will furnish a crack demonstrator and pay us eight dollars a month for floor-space, I'll tell Mueller to give you the upper end of that delicatessen-counter and play up your whole line.' So I told him I would notify him within an hour."

"Good work!" cried Hargreaves enthusiastically. "We can put Miss Jennison in there. Go up and close it. We will start the demonstration next Monday."

SOME one has said that a man makes good on a big job in precisely the same way that he makes good on a small one, and an experienced salesman once declared that it is easier to sell to the big trade than to the small trade. Be that as it may, the fact remains that two

months after Steve started upon his sample-case route he was making more rapid progress than at a corresponding period upon the automobile-route; but unfortunately for his plans, he had only gotten fairly under way when Congress declared that a state of war existed between the United States and Germany. A few days later Steve reported at Hargreaves' office.

"About two months ago I joined the National Guard," said he.

"Why did you do that?" asked Hargreaves.

"Somebody has to join the National Guard—why shouldn't I?" asked Steve in surprise.

"And the Government has called you into the Federal service?" said Hargreaves.

"Sure. We must report at once."

"Too bad—just as you got going! No, by George, it isn't too bad, either! It is just as it should be! Uncle Sam needs just such soldiers as you will be, Deering. Go to it!"

"How about my job when I get back?" asked Steve.

"The sample-case will be waiting for you," assured Hargreaves. "And say, write to me once in a while, Steve, and I will answer and give you all the news."

And so Steve laid down his sample-case and put on the khaki uniform. During all these strenuous months since leaving home, Steve had been too busy to go back for a visit, and now he had no time to do so. Some men are facile correspondents, but Steve was not. He had never cultivated the art of self-expression. It was a hard task for him to write a letter. He had kept up a sort of correspondence with June Morgan, but his letters were infrequent and brief and exceedingly matter of fact. This was not because of any lack of depth in his affection for June—it was simply that he did not know how to express it.

ANYONE passing the Morgan homestead up in Buffalo County, Michigan, would note at a glance that the owners of this place were thrifty. The house was painted white and the barns red. The fences were neat and orderly. The apple trees in the orchard stood in straight rows, as did also the growing corn in the field—in fact, everything upon the farm was upright, orderly, neat and in good repair. The dynamic source of all this thrift, as everyone in the neighborhood new, was Ma Morgan—as she was generally called. Some farmers acquire a competence through inheritance, others through enterprise and business ability, but Pa Morgan had acquired his through hard work and a thrifty wife. It was Ma who managed things on that farm, and the management was efficient, in consequence of which the Morgans were worth about twenty thousand dollars—a comfortable competence from a rural standpoint.

There was but one farmer in the township who was better fixed financially, and that was William Southworth. Southworth was not only thrifty, but he was thrifty plus. He was a business farmer. He possessed an almost uncanny judgment in the matter of future crops and markets; he often took long chances, and usually came out on top. Had he been a city man, he would have been a successful operator upon the board of trade, but being a farmer, he was a successful operator upon the farm. It was common knowledge that William Southworth was worth not less that eighty thousand dollars.

Now, the only child in the Morgan family was June—sole heiress of the Morgan farm and the acknowledged neighborhood beauty. Similarly the only child in the Southworth family was their son John, an upstanding, ambitious young farmer who at the age of twenty-two already gave evidence of having inherited his father's business ability. He dressed well and owned an expensive car—and he was deeply in love with June Morgan. Now, if it be true that marriages are made in heaven, it would clearly seem as if Heaven had decreed a match between these two.

TO the thrifty soul of Ma Morgan there was nothing else to it; in fact, she had firmly resolved that this thing should come to pass, and when Ma Morgan determined a thing, it was quite likely to happen. She had not been insensible to the boy-and-girl attachment of June and Steve Deering, but that would easily disappear when June grew old enough to understand. When, however, their friendship continued into their maturer years, Ma became uneasy. It was therefore with considerable relief that she heard about Steve's decision to go to Chicago and obtain employment, although ostensibly she disapproved of the project.

"Land sakes, what is Steve Deering goin'

to Chicago for?" she said to June. "They say he don't even know who he is goin' to work for."

After Steve's departure, Ma Morgan was too diplomatic to wage an open propaganda against him, but she lost no opportunity to comment from time to time upon the degeneracy of morals in the big cities.

"Land sakes, is it any wonder that the young men in the cities go wrong?" she exclaimed, pointing to an illustration in the Chicago Sunday newspaper of a ballet dance in one of the theaters. "When girls come out on the stage and kick around and show themselves like that!"

"But all the young men don't go to those performances," protested June.

"I guess most of 'em do, when it is held right up in front of their faces in the papers and on the billboards like that." And so by constant repetition Ma succeeded in creating the impression that a young man in a modern city was so beset with moral snares, especially in the shape of fast women, as to make virtue and fidelity most improbable if not quite impossible.

Meanwhile, John Southworth pressed his attentions upon June with a great deal of ardor. She really did enjoy his companionship and was fond of riding in his fine car, and she also appreciated the compliment of his devotion. She could not avoid a sense of satisfaction in possessing power over such a fine young man; in fact, things gradually began to move along in a manner quite satisfactory to Ma. However, in justice to June, it should be said that none of these things would have influenced her devotion to Steve Deering, were it not that Steve himself gave her the impression of being somewhat indifferent. He had never given her an engagement ring. He seldom in his letters referred to an engagement between them—never directly. In fact, June sometimes wondered whether Steve really did consider that they were engaged. She recalled their conversation upon that evening before he went away. He had not asked the question directly; he had given her no opportunity to say yes. He had taken it all for granted. Perhaps he had a right to do that, but June gradually began to feel resentful. What right had Steve to hold her so cheaply? She contrasted this with the ardent devotion of John Southworth. The climax was reached when Steve started for France without coming home to see her and say good-by. To be sure, he wrote and told her that he could not come, but why could he not come? Did he really care to come? And after that, his letters became still more infrequent and more brief.

Now, let it be admitted that Steve was at fault. He might—he could—have cultivated the ability to go into details in his letters. He could have thought and studied more into the matter of courting a splendid girl like June. He had the native ability, but he had given all his best thought and energies to selling goods, and now he gave them to military training. And he took it for granted that June would understand.

John Southworth was no slacker. He had offered himself for enlistment at the outbreak of the war, but was rejected because of an incidental physical defect. He endeavored to get into special Government service, but his offer was declined because of the fact that he was engaged in agriculture, which was just then considered more essential. He availed himself of every opportunity to perform helpful civilian service.

It was not because of any lack of patriotism that John had a clear field with June Morgan; it was his good fortune, and he made the most of it.

THREE months after the battle of Château-Thierry, Steve Deering walked into the office of the Interstate Dairy Company and into the room of James Hargreaves.

"Well, look who's here!" cried Hargreaves as he gave Steve a cordial handshake. "When did you blow across?"

"Just got in," smiled Steve.

"How did that happen?"

"Oh, they got a piece of me," replied Steve, holding up his left hand. Two fingers were missing.

Hargreaves gave a low whistle. "Where did you drop them?" he asked.

"Château-Thierry," responded Steve, "but that wasn't the worst. Here is where they almost got me." And unbuttoning his collar, he displayed an angry red scar extending across the entire side of the base of his neck. "Just a half-inch farther in, and good night!" said he with a grin.

"Gad!" exclaimed Hargreaves as he examined the scar. "That was a close call, old man!"

"Sure, but the other fellow got a closer

call than that—he got it plumb in the neck."

"Did you see him?"

"See him! We were only about ten feet apart, and we both had automatics. I shot a little straighter—that's all."

"Bully for you, old boy!" cried Hargreaves.

"Well, one of us had to put it across—why not I?" explained Steve.

"That's it—that's it—why not?" laughed Hargreaves.

"How about the sample-case?" asked Steve.

"It is waiting for you, and we have a fine territory open."

"Lead me to it," cried Steve. "But say, Mr. Hargreaves, I would like a week or ten days to go up to my old home in Michigan. There's a party I want to see up there."

"All right. We will have things ready for you when you get back. Hello, got a Croix de Guerre and sergeant's stripes?" —noticing for the first time the decoration upon Steve's uniform.

"Sure! After I got out of the hospital, I tried to get back into my company, but they stuck this onto me and told me to beat it for home."

THE following day, while the train was approaching his home town, there began to come over Steve a strange sense of doubt and apprehension regarding June. He had all along felt somewhat uneasy over the fact that he had not received any letters from her for about six months, and his own letters had been all too few, although he had written to her one eight-page letter while convalescing in the hospital. He had spent the best part of two days writing this letter, as if to atone for previous neglect. He felt that June would understand why he had not written more often, but at times it had made him a bit uneasy. Now, however, as the train was pulling into the home station, a sudden feeling of panic came over him. What if June had misunderstood him! What if she—

He stepped off the train and headed straight for the Morgan farm, which was only one mile out from the village. As he approached the home and noted the old familiar landmarks, the oak trees upon the lawn, the broad porch with the flower-beds in front, the orchard, the well,—each of which brought keenly to his mind some intimate association with June,—his heart was beating like a trip-hammer. Now, if only June would meet him at the door and be the same June—his June!

But June did not meet him at the door. It was Ma Morgan.

"Land sakes, if this aint Steve Deering!" she cried in astonishment. "When did you git back?"

"Just got back," smiled Steve. "Where is June?"

"June has gone riding with John Southworth," replied she. "Well, you haven't changed very much, Steve. Was you in some of the battles over there?"

"Yes, a few. How long before June will get back?"

"Land sakes, when she and John go off together, they are liable to be gone all day! Maybe it will be dark before they come. Tell me about the war, Steve."

"Oh, the war was pretty rough, most of it. What time was it when June left?"

"About one o'clock. Did you git shot any in the war?"

"Yes, they hit me a few times. How is June—is she well?"

"June is well and happy," said she. "You know, Steve, we will probably have a weddin' in the family pretty soon. I guess John Southworth and June have got it all arranged."

STEVE'S back stiffened and his lips compressed, but he made no response. They were sitting together upon the porch, and just then an automobile came dashing up the road and halted in front of the gate. It contained June and young Southworth. They were engaged in an animated conversation, interspersed with rippling laughter on the part of June. They were evidently in high spirits, and as John sprang out from the machine and assisted June to alight, there was that in their mutual attitude which suggested an intimate understanding. They were so engrossed in each other that neither of them had noticed the presence of Steve upon the porch. He arose and walked down toward the gate. June sighted him first.

"Why, it is Steve—Steve Deering!" she cried falteringly.

"Hello, June," said Steve as he offered her his hand, which she took with evident embarrassment.

John and Steve shook hands somewhat stiffly.

"Why, when did you get home, Steve?" she asked.

"Just got here," replied Steve.

"Wont you come in, John?" she asked, turning to Southworth.

"No, I must get home. I will see you Sunday," rejoined John, giving her a significant glance. "Come out and take dinner with us while you are here, Steve."

"I'll try," answered Steve, but they both knew that he would do nothing of the kind. Such rivalry as this would not admit of any empty social amenities. As they stood there confronting each other, there could be no question of the fact that Steve was the dominant figure. The past two years had smoothed down the rough corners of his personality. His athletic form stood erect and four-square in his soldier uniform, and he was undeniably handsome. John was well dressed, but somehow in comparison with Steve he seemed just a little verdant. Upon Steve's face there was a confident smile that embarrassed John somewhat and added to the confusion of June. Temporarily, however, this reacted against Steve, for it produced in June a feeling of resentment.

"Steve had his opportunity and threw it away," thought she bitterly. "He need not think he can come back here and dominate me."

They went in and sat for a time upon the porch, while Steve related some of his experiences in France; but his heart was not in his narrative. As for June, she showed only a perfunctory interest.

"Let us walk down the lane, June," said he suddenly.

June nodded and went inside for a wrap.

AS they took their way slowly along the lane, Steve called attention to certain spots that revived old associations. "Do you remember that time when the bull chased you up into this tree?" laughed he. "How you ever managed to climb, I can't understand."

"Yes, and you got a pitchfork and drove him away. Ugh! I was frightened."

"That was only a game of tag compared to some of the things I've been in lately," responded Steve.

Just then June for the first time noticed the loss of the two fingers upon Steve's left hand.

"Why, Steve! Your hand!" she cried.

"Yes, they shot off a couple of fingers," admitted he. "But here is what came near being my finish." And Steve threw back his collar and disclosed the scar upon his neck.

June turned pale.

"And you never even let me know!" she cried reproachfully.

"Didn't let you know?" he echoed in surprise. "Why, June, I wrote you the longest letter from the hospital I ever wrote. I told you all about it, and lots of other things, too. It took me two days to write that letter, June."

"I never received it," said she sadly. "I have had only a few letters from you, Steve, and they were short ones."

"But June, you know I was never much on writing. You know—"

"Tell me this, Steve," interrupted she, grasping his arm impulsively. "Did you consider that you and I were engaged?"

"Why, sure!" he exclaimed in amazement. "Didn't you think so, June?"

"Then why didn't you act as if you were!" she cried resentfully. "You never gave me an engagement ring. You hardly ever wrote as if you cared—"

"June," interrupted Steve as he suddenly halted and faced her, "I never cared for any other girl but you, and I never shall. I care more for you than for anything else on earth. The only reason I have worked so hard for success is because I wanted to bring it back to you. But I guess I made a fool of myself. I sort of took you for granted, just as you and I always did when we were boy and girl together in school. I should have written more, I know, and I should have been a better lover, but I couldn't have loved you any more, June—nobody could love you the way I do. You know that—you must know that; don't you, June?"

JUNE made no reply. "Let's go back to the house," said she faintly. They returned in silence. Steve did not go in.

"I shall come over and see you again to-morrow," said he as he left her.

"Well, I suppose Steve Deering will go back and work in Chicago," remarked Ma Morgan after June had come in and removed her wrap.

"I presume so—although he said nothing to me about it," replied June. "What a handsome man he has grown to be! Don't you think so, Ma?"

"He is good-lookin' enough," admitted she. "What a pity he don't settle down out here in the country!"

"Ma, I believe that Steve is going to succeed!" protested June, with so much warmth that her mother gazed at her in surprise.

"Tell me this, June," said her mother quietly: "have you and John Southworth come to an agreement?"

"Not exactly," responded June somewhat reluctantly. "He wished me to give him an answer to-day, but somehow I couldn't—I put it off until Sunday."

"But he expects you to accept him," persisted Ma. "He has a right to expect that, June."

"Perhaps so," responded June listlessly.

Ma Morgan came over and laid her hand upon her daughter's shoulder. "June," said she, "you wouldn't break that boy's heart, would you? And you wouldn't go off to Chicago and leave Pa and me all alone in our old age—you wouldn't do that, would you, June?"

There was a note of pathos and entreaty in her mother's voice that touched June deeply. She made no reply but turned and ran up to her room; and locking the door, she flung herself upon the bed and burst into a passion of tears.

Meanwhile Steve Deering hurried back to the village and sent the following telegram to Chicago:

Interstate Dairy Co.,
Attention James Hargreaves.
What salary will you pay me on new territory wire.
STEVE DEERING.

No reply came that night, but early next morning Steve received this message:

Will pay forty-five per week and expenses. You can increase it fine territory wire acceptance.
INTERSTATE DAIRY CO.,
Hargreaves.

Steve sent the following response:

Accepted.
STEVE DEERING.

Then placing the telegram from Chicago in his pocket, he struck out for the Morgan farm.

JUNE was in the garden. Steve spied her there, and vaulting the fence, he joined her. Her face was slightly pale. Her eyes gave evidence of a restless night.

"When I left you two years ago," said Steve suddenly, "I said that when my income should reach thirty-five dollars a week I would come back after you. Do you remember that, June?"

"Yes."

Steve handed her the telegram without comment. As June read it, her face lighted with pleasure. "I told Ma last night that you were going to succeed," said she quietly.

"Sure," asserted he. "And now, June, let us get married right away, and you go back to Chicago with me."

"You seem to be sure that I am going to marry you, Steve," said she with a quizzical smile.

"Somebody is going to be your husband—why not I?" laughed he.

"Let us find Ma, and you tell her," said June quietly.

When Steve and June came in together from the garden, the expression of radiant happiness upon her face, and the look of quiet confidence upon his made any other announcement quite unnecessary. At first glance Ma Morgan stiffened, but realizing the futility of any further resistance, she relaxed.

"When I left home," began Steve, "I intended to come back after June when my salary got to be thirty-five dollars a week."

"Yes, and how long will that be?" responded Ma Morgan bitterly. "Maybe ten years, and maybe never!"

"Not so bad as that," smiled Steve as he took the telegram from his pocket and handed it to Ma.

As she read it, a look of amazement came over her face.

"Do you mean to say, Steve Deering, that them people will pay you forty-five dollars *a week?*"

"Sure—that's what they say there."

"Land sakes! Why, you and June could save—"

"Yes, we will save part of it, all right And listen, Ma: within two years I am going to pull down seventy-five dollars a week."

"Seventy-five dollars a week?" she gasped incredulously.

"Sure! There are other salesmen that make seventy-five a week—why not I?"

From a Frontiersman's Diary

Jungle Justice

by

Edison Marshall

Sometimes the tent seems lonely at night.—From a Frontiersman's Diary

JUST where the long shoulder of Mt. McLaughlin slopes down to the high plateaus, a long chain of lakes makes a sort of giant's necklace of sapphires from Fish Lake down into Klamath. You can hunt all day without finding them on the map; yet they are notable in their way. Certain clans of the tribes of waterfowl make them a rest-camp on their southern migrations; and these feathered nomads always know exactly what they are about. Besides, a few bronzed old sportsmen, quiet-eyed and cool-nerved and with a perfect knowledge of what is worth while in the world, come from long distances to cast flies upon their waters. The lake-trout therein are large and fight furiously until the landing-net slides beneath them.

It is impossible to find the lakes on the map; and they are not particularly easy to find in an automobile. One has to go to the great Northwest of the United States, a rather ample space that fills up all the country between California and Canada, and take the mountain road that curls up toward McLaughlin. It is best not to get off the road, for one might find himself anywhere from the bottom of a precipice to the other side of the Umpquaw divide, a rugged eternity wherein even the oldest mountaineers do not care to be lost. McLaughlin is notable too, although it isn't one of the greatest of Western mountains. It is snow-covered, however, and wonderfully symmetrical; and it is one of the great family of high peaks that keep a sort of outpost guard all along the Western coast. McLaughlin, which some people call Mt. Pitt, has charge of the post between Mt. Shasta, to the south, and the Three Sisters to the north—and all the Government property in view!

FISH LAKE is the first of the chain, and perhaps less interesting than the others. Then comes sleepy, creepy old Lake-of-the-Woods. Buck Lake is the third; the timber grows almost down to the water's edge at Buck Lake. And since Woof and his mother were born clumsy, it was quite impossible for them to go down and get a drink without disturbing everyone in the vicinity. Woof made more noise going through a half-mile of timber than little Brownbody made in his whole life.

But of course Brownbody was a cougar, whose very life depended on being able to slide through the forest like a puff from Long Tom's pipe. He had cushions on his feet, and more marvelous muscle-control than any physical-culture expert in the world. A single broken twig, a rustle of a leaf or a stir of a pebble would transform the feeding deer into flying brown meteors that no cougar could possibly catch. But noise didn't matter to Woof.

He rather liked it. The only game he sought was an occasional beetle under a log; and a beetle wont run from an avalanche. For Woof was simply a fuzzy, fat little black-bear cub, with no hunting-blood in his veins.

His lean mother led him down through the thick brush; and everyone on the lake had his head up to see them come. Life itself, in the forests, depends on always being alert. The forest creatures have no officers of the law, or no battleships on the sea or cannon in the forts to guard them. They have to depend on their own senses, every minute of every hour. The step in the brush might be Woof, or it might be the tramp of some human hunter, trying to go silently. So when finally the brush parted at the lake shore, the flock of geese that had been feeding at the water's edge were all poised for flight. But at once they settled back with little squawks of content. Not even the teal in the shallows were afraid of Woof.

THIS was the first time the cub had seen the place. He sat up, pointed his ears, and blinked with delight. He began to wonder if he could possibly catch the waddling geese on the lake-margin—unknowing that months were to pass before he would finally conclude that he couldn't. A trout, splashing from the water, suggested all sorts of pleasing possibilities; and a horned buck, drinking a short distance down the shore, excited his bump of curiosity beyond restraint. Woof was born with more curiosity than he could ever hope to satisfy. But just then, before he was half done looking, his mother cuffed him from behind and sent him on his head in the sands. She meant by this that he was to get his drink and go.

But Woof delayed just as long as he could. He drank very slowly, and pretended to have difficulty in finding clean, unroiled water. He fell down two or three times, and chased a gopher-snake into the thickets, and bumped his nose on a sharp rock, and tumbled headfirst into the water and had many other adventures in even less time than a man-cub could have done the same. And then—at the edge of the little inlet in the sand—he ran smack into the greatest find of his young life.

It was a small trout, newly killed, lying in the sand. His mother was too far ahead to see it. Nine chances out of ten there would have been a strangeness and a smell about it that would have caused her to investigate it very carefully before she laid on paws. Woof's mother, awkward and fumbling though she was, knew considerable of the ways of men. But little Woof was wholly without suspicion. He gave a cry of pleasure, and stretched out a paw.

There was a clang of metal, a terrifying leap and stir in the sand; and then his pleasure-sound changed to a wail of fright and pain. The water-fowl leaped in the air, poised and dropped again. His mother whirled, faster than ever the forest people had seen her move before, and charged back with a roar of anger. The mother black-bear is as amiable and gentle a creature as ranges the forest; but she is not pleasant to meet in defense of her cub. It seemed to the watching forest-creatures that she covered the forty paces in the time that a teal takes to leap from the water.

But when she got back to her squealing cub, the only foe she could see was a steel something that the cub pulled about in the sand. The jaws of it were pinched tightly on the very tips of her son's toes. Woof had walked squarely into one of Long Tom's traps.

IT is likely that old Black-tail, standing knee-deep in the cool water, heard the sound first. He liked to stand that way. The August sun had parched the woods dry, and even the heavy buck-brush no longer afforded a cool retreat during the heat of the day. Black-tail's very life depended on hearing sounds quickly and surely—the tiniest prick of sound through a half-mile of forest. His ears were trained to listen for the fall of the cougar's feet on the forest leaves, and ears that can hear that, can hear the death-cry of an insect in the air.

He raised his antlered head and stood motionless. A hush fell over the lake. The long necks of the geese came up, and a mink slid softly into the water. Woof's mother paused for an instant beside her cub, then turned anxious eyes toward the thickets behind her.

The sound that reached them would have gone unnoticed by human ears. Some one was crossing to the lake through brush, some one who knew how to walk with silence. Only the dry foliage permitted them to hear at all. Black-tail knew perfectly that few indeed of his arch-enemies, the mountain men that had farms in the

little valleys, were able to walk so quietly. The sound grew louder; and Black-tail made the shore in a single leap. He did not pause on the bank. The brush seemed to leap to cover and close behind him.

The wild geese do not hear particularly well; but their eyes are among the keenest in the animal world. They caught a glimpse of a stealing figure in the thickets; and they sprang up with a rumble and crash of wings. The she-bear waited but an instant more. She called once to her cub, then loped back into the brush. But she had no intention of deserting her offspring for good. Such isn't the way of mothers. She would simply wait until this danger had passed. . . . . Then Long Tom, the trapper of the lake region, stepped on the shore.

BLACK-TAIL might have congratulated himself that he got out in time. Long Tom carried a rifle, and he had a way of glancing for an instant down its barrel that was simply death for anyone at the other end. A rifle is not the gun usually used for hunting waterfowl, but the geese had a right to feel self-congratulatory too. Long Tom had been known to do unexpected things with the little 30-30 caliber in the hollow of his arm.

The other mountaineers missed sometimes. Long Tom never did. They stumbled and broke twigs and fell over stumps when they went through the forest. Long Tom slipped through like a mid-afternoon wind. They had houses; Long Tom's lair was either a hasty lean-to, or a white-cornered thing that he stuck up on poles. They had white skins; Long Tom's was curiously dark.

The whole secret lay in the fact that Long Tom was an Indian. He was not the kind of Indian that welfare workers see on the reservations. The latter live in houses and wear gay clothes; and some of them have automobiles and bad habits. It was simply that when civilization was passed around, Long Tom missed his portion. He didn't even own a last name, but was known through a territory as big as the State of New Jersey simply as Long Tom, with accent on the Long. Though he no longer wore feathers and paint, though occasionally he took his furs down and traded them for supplies, he was just as much a wild Indian as he ever was, just as much a native of the forest as the little black cub in his pathway.

He came up close, and a curiously bright, flashing smile lingered for an instant on his dusky face. "Ugh!" he exclaimed.

Since the aborigines first bathed in the crimson snow on the top of Mt. McLaughlin at sunset and thereby became redskins, they have said "Ugh!" at anything that surprised them. Even tame Indians say it yet. No one knows exactly what it means—any more than anyone knows what a white-skin means when he says "Geewhillikins!" He stole one glance at the cub's paw, seeing that only the tips of its toes held it in the trap. "Ugh!" he said again.

"Woof!" replied the cub.

"So that is your name?" the Indian asked in the vernacular. "Woof!"

"Woof!" the cub barked again, as if reassuring him on this point. Then it crawled clear out to the end of its chain.

"Woof" comes as near the usual articulation of a black bear as the language can express. Of course he has other sounds too, whimpers and barks and whines and growls, but nine times out of ten he will say "Woof," and let it go at that. It means "What is that?" and "I'm hungry," and "Go away," and "I'm scared," and one hundred other things. The little cub said it several times more; and then—

THE word can be said in several tones of voice. The cub used a frightened tone; and because a cub is never so frightened but that he is somewhat curious as well, a rather questioning tone too. But just then Long Tom heard the same sound, only about one hundred times louder, just behind him. And this time it was neither afraid nor questioning.

"Woof!" It was simply an explosion of sound, a kind of cross between a roar and a bark. Long Tom did not have the unsteady nerves of white men, and he did not jump at all. He simply whirled, and the rifle leaped like a streak of light to his shoulder. No human eyes could have traced its motion. It was cocked and ready by the time his head was bent to see along the barrel. The thickets parted, and a black form lunged through. In a desperate effort to protect her cub, the she-bear charged full in his face.

Ordinarily a black bear is the most timid and good-natured creature that can be imagined. It would sooner charge a full wolf-pack in winter than a man. And under ordinary conditions Long Tom

would have rather wasted his shells on a porcupine than on a black bear. No one knew better than he what harmless, amiable creatures they were. But in one case, the she-bear obeyed a voice that was as real as life itself, as inexorable as the night falling when the day is done. It was the instinct to protect her offspring—that deep-seated impulse that alone has made possible the perpetuation of life. And in the other, it was simply a matter of self-preservation. There was simply no other choice.

The bear fell just at the edge of the brush—softly and silently and without pain. The man crept toward it, with ready weapon. But it did not stir again. Then he turned back to the cub, whining in the trap.

"Poor little one!" he said in his own tongue—a tongue more gentle than most people believe. "Poor little motherless! I have no furry coat to warm you, and no milk in my hard breasts. But I will do my best, smallest! And perhaps you will find me not so bad a father!"

For Long Tom had that sense of direct, elementary justice that has long been recognized as a trait among the Indians. He had slain Woof's mother; and by the laws that the glaciers engraved on the mountain-sides, Long Tom must needs watch over the cub until it was able to take care of itself.

THE task of being mother of little Woof was a delight almost from the first. He had been well weaned the previous month; and this simplified matters immensely. A wet-nurse would have been hard to find in the Lake region. Long Tom took him to his shelter, and that night they had a long talk together as the stars popped one by one out of the gray evening sky.

Long Tom did most of the talking; what he said is forever locked in the dark hearts of the great pines that lifted their heads over his rude hut; and these grave companions are never tale-bearers. He was a lonely man, and most of his race had long since departed to a hunting ground where there are no such things as titles of land, and hunting-licenses, and trespass-signs. The little cub licked his hand with a warm tongue, and cuddled in the hollow of his arm. And something seemed to change and grow warm deep down in this strong man's strong heart.

It is not often that an Indian smiles; but Long Tom smiled then. If indeed the forest folk were watching through the windows, as legend says they do, they must have wondered at it. It was a peculiar upward curve of the thin, firm lips, and a sudden light in the straight, dark eyes.

He talked in his own tongue—a tongue since bastardized and weakened. And the little cub had but one reply—a little "Woof" of contentment and peace.

Truly, Woof grew lonely before the night was done. The hard muscles under the blanket were not like the furry coat of his mother. He missed the warm tongue, the rough caresses. He was a little afraid, too, when the smells and the sounds of the mountain night stole in through the opening in the lean-to. But in the morning there were fried potatoes wet with canned milk, and a lump of wild honey, and a big, fat flap-jack fried solely for his use; and these things went a long way toward effacing the memory of his mother. After a digestive nap, he was quite ready to romp.

He followed the tall form around the line of traps; and Long Tom was even a better provider than his late mother. He had a pleasant way of upsetting rotten logs with one shove of his broad shoulders, and exposing whole armies of the most tempting beetles and slugs. Then he would stand back and grunt as little Woof would tumble all over himself trying to lick them all up with his red tongue. And just as evening came down, they encountered a wonderful thicket of the biggest, juiciest huckleberries that hungry bear ever spied before.

Inside of a week, Woof was firm in the belief that Long Tom was his rightful and legitimate parent. He had forgotten his real mother that lay so still beside the lake. The two would sit together before the lean-to in the evenings, and Long Tom's pipe would glow, and little Woof would grunt and whisper and beg for caresses, and play clumsy, romping games with his own shadow; and then they would go to sleep under the same coverlet.

And soon they needed a bigger blanket. Little Woof was well fed and happy, and even the summer flowers, that know they have to live a whole life of bud and leaf and blossom and seed between one winter's snow and another's, did not grow as fast as he. His joy in the fact was nothing compared to Long Tom's. By now the latter was convinced that he owned the

prize bear in the whole wide world; and he rejoiced in every added ounce of fur and muscle.

LIFE was good, after all. As the long fall drew to winter, and the various berries grew ripe and rich, and the fallen leaves began to shuffle beneath his clumsy feet, just to live and breathe became a delight. And when the night brought its age-old return of mystery—smells pungent and strange, and the little, hushed noises of the wilderness, he would simply tingle with rapture. He liked the long, hard walks with his master, the meals under the pines, the hours of romping and the caress of the hard hand. It was a curious fact that the days seemed to pass faster for Long Tom, too. It is not good for a man to live alone in the still hills, and little Woof was company of the rarest. The man was never quite sure what he was going to do next. He only knew that it would be something entirely unlooked-for and original.

Long Tom permitted him the fullest freedom. After the first week the hastily fabricated collar and leash were taken off for good. Long Tom, free as the eagles that now and then skimmed down from Eagle Ridge, knew something of the value of liberty. Woof was of a free people, even as he himself, and his eternal sense of justice prevented him from inflicting bonds on his pet. The cub was free to go at all times—yet he seemed to prefer to remain. And really he had all the joys of a completely wild bear with none of the disadvantages. There was nothing tame about the wild, nomadic life they led from rim to rim of the Lake region.

Woof began to be glad that he did not face the winter alone. Somehow, the sight of all the fallen leaves, and the dying flowers, and the feel of a strange heaviness in the air, began to make him afraid. Even the leaves looked strange and dark, and the grass got tawny, and the wind came up cold in the dawns. He began to be glad of the tall, strong body that lay beside him under the coverlet. By now the flight of the waterfowl had begun in earnest; and the air was choked with the sad cry of the wild geese. The velvet was all gone from the horns of the great buck deer, and they seemed to be filled with frenzy and madness; it was mating time among the black-tails. And one night the snow fell over the hills.

It vanished soon in the morning; but for all that, it marked the change in the seasons. Winter had come.

Soon after this Woof beheld the slow descent of all the forest people from the lake regions to the brown foothills below. Even the rodents and the poison-folk were crawling away where his groping paw could not find them. One night, when he wanted Long Tom to play with him, he saw that his master was busy tearing down the little shelter.

"I'm going to the lower foothills," the man explained. "You'd freeze your nose off if we tried to winter here."

For Long Tom had no deeds of land or cabin of logs to keep him in one place. He moved with the seasons, and his trail was the trail of the deer—down in fall and up in spring.

On the way they met Jim Gibbs—a trapper that lived in the Fish Lake region. Neither of them particularly cared about him. Long Tom, a just man to the last drop in his veins, had always tried to overcome the feeling of distrust that he had for him; and his greeting was friendly. He tried to disregard the fact that more than once Gibbs had broken the trapper's law and trespassed on Long Tom's own trapping-ground. But of course Gibbs was a white man, and he did not understand the law of trap and tribe.

But little Woof felt no restraining influences. He knew little of manners and less of conventions that make the relations of human beings so inexplicable to the forest folk, and he had no principles whatever except fairness to his master and self-preservation; so he made no effort at all to be polite to Gibbs. He didn't like the way Gibbs looked at him. It was the same look that had burned from the eyes of the cougar, one night when it had slain a deer in the Dark Glen.

So Woof didn't look twice at Gibbs. But he was very much interested indeed in the pet that followed at Gibbs' heels. He had to look a long time before he could make him out; and then concluded that he must be a strange kind of bear-cub.

Gibbs' pet was interested too; and he also fell to conjecturing what manner of creature this little, black, fuzzy, four-legged beast might be. And equally erroneously, he concluded that he must be some new kind of dog. They came up to make friends.

Woof immediately sat down. When he was particularly interested, he always sat down. And the little dog could not understand this action at all. He was quite unable to sit down in just this way himself, and the whole proceeding mystified him beyond words. But taking heart, he came close and tried to introduce himself in the way accepted among dogs.

He wasn't quite sure what happened after that. He was quite vividly aware that the bear had reached down and cuffed him—once with each paw—and rolled him over backwards. And not till then, when he heard the two men bellowing with laughter, did he conclude that he must have been mistaken in thinking Woof a dog. Dogs, he well knew, had better manners.

They parted soon, and Long Tom headed the way down the long trail. He was quite unaware that Gibbs looked after him until a shoulder of the hill hid him from sight—an odd look of speculation and greed on his heavy face.

HIBERNATING in the winter is simply a matter of the lesser of two evils with the bears. When life is good and their stomachs full, three months of sleep doesn't appeal to them at all. Life is too short, and the fun of living much too keen for a happy bear to do this sort of thing from choice. They would much rather be prowling about on the hillsides, grunting at the deer, and unearthing beetles, and shuffling leaves and scratching fleas.

But there is no other alternative. The deer all go down to the foothills in winter. The beetles bury under the ground, and the shuffling leaves are all covered with snow. There aren't even any fleas left to scratch. The bears are sociable animals, and they don't like to have the big dead mountains all to themselves. Moreover the business of making a living becomes extremely difficult. Even the acorns are snow-covered. So they simply make the best of a bad job, find some cozy nook or rocky cavern and sleep till spring.

In this regard they are entirely different from their superiors, the men that come up from the valleys to hunt. When the latter are out of food and lost from their own kind, or when a blizzard suddenly breaks down upon them like a scourge, they do not make a snug snow-house and rest till the danger is past. They are more likely to start running—in a perfect circle. And soon after this search-parties scour the hills for the form of something huddled and strange in a snowdrift.

Woof had a strong, tall man to look after him; so the thought of hibernating did not even enter his head. The two spent the winter on the lower foothills—lovely, green slopes where the snow only came at long intervals and melted quickly. He liked the cold dawns, the tiring tramps over the trap-lines, the wind and the winter stars. He liked to climb to the top of a great pine and have a delicious swinging-game all by himself. And by now he had learned most of the lessons that the wild bears know—lessons in bread-winning to sustain him if anything ever happened to Long Tom. Things do happen to people, quite often, in the mountains.

Among other things, Woof learned to be an expert fisherman. Bears do not use hook and line. They crawl out on some fallen log over the river and simply wait. The art in it lies in being able to stand perfectly still—so not even a shadow flickers on the water. The salmon do not have very sharp eyes. The black shape on the log, unmoving, does not even attract their attention. They swim on, in their endless upstream journey. The Indians say that the secret of life is to be seen in the lives of the salmon—a long climb until death! They pass beneath the fallen log, and all at once something that is too fast for the human eye to follow scoops down at them. Curved claws catch them and hurl them to the bank. And Woof, with a ten-pound steelhead trout in his stomach, was the happiest creature alive.

But Woof preferred berries and acorns and vegetables. In the way of meat, he liked beetles and slugs and an occasional toad. It was always an exciting game to get into Long Tom's grub-box—and one day he got his head caught in it. This was circumstantial evidence that even such a just Indian as Long Tom could not question. So he soberly cut a switch and inflicted it when Woof was helpless.

SPRING came at last; and Woof was a yearling. They headed together back into the higher hills. Spring drew to summer, and life was perfect beyond all dreams. In the last days of August a man on horseback brought a letter to Long Tom.

"You will have to read it to me," Long Tom told him.

With an apprehensive eye on the bear, the white man read the letter. It was from the court in the valley below, and it turned out to be a command for Long Tom to leave his mountain home for a week and attend to some legal business. Because Long Tom was an Indian, the Government felt it had to look after him.

"But what shall I do with Woof?" he asked in the vernacular.

The only word that the white man caught was the last one, but he interpreted amazingly well. He hadn't even known that the bear's name was Woof. Perhaps he was an imaginative man, or perhaps he was simply thinking about the bear all the time. For his answer came pat.

"Take him with you, and sell him to the circus that is coming through the valley in three days."

Long Tom didn't consider this suggestion worthy of a reply. At once he began to make preparations for departure. He got out Woof's collar and chain, and tied him securely to a little pine-tree in front of the tent. "Worthless!" he said gently, coming back to take the bear's muzzle in his palm. "Go back, furry robber of grub-boxes. Your master is called away to the white man's court below; and you, little wicked, must stay here. But I will return soon. And then, Woof, you and I will see what country lies about Squaw Lake."

If Woof could have understood, his little brown eyes would have glittered with delight. He loved strange regions and new rivers, long climbs to unknown peaks, and stealing searches through the unsurveyed. But he howled mournfully when Long Tom vanished down the trail.

On his way down, Long Tom made a satisfactory arrangement with Jim Gibbs —by which, for a certain beaver-skin, Gibbs was to care for Woof during the Indian's absence. He was to come in the morning and make him a flapjack, and in the afternoon take him for an hour's ramble through the berry thickets.

"So you're goin' for a whole week?" Gibbs murmured when their talk was done. His eyes seemed to grow speculative, then wandered to an empty whisky-flask on his grub-box. Gibbs knew perfectly that many things could be accomplished in a week.

In reality the work of the court took ten days. They seemed like ten months to Long Tom. He couldn't sleep in the hotel bed at all, for the first few nights. He did manage to attain some rest in the grass of the park. On the eleventh day he did not even wait for dawn, to start back into the hills. And he rejoiced at every mile that streamed beneath him.

EVENING was falling when at last Long Tom came in sight of his own tent. But at the first glance something seemed changed about it. It did seem so curiously silent and deserted. He could not understand at first. Why was Woof not roaring a welcome to his sound and smell on the wind? He sprinted the last hundred yards—and then he stopped dead in his tracks.

Woof was gone. The chain was broken off squarely, a few inches from the tree.

"Maybe Gibbs has got him," the Indian muttered. "Maybe he's feeding him in the thickets." Yet he knew that he lied as he said it. Gibbs would not have broken the chain to lead the bear to the berry-fields. He started back, running, toward Gibbs' cabin.

He met the man at the river, his rifle in the hollow of his arm. Gibbs wore a new pair of boots; his eyes were blood-shot and strange. His hip bulged with a heavy flask, and it was almost empty, too.

"He was there this morning," Gibbs told him when he had heard the story. "I tended him more'n a week, for the beaver-skin you promised. He must have broken his chain and went wild."

Soon after this the Indian went alone back to his tent. He sat down on his bed of fir-boughs and looked a long time into the graying horizon. "The tent is empty," said the wind that swept in about him from the hills. He heard it plainly. It swished at the canvas. "The tent is so large—and empty."

The blanket seemed much too large as he drew it over him. The night was chill, too. "Come back, little cub," the pine trees murmured over his head. He was an Indian, and he understood them well. "Come back, little cub—for the tent seems empty and my bed is cold."

THE Indian always remembers. It was a peculiar thing, learned by frontiersmen long ago, that the Indian seems unable to forget. He cannot forget an injury, and there are many unpleasant legends that prove this fact. He never

forgets an enemy, and men who have had hard work to remember a savage face peering from behind the sights of a rifle, have learned this lesson very dearly. And to their friends, to those who have won their deep, dark sort of love, they are simply faithful to the death.

Most white men would have forgotten little Woof. Even a mountaineer, bred in a land where all emotions are simple and intense, would probably not have missed him after the first few weeks. But it was not this way with Long Tom. The sun never rose and the stars never burned in the sky when he did not feel his pet's absence.

The first few days he had simply hunted far and wide, and called from the hilltops. Then his crafty Indian brain began to work. He went back to his tent and hunted for clues. And he knew perfectly, at the first glance, that Gibbs had told him one lie at least. Woof had not broken away the very day of Long Tom's return. The spoor was too old. Evidently the escape was made within three days after his departure.

Then he examined the chain. The broken ends were oddly flattened out. A mere straight pull could not have done this. They looked as if they had been broken with a hammer. And then Long Tom sat down on his cot to think.

His first impulse was to go and lie beside the river, his rifle in the hollow of his arm. Jim Gibbs would come by, soon. Nor did Long Tom ever miss, once he saw his game along the barrel of his rifle. But perhaps it was better to wait. He was a mountain man; and long ago he had learned to wait with patience and fortitude. Besides, justice might be obtained in a more fitting manner.

Soon after this he made an expedition down into the foothills. He questioned a few people, and the questions led him even to the town in the valley. One day he talked to a newspaper reporter; and reporters have a way of knowing all things. After that, Long Tom went back quietly to his tent in the hills—to wait until a certain circus should come again.

"It comes every summer," the newspaper man had told him. "And the year will pass quickly."

In this the reporter was mistaken. The year did not go particularly fast for either Long Tom or his pet. One waited in a shelter in the hills, watching his traps and listening to the voices of the lonely wind. They still talked to him. The pine trees had the same voices. He beheld the leaves fall, one by one, revealing the end of autumn; and he wanted to shake the rest of them from the tree. He saw the flowers pass; and his thoughts sped their departure. The winter months dragged to spring, and never did the snow seem to melt so slowly. And the spring, always before passing much too swiftly, seemed longer than a lifetime itself.

TO little Woof, the seasons seemed all the same. He had forgotten that the stars were white and sharp in winter, and warm and soft in spring. He had forgotten that there were such things as stars. All things had ceased to matter; and only the wind sometimes blew to him a memory of what was past. The circus men said that he was always restless when the wind blew. But they did not know why. He would make a thousand journeys up and down his cage; and at such times he didn't seem to know his trainer.

He could not even bury in the snow, and forget his bars and the rumbling wheels and the sawdust smell. He could only pace back and forth, regularly as a pendulum swinging from a clock, until even his trainers began to wonder at him. Mostly they were kind to him, but all the kindness in the world could not make up for the chains he wore and the bars that inclosed him. He was altogether indifferent to their kindnesses. He went through his tricks at their command, wholly and entirely bored by the crowds that cheered him. He wanted the old times back again, the mystery and the silence, the smells and sounds and dangers. He longed for the rough love and the rough games. He did not even know when summer came.

But one night the trainers noticed he seemed more restless than ever. They had come back to a certain valley in southern Oregon, the same place they had played the year before. There was a cool wind blowing in from the hills, and at the first breath Woof suddenly stood upright in his cage. Then he charged full at the bars, hurling his weight against them.

"It's mighty plain to me," the trainer said when he came to quiet him. "This is Woof's own country. We bought him from that hill-billy Gibbs almost a year ago—in this very town."

But it was no easy task to quiet Woof. The madness was upon him. He flung himself again and again against the bars. His spirit was broken, and the indifference of despair had all at once given way to a desperate resolve to escape or die.

The full-grown black bear that shared his cage retired to a corner. He was the crossest, surliest animal in the circus, and ordinarily he liked to bully the two-year-old. But it was noticeable that he remained discreetly polite to-day. Woof was in a fighting mood.

The crowds filed into the animal-tent, but Woof did not even glance at them. They laughed at him awhile. Then they drifted on into the main tent and left him to his rage.

But all at once he stopped short. His savage bark cut off sharp after a single syllable. The animal tent was deserted by trainers and crowds alike; so there were no spectators to wonder at him. All of them were busy in the main tent. The bear stood like a form in metal, ears cocked forward, scarcely breathing.

It was just a smell at first—a smell that swept him back twelve months of time in a single breath. Then it was a sound of footsteps on the sawdust—the sound of some one creeping close to the canvas wall. And even before he saw the dark face at the bars, Woof knew who had come.

It was Long Tom, his master of long ago. It was the same dusky face, the same dark eyes and tall form. It was the same voice, whispering in the same, never-to-be-forgotten tone of command. "Woof," the man said. "Be quiet, Woof! I've come to get you."

He spoke in the Indian tongue; but the bear seemed to understand. "Be quiet, Woof," he warned again. But Woof could not be quiet. With a bellow that frightened the deer in their pens, he roared out his welcome, and flung himself in rapture against the bars.

LONG TOM laid his plans carefully, and he did not make a false step. He had but one ally—a newspaper man with whom he had talked a year before. Perhaps the latter took a real interest in the Indian's attempt to get back his stolen pet. Perhaps he simply wanted a story.

Night had come down, and the oil-lamps danced when Long Tom met Gibbs on the circus grounds. He had known Gibbs would come. The mountain-folk never missed a circus. Gibbs had been somewhat apprehensive all day, for fear that Long Tom would recognize his pet; but it seemed that the Indian had forgotten. Gibbs had never seen him so affable. If he had been a wiser mountaineer, he would have been suspicious at once. Indians are rarely affable unless there is something in the wind.

"Firewater," Long Tom said simply. He pointed to a curious bulge at his hip. It was the one thing that Gibbs felt he needed to complete a perfect day. He had seen the circus and the side-shows, and he had paid his last quarter for a rather disappointing device called "Patrick at the Keyhole." He did not object at all to a quarter-mile walk down the railroad-track to a secluded spot. And there they found the reporter, waiting in the darkness.

It can be said that the latter had no hand in the rather rough-and-tumble work that ensued. He did enjoy it, however. He even went so far as to emit a small, shrill cry of encouragement when the real business of the evening actually began. This started with Long Tom suddenly inflicting a little six-inch jolt with his fist, squarely on the point of Gibbs' chin.

Human beings are not constructed to stand up well under a blow like this. It can be relied on just as confidently as a drop of laudanum or a breath of chloroform, and its effect is just as certain. It was not a particularly violent blow. It was very short and very cool and remarkably efficient. A large number of the stars began to fall out of the sky and whiz and streak before Gibbs' eyes. He wasn't quite sure what happened for a minute or two thereafter. When he did open his eyes again, his hands were tied tight behind him, his feet were pinioned, and a soft cloth absolutely prohibited any sound.

It was then that terror came upon him. It wasn't as if the Indian were blind and wild with wrath. Gibbs knew fairly well what could be expected of a man in wrath—a few such things as blows and kicks that would certainly do no more than send him to the hospital. But the dark face before him was perfectly grave, perfectly inscrutable and impassive. He did not seem to be angry at all—just cold and sure and just. The handkerchief in his mouth was new and white, bought, in fact, for the occasion; and Gibbs' skin faded

to almost the same shade. His throat-muscles contracted for a scream; but not a sound came out.

THE Indian put him across his shoulders and carried him to the open door of the freight-car. He didn't seem to feel the weight at all. And from the deep shadows of the car, growling, savage voices came out to them.

Gibbs was struggling now, every inch of his cold skin creeping with terror. It seemed such a ghastly business. He only knew that wild animals of some kind were waiting in the car, and this impassive red man was carrying him in to them. He was altogether powerless in his grasp. Long Tom seemed scarcely aware that the man was struggling.

It all went like clockwork. The reporter had done his part. Time was when he had traveled with a circus, and he knew just what to do. He stood ready, at the door of an iron cage in the darkness of the car. There were living creatures in the cage—beasts that flung against the cars and roared and growled. Gibbs was too frightened to distinguish the friendly, welcoming roars of one of the creatures from the angry grunting of the other. He only knew that some high justice, immutable as the stars, had fallen upon him at last.

The reporter opened the cage door, and one of the dark figures bounded through. Woof had needed no urging. He was back to his own at last. The Indian lifted Gibbs from his back and set him on his feet, facing the cage. He slipped one of his strong arms behind the elbows, just above the pinioned hands. Then, while the reporter with one motion severed the bonds, the Indian thrust him through the cage-door into Woof's place.

"Good God, Tom!" the man yelled, when he could snatch off his gag. "Are you goin' to leave me here to be et up?"

For the door had swung shut after him, and Woof's companion was growling like forty demons in the corner. Perhaps the reporter laughed in the darkness—Woof's roars mostly obscured the sound. Long Tom looked closely at the lock of the cage-door before he answered. It was a most satisfactory lock—one that could not possibly be worked from within. "Turn about—fair play," he grunted gravely.

Then they went away and left him, howling in the cage.

CERTAIN gray old circus men, traveling up and down the long lanes of the world, have one story that they particularly love to tell. It concerns how certain of them went to one of the animal cars in the gray of dawn and found Jim Gibbs, almost petrified with fright, in the bear-cage. Of course he was unhurt. Spending a night in the same cage with a black bear may be a most uncomfortable proceeding, but barring accidents, it is no more dangerous than spending the same length of time in jail. And although Gibbs threatened all manner of suits, the circus men only rolled around on the ground and laughed at him. Moreover they told him that they would answer his charge with an indictment for selling stolen property; for the reporter had written a cracking good story for his daily that explained the whole matter, and left Gibbs without a case.

It is doubtful if Long Tom and his pet ever saw the story. But they did see the pines and the waters, which was really better. And their tent seems no longer large and empty. The call of the pine trees has ceased to be plaintive and sad in Long Tom's ears. Sleeping together, under the same warm blankets, it's a cruel wind or a cold snow that can chill or harm them.

For Sentimental Reasons

by Chester T. Crowell

A DEEPLY impressive story of the Southwest, wherein clever Senator Logwood gets at the truth of a strange tragedy.

SENATOR LOGWOOD was seated comfortably but erect in his heavy upholstered chair with a volume of commentaries on the first constitution of the State of Mesquite opened before him. A love-letter could not have brought more bliss to a young man than these old records brought to Senator Logwood. His bright blue eyes were like stars, and a smile wreathed his classic countenance as he lived again the turbulent days of the birth of that constitution. Now and then his left hand stole upward and smoothed his snow-white hair.

Suddenly the door opened. The venerable George, Senator Logwood's negro servant, was nearly bowled over as he grasped at the door-knob. The door had been opened without notice, and more suddenly than George expected. It struck him on the forehead. Mack Mason came in somewhat out of breath and thundered, after his fashion: "Good morning, Senator. How is every little thing?"

A frown crossed Senator Logwood's face.

"What on earth are you doing here?" he asked. "You are supposed to be in San Jacinto to-day making a speech. This is the first time you have ever failed an engagement of that sort, Mack Mason. I am grieved and astonished."

Mason yanked a heavy chair close to the cuspidor and sat down with such violence that it seemed probable something would be broken.

"Now, Senator," said Mack Mason as he dropped his clumsy, enormous frame into the chair, "don't you get all mad up at me. I come in here to save your life."

"Yes, yes," said Senator Logwood with no show of appreciation, "but my life is in no danger. I wish you would get right back to San Jacinto. There is a train leaving in twenty minutes. If it is on time, you can make your engagement."

"Now, that's just what I'm a-going to do," agreed Mack Mason. "So don't get no crow's-feet around your eyes. You know me, Senator. There's roller skates on my suit-case, and I don't never stop nowhere long. I come in here to find out what in the Sam Hill you mean by taking that Silent Stubbs case. Don't you know them fellers in Huisatche County" (pronounced Wee-sat-she) "is going to dangle Stubbs at the end of a string?"

"That may be," said Senator Logwood. "It is not impossible that they may dangle his attorney also. I have faced such

situations before. You know me well enough to know that when my duty as a member of the bar of the great State of Mesquite summons me, I never look back. As for the danger, I recall when the scholarly and gallant old Justice Smoot presided over our State supreme court and some one told him that every drink of whisky he took was cutting years off his life. He replied that he thanked God they were being cut off the end where they could best be spared."

"But your duty as a member of the bar never summoned you in this Stubbs case. You butted into that," objected Mason.

"Yes, Mason, so I did," admitted Senator Logwood in a very low tone, but tremulous with pride. "I did that for sentimental reasons—reasons which I am sorry to say, Mason,—fine man that you are,—you would never understand."

"I don't know why you all the time say such things about me," declared Mason. "If it was anybody else but you, I'd call him a liar. I don't know why I take all this abuse off you, Senator, unless it is because I love you so much that no matter what you do to me, I just say to myself: 'That white-haired old darling don't mean nothing by it.' What are these sentimental reasons?"

"They are difficult to explain," said Senator Logwood, "and we will pass the matter at this time. If I come back alive,—and I may say that I confidently expect to do so,—I will tell you."

"That is a promise, Senator," asserted Mason firmly. Senator Logwood extended his hand and Mason grasped it.

"Now, hurry," urged Senator Logwood, "you have just a few minutes." Mason pulled out his watch with his left hand while still grasping the Senator's hand.

"Four hours from now, Senator," he said, "the best catch-as-catch-can, rough-and-tumble stump-speaker in the State of Mesquite will have them hill-billies howling for our man."

"I know you will, Mason," said Senator Logwood. "Good-by and good luck."

AT nine o'clock on the morning of the following Monday, Senator Logwood strolled into the office of the sheriff of Huisatche County. Just as they concluded their introduction, the district judge entered. He barely acknowledged Senator Logwood's greeting. There were dark rings under his eyes, and his hand trembled slightly. He showed the effect of sleepless nights. After closing the door and locking it, he said in a voice unsteady with emotion: "Senator Logwood, you are an old member of the bar, and I want to talk to you frankly. I will be very glad to entertain a motion for change of venue in this case. I do not think it is safe to try Stubbs in this county. The sheriff and I feel a heavy responsibility. We have exhausted our means to protect the defendant, but we have reason to believe that the trial will not be concluded without disorder. Of course I could make that motion myself, but for obvious reasons I would prefer that you make it."

Senator Logwood drew his gold monogrammed cigarette-case from his vest pocket and offered its contents first to the sheriff and then to the judge. They looked at the case with interest, but each declined. Senator Logwood lighted a cigarette very deliberately and then said:

"Judge, I shall not make that motion, and I will ask you not to make it. I have had a conference with my client. As you know, he is a very peculiar type. I have been able to get nothing out of him. He has no witnesses. He seems resigned to his fate, and certain of what that fate will be. I have come into this case for sentimental reasons only. I would not care to get him a verdict of acquittal in any other county if I could. He has never been more than one hundred miles away from this county, I understand. Unless I could restore him to the confidence of the only people he knows, I shall have failed. I have faced such dangers as this before, and without any egotism I wish to tell you frankly that I am able to awe the mob spirit, and I have never failed."

The district judge heard this with a sinking heart.

"You force me, Senator," he said, "to tell you frankly that the danger extends not only to the defendant but to you."

"I knew that when I started," said Senator Logwood. "I have only one request to make. It is improper for me to say this, but I am being as frank with you gentlemen as you have been with me. Would it be possible for us to have a jury of cattlemen exclusively? You have no better citizens, and I know you will not think this is an effort to tamper with the jury."

The sheriff's face registered astonishment beyond utterance.

"The cow-men are the ones that are going to get Silent Stubbs," he said.

"Nevertheless," said Senator Logwood, "that is my one request."

"Well, it is mighty easy to grant," said the sheriff, "and I reckon when the crowd sees a jury of cow-men, it may help some."

"That is what I think," said Senator Logwood.

The judge looked puzzled. He drew his watch from his pocket.

"It is nearly ten o'clock, gentlemen," he said. "I assume, Senator, that you will announce ready for trial."

"Certainly, certainly," said Senator Logwood. "We ought to have it over with to-day."

TEN minutes later the jury was sworn in. The original panel furnished sufficient cow-men. The district attorney was astounded when it became apparent that the crafty Senator Logwood was choosing the very jurors he ought to be trying to avoid. The little district courtroom was crowded to its uttermost, and Senator Logwood observed that among the men standing in the rear were some twenty or more with lariats fastened to their belts or held loosely in their hands.

Silent Stubbs was charged with the murder of his bride of one day, a daughter of Richard Watts, cattleman and banker, and a popular man among the pioneers.

Richard Watts was the first witness. He told of his daughter's infatuation for Silent Stubbs from the age of fourteen, and of Stubbs' assertion that he would wait for her.

"Did your daughter own any land in her own right?" asked the district attorney.

"Yes sir."

"How much?"

"Seventeen thousand acres."

"Where?"

"Adjoining the Stubbs ranch."

"That's all," said the district attorney, and those in the crowd looked significantly at each other.

"No questions," Senator Logwood said calmly, as though he did not realize that the motive for the murder had just been established, Richard Watts left the stand.

The minister who performed the marriage ceremony was the next witness. He told the details of the ceremony and of the departure of the bride and groom in their wagon heavily loaded with supplies and drawn by four mules. The bridal couple left early the morning of the ceremony for Stubbs' ranch fifty miles distant.

The next two witnesses were Sam and Harry Wade. Each told the same story. Forty miles from the county seat of Huisatche County was their ranch. They were riding together across a ridge of hills late in the morning when they looked down on the road below and saw Silent Stubbs and his bride driving along where the road follows a ledge of rocks.

"Now tell in your own words," commanded the district attorney, "all that happened."

"The mules picked up from a walk to a trot," said Sam. "They had gone about thirty feet in a trot, when Stubbs pulled his pistol and fired twice to the side where Mary was sitting. Mary fell out of the wagon, and it ran over her. Stubbs stopped the mules and got out of the wagon and leaned over Mary, and it looked to me like he choked her."

THERE was an angry growl from the crowd. A lariat was loosened, and a loop flung out over the heads of those in the courtroom. The loop dropped around Silent Stubbs, who was seated behind his attorney. The sheriff quickly grasped the loop and threw it up before it could be tightened. "Have order in the courtroom," he shouted, at the same time drawing his pistol.

"Sit down," shouted some one angrily from the rear. Another lariat whipped out of the crowd, and the loop instantly tightened about the sheriff's shoulders. Senator Logwood cut it with his pocketknife just as the man at the other end of the line gave a tug that was intended to pull the sheriff from his feet. The result was that some ten or twelve persons in the rear of the courtroom fell down. Instantly there was a shout of laughter. Senator Logwood sighed with relief. That meant safety for a few minutes, anyway.

"He knelt there beside her for about ten minutes," continued the witness, who was undisturbed by the disorder. "Harry and I shouted, but the wind was in our faces and he could not hear us. I was for shooting him, but we were afraid to try it at that range when they were so close together. We stood there helpless. After a long time Stubbs pulled out his six-shooter again and put it close to

Mary's head and fired. I told Harry to ride down to the pass and go after Stubbs, while I stood there and watched. Stubbs dug a grave with his hands and buried her. Then he got in the wagon and drove off fast." The witness paused.

"Did you finally go to the scene of the homicide?" asked the district attorney.

"Yes sir."

"Did you see anything the defendant might have fired at?"

"The only thing I saw was two dead rattlesnakes, but they looked like they had been run over by the wagon."

"That's all," said the district attorney. Then, turning to the judge, he said solemnly: "Your Honor, the State rests."

THE judge looked uneasily toward Senator Logwood. Senator Logwood rose from his seat very deliberately, and instead of facing the court, turned toward the crowd. There were hisses and curses as he did so. "Gentlemen," he said calmly, "this case will be concluded within half an hour. What you do then is a matter of no moment to me, but it is of great moment to you. I ask only in the name of good government, in the name of the fine traditions of American fair play, that you permit me to put this unfortunate man on the witness stand and hear his testimony without intimidation. Then I shall have closed my connection with this case, and you will have contributed a glorious page to the history of Huisatche County."

Most of the crowd was silent and thoughtful. There were a few angry snarls as he faced the judge.

"I beg the Court's pardon," he said. "I shall now ask the defendant to take the stand." Silent Stubbs made no move to rise. Senator Logwood slapped him soundly on the shoulder and thundered: "Take the stand, sir." Stubbs rose as though hypnotized; there was a dull, far-away look in his eyes. His countenance suggested the appropriateness of the nickname he bore. One could look at him and tell he had not the gift of speech.

"Be sworn," commanded Senator Logwood. He grasped the defendant by the shoulders and turned his face toward the clerk of the court. When Stubbs had mumbled his "I do," he mounted the five steps leading to the witness-stand.

"What is your name?" asked Senator Logwood.

"Henry Stubbs."

"You are known as Silent Stubbs?"

"Yes sir."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-six years."

"How long have you lived on the ranch where you now reside?"

"All my life."

"How long did your father reside there?"

"All his life."

"Your grandfather?"

"He come out from Tennessee after he was grown."

"Where were you going on the morning of the homicide?" asked Senator Logwood.

Stubbs was silent a long time; and then a sob was heard in the courtroom, which had become absolutely silent. Stubbs turned to the judge.

"I done wrong, Judge," he said. "I aint got nothing to say."

Senator Logwood was on his feet instantly, his eyes flashing fire.

"We want no statement from you." Senator Logwood fairly bit out the words. "You stand there accused of murder. A solemn responsibility is imposed upon those jurors to say whether or not they shall send you to the gallows. I believe they have a right to hear your testimony, not a statement; and I, as your attorney and an officer of this court, have placed you on the stand. You will answer my questions and any questions the district attorney may ask, promptly and directly. No one has asked you what you think about this case, or your opinion as to whether you have done wrong. That is for the jury to determine. I will pass my former question at this time and ask you another."

Stubbs blinked. The crowd nodded approvingly.

"Have you conferred with anyone about your defense in this case?"

"Yes sir,"—very low,—"with you."

"Tell this jury everything that you told me."

"I object to that form of examination," shouted the district attorney.

"You will have no cause to," remarked Senator Logwood, "when you hear his reply."

"Very well," said the district attorney.

"Proceed," said Senator Logwood to Stubbs. "What did you tell me?"

"I told you," said the witness slowly,

awed and very uneasy, "that I done wrong and I didn't want no lawyer."

"Is that all you told me?" asked Senator Logwood.

"That's all," replied the witness.

"How long was I with you?"

"About two hours."

"How many times did you repeat that statement?"

"Twenty—maybe fifty."

"Very well," said Senator Logwood.

"Your father met a violent death, did he not?" was Senator Logwood's next question.

"Yes sir."

"I object," interrupted the district attorney. "There is nothing in the record which makes the manner of the death of the defendant's father relevant in this case."

"I shall show its relevancy if I can," said Senator Logwood, "and I shall show you that I am not making an effort to draw any self-serving statements from the defendant. I have shown you and the court by his own testimony that I am proceeding blindly in this case, and depending upon a theory I have concerning this homicide. We are dealing with a peculiar type of man. I beg the indulgence of the court and district attorney to permit me to proceed to do what little I can to throw what light I may upon this most strange homicide."

"Proceed, proceed," said the judge impatiently.

"Your father came to a violent death?" asked Senator Logwood.

"Yes sir."

"Well, what was it?"

"A rattlesnake struck at his horse and threw him, and he was dragged and both legs were broken. I found the body ten days later. He had shot himself."

"Did you find a note by the body?"

"Yes sir."

"Did you read that note?"

"I can't read—only just a little when it is printed."

"Did anyone read that note to you?"

"Yes sir."

"What did it say?"

"It said both his legs were broken, that he had fired all his shells but two, that no help came, that he was bad hurt and that he was going to shoot himself."

"Who read that note to you?"

"You did."

"How long after your father's death?"

"About a year."

"You had made no effort to have that note read before then?"

"No sir."

"Why?"

"Because I knew what had happened."

"How did you know?"

"I could tell."

"Was it because that was what you would have done under similar circumstances?"

"I reckon so."

"Have you ever shot a cow or a steer?"

"Yes sir."

"How many?"

"I don't know."

"Well, fifty or sixty?"

"I reckon two hundred, maybe."

"Why did you shoot them?"

"When they break their legs, everybody shoots them."

"Now, getting back to the morning of the homicide," said Senator Logwood, "why did you fire those first two shots?"

"I shot at two rattlesnakes."

"Did you hit them?"

"Yes sir—both of them."

"Did the wagon run over them?"

"No sir."

"What made them look as if the wagon had run over them?"

"I planted the shots in front of the snakes so the bullets would flatten on the rock and cut them all to pieces."

"Is that the way you usually shoot a rattlesnake?"

"When it is on a rock—yes sir."

"What made those mules go from a walk to a trot that morning?"

"We run into a nest of rattlesnakes sunning themselves on the rocks. One stuck its fangs in a mule's collar and hung there rattling. I shot two others."

"Then you didn't shoot Mary?"

The witness was silent for a long time. He tried several times to swallow and seemed to be suffering.

"Did you shoot Mary?" roared Senator Logwood.

"Yes sir," replied the witness.

THREE lariats were thrown from the rear of the courtroom. The sheriff, who was standing close to the witness-stand, knocked them down with his arm just as the loops were about to fall around Stubbs.

"Have patience, gentlemen," pleaded the sheriff, his voice very unsteady.

"You shot Mary while she sat beside you?" asked Senator Logwood.

"No sir."

"What made her fall out of the wagon?"

"We bumped over some big rocks."

"Why didn't you fall out also?"

Stubbs almost smiled.

"I couldn't fall out of no wagon or off of no horse," he replied.

"What happened to Mary after that?"

"Both wheels ran over her."

"Was the wagon heavy?"

"Yes sir—loaded with all it would carry."

"You stopped the mules?"

"Yes sir."

"Then what did you do?"

"I got that snake loose from the collar."

"You attended to the mule before you looked to see how badly Mary was hurt?"

"I had to." For the first time the witness flashed fire. Senator Logwood looked at him as though he hated him, but there was a leap of joy in his heart as he saw that at last he was going to be able to draw the whole story from the witness. The apparent hostility of Senator Logwood toward the defendant satisfied the crowd.

"Why did you have to?" demanded Senator Logwood in a tone that indicated he did not believe the witness.

"Soon as I got the snake loose, the mules stood. They are well trained, but they wouldn't stand while that snake was flopping from the collar and rattling."

"Then what did you do?"

"I went back to Mary."

"Well?"

"She was unconscious." Senator Logwood waited patiently; and finally the witness continued: "I felt of her." There was another long delay. "Both hips were broken," said the witness. "Both legs were broken below the knee. I put her head on my right arm."

"Where did you put your left hand?"

"On her throat."

"Why?"

"To feel if blood was coming through the veins."

"Why didn't you put your hand on her heart?"

"I don't know."

"Was it because she was a woman?"

Tears welled up in the eyes of the defendant, and he murmured: "Yes, sir."

"You are sure it was your left hand at her throat?"

"Yes sir."

"Are you left-handed?"

"No sir." The jurors looked significantly at one another.

"Did Mary ever recover consciousness?"

"Yes sir—after a long time."

"Did she seem to be in much pain?"

"Her whole body quivered."

"What did she say, if anything?" The witness struggled to maintain his composure, and finally he whispered: "She said, 'Good-by, darling.' "

"Is that all she said?"

"Yes sir."

Senator Logwood placed his hands over his eyes to visualize the scene and outline in his mind his further questions. While he sat thus, the witness proceeded, which astonished everyone in the courtroom.

"She laid her hand on my gun and pointed to her forehead."

"What did you do then?"

"I kissed her."

"Well, what then?" There was another long delay, and Senator Logwood repeated: "Well, what did you do then?"

The witness suddenly lifted both arms and buried his fingers in his matted hair. He turned a face distorted by anguish toward the judge and sobbed: "I done wrong. I don't want no lawyer."

Senator Logwood came close to the witness and leveled his right forefinger at him. "You tell this jury what you did!" he roared.

"I shot her," said the witness.

"Did you bury her?"

"Yes sir."

"Where?"

"Right there."

"Didn't you think you ought to take that body to town for Christian burial?"

"I never thought of it. We live so far out. We—" his voice broke.

"Why did you run away?"

"I had to feed the cattle. We have no grass. I was feeding them from silos. If I got back late, they would starve. I was pumping water with a gasoline engine. They wouldn't have had no water."

"How many cattle?"

"About one thousand head."

"You didn't want to lose those cattle?"

"I didn't want them to suffer."

"Take the witness," said Senator Logwood, turning to the district attorney.

SILENT STUBBS fell from the chair and rolled down the five steps which led up to the witness-stand, before the district attorney could ask a question. Stubbs lay in a heap at Senator Logwood's feet. The sheriff brought a tin cup of water and poured it on Stubbs' forehead. He opened his eyes and closed them again. Senator Logwood was kneeling beside him. "I done wrong," Stubbs muttered.

"Shall we take a recess until after lunch?" asked the judge.

"I have no questions," replied the district attorney. "It looks like the Senator's blind guess was right."

"The defense rests," said Senator Logwood.

He walked around the attorney's table and whispered to the district attorney. The district attorney addressed the court. "We have agreed, Your Honor," he said, "to submit the case without argument."

The judge read the charge, concluding with the solemn mandate: "You are the sole judges of the facts, but the law you will receive from the court and be governed thereby." The judge raised his eyes and said: "Mr. Sheriff, take the jury." The clerk of the court and Senator Logwood lifted Stubbs to his seat as the jury filed out. Five minutes later, the foreman of the jury read the verdict: "We, the jury, find the defendant not guilty."

The crowd filed out solemnly. The jurors looked at Senator Logwood but were unable to give expression to their admiration. Finally Senator Logwood said to Stubbs: "Your horse is tied to the courthouse railing. I ordered it brought in this morning." Stubbs rose and walked slowly out of the room. A few minutes later he was on the road to his ranch.

THAT night as Senator Logwood sat in his room in the little hotel, the district judge came to visit him. He was as speechless as the jurors, although he had come with the intention of paying a tribute of praise.

"This case is not over yet, Judge," said Senator Logwood. "I know the Stubbs family well. I will remain here until the noon train leaves to-morrow. I might as well see the last chapter written. There are some lives that begin and end in the shadow. Such is the life of Silent Stubbs."

The door opened softly. Mack Mason entered silently, for the first time in his life, so far as Senator Logwood could remember.

"You again!" exclaimed Senator Logwood.

"I come to collect on your promise," said Mason. Senator Logwood smiled.

"It is a good story, Mason," he said, "and I am in a humor to tell it. Judge, this is not private, and you may hear it.

"When I was a boy, the father and grandfather of Silent Stubbs were my neighbors. I was a country boy. One day my father brought me a pair of boots with red tips and gave me fifty cents and told me I might go to the circus. Judge, I was so happy over those boots I must have walked a mile backward through the sand admiring my tracks. Then I turned and ran and ran and ran. Kidlike, I was afraid I'd be late. I got so tired I had to lie down and rest. Then I ran some more."

Senator Logwood lighted a cigarette and watched the match burn out. "When I arrived at the main entrance," he continued, "I reached into my pocket and discovered I had lost my fifty cents. No man ever suffered a more cruel bankruptcy. I began to cry. I stood there sobbing, a broken-hearted child." Senator Logwood paused for a long time, then continued: "The elder Stubbs, grandfather to the defendant in this case, came by, and asked me what was the matter. When I finally told him, between sobs, he gave me fifty cents and patted my head, and I went to the circus. I resolved then and there that between me and the Stubbs family even unto the third and fourth generation, there was an alliance. I am a man of sentiment. I have paid a little on that account to-day—not much, but some."

THE telephone rang. Senator Logwood, after answering it, called the district judge. The judge listened a few moments and then turned to Senator Logwood and Mack Mason.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the case is closed sure enough. Stubbs rode from here to that little grave on the ledge and dug another beside it and shot himself."

"I knew he would," said Senator Logwood, "and it is best so. Mason, we will take the night train, after all."

The White Moll

The Silver Sphinx

By Frank L. Packard

ANOTHER night—another day! And the night again had been for Rhoda Gray without rest, lest Danglar's dreaded footstep come upon her unawares; and the day again had been for her one of restless, abortive activity, now prowling the streets as Gypsy Nan, now returning to the garret to fling herself upon the cot in the hope that in daylight, when she might risk it, sleep would come. But it had been without avail, for in spite of physical weariness, it seemed to Rhoda Gray as though her tortured mind would never let her sleep again. Danglar's wife! That was the horror that was in her brain—yes, and in her soul; and that would not leave her.

Now night was coming upon her once more. It had even begun to grow dark here on the lower stairway that led up to that wretched, haunted garret above, where in the shadows stark terror lurked. She feared the night—and yet she welcomed it. In a little while, when it grew a little darker, she would steal out again and take up her work once more. It was only during the night, under the veil of darkness, that she could hope to make any progress in reaching to the heart and core of this criminal clique which surrounded her, who accepted her as Gypsy Nan, and therefore as one of themselves, and who would accord to her, if they but even suspected her to be the White Moll, less mercy than would be shown to a mad-dog.

She climbed the stairs. Fear was upon her now, because fear was always there, and with it was abhorrence and loathing at the frightful existence fate had thrust upon her; but somehow to-night she was not so depressed, not so hopeless, as she had been the night before. There had been a little success; she had come a little farther along the way; she knew a little more than she had known before of the inner workings of the gang who were at the bottom of the crime of which she herself was accused. She knew now the Adventurer's secret, that the Pug and the Adventurer were one; and she

THE WHITE MOLL, as the charity-worker Rhoda Gray was known to the underworld, found herself through a peculiar chain of circumstances accused of robbery and murder. To escape arrest and certain conviction she was compelled to impersonate a certain Gypsy Nan—who, unknown to her associates, had died. And then Rhoda discovered that "Gypsy Nan" had herself been an impersonation—the disguise used by the wife of Danglar, a master crook. . . . . This fifth of Frank Packard's brilliant stories describes Rhoda's further adventures.

knew where the Adventurer lived, now in one character, now in the other, in those two rooms almost opposite each other across that tenement hall.

So it seemed that she had the *right* to hope, even though there were still so many things she did not know that if she allowed her mind to dwell upon that phase, it staggered her—where those code-messages came from, and how; why Rough Rorke, of Headquarters, had never made a sign since that first night; why the original Gypsy Nan, who was dead now, had been forced into hiding with the death-penalty of the law hanging over her; why Danglar, though Gypsy Nan's husband, was comparatively free. These, and a myriad other things! But she counted now upon her knowledge of the Adventurer's secret to force from him everything he knew; and with that to work on, a confession from some of the gang in corroboration that would prove the authorship of the crime which she had seemingly been cought in the act of committing.

YES, she was beginning to see the way at last—through the Adventurer. It seemed a sure and certain way. If she presented herself before him as Gypsy Nan, whom he believed to be not only one of the gang, but actually Danglar's wife, and let him know that she was aware of the dual rôle he was playing, and that the information he thus acquired as the Pug he turned to his own account and to the undoing of the gang, he must of necessity be at her mercy. Her mercy! What exquisite irony! Her mercy! The man her heart loved, the thief her common sense abhorred! What irony! When she too played a double rôle, when in their other characters, those of the Adventurer and the White Moll, he and she were linked together by the gang as confederates; whereas in truth they were wider apart than the poles of the earth!

Her mercy! How merciful would she be—to the thief she loved? He knew, he must know, all the inner secrets of the gang. She smiled wanly now as she reached the landing. Would he know that in the last analysis her threat would be only an idle one, that though her future, her safety, her life, depended on obtaining the evidence she felt he could supply, her threat would be empty, and that she was powerless—because she loved him? But *he* did not know she loved him—she was Gypsy Nan. If she kept her secret, if he did not penetrate her disguise as she had penetrated his, if she were Gypsy Nan and Danglar's wife to him, her threat would be valid enough, and—and he would be at her mercy!

A flush, half shamed, half angry, dyed the grime that was part of Gypsy Nan's disguise upon her face. What was she saying to herself? *What* was she thinking? That he did not know she loved him! How would he? How could he? Had a word, an act, a single look of hers ever given him a hint that, when she had been with him as the White Moll, she cared? It was unjust, unfair, to fling such a taunt at herself. It seemed as though she had lost nearly everything in life, but she had not yet lost her womanliness and her pride.

She had certainly lost her senses, though! Even if that word, that look, *had* passed between them, between the Adventurer and the White Moll, he still did not know that Gypsy Nan was the White Moll—and that was the one thing now that he must not know—

Rhoda Gray halted suddenly and stared along the hallway ahead of her, and up the short ladderlike steps that led to the garret. Her ears—or was it fancy?—had caught what sounded like a low knocking up there upon her door. Yes, it came again now distinctly. It was dusk outside; in here, in the hall, it was almost dark. Her eyes strained through the murk. She was not mistaken. Something darker than the surrounding darkness, a form, moved up there.

THE knocking ceased, and now the form seemed to bend down and grope along the floor; and then, an instant later, it began to descend the ladderlike steps. Abruptly Rhoda Gray moved forward. It wasn't Danglar. That was what had instantly taken hold of her mind, and she knew a sudden relief now. The man on the stairs,—she could see that it was a man now,—though he moved silently, swayed in a grotesquely jerky way as though he were lame. It wasn't Danglar! She would go to any length to track Danglar to his lair; but not here—here in the darkness, here in the garret. Here she was afraid of him with a deadly fear; here alone with him there would be a thousand chances of exposure incident to the slightest intimacy he might show the woman whom he believed his wife—a thousand

chances here against hardly one in any other environment or situation. But the man on the stairs wasn't Danglar.

She halted now and uttered a sharp exclamation, as though she had caught sight of the man for the first time.

The other also had halted—at the foot of the stairs. A plaintive drawl reached her:

"Don't screech, Bertha! It's only your devoted brother-in-law. Curse your infernal ladder, and my twisted back!"

Danglar's brother! Bertha! She snatched instantly at the cue with an inward gasp of thankfulness. She would not make the mistake of using the vernacular behind which Gypsy Nan sheltered herself. Here was some one who knew that Gypsy Nan was but a rôle. But she had to remember that her voice was slightly hoarse; that her voice at least, could not sacrifice its disguise to anyone. Danglar had been a little suspicious of it until she had explained that she was suffering from trouble with her throat.

"Oh!" she said calmly. "It's you, is it? And what brought you here?"

"What do you suppose?" he complained irritably. "The same old thing, all I'm good for—to write out code-messages and deliver them like an errand-boy! It's a sweet job, isn't it? How'd you like to be a deformed little cripple?"

She did not answer at once. The night seemed suddenly to be opening some strange, even premonitory, vista. The code-messages! Their mode of delivery! Here was the answer!

"Maybe I'd like it better than being Gypsy Nan!" she flung back significantly.

He laughed out sharply.

"I'd like to trade with you," he said, a quick note of genuine envy in his voice. "You can pitch away your clothes; I can't pitch away a crooked spine. And anyway, after to-night you'll be living swell again."

She leaned toward him, staring at him in the semidarkness. That premonitory vista was widening—his words seemed suddenly to set her brain in tumult. *After to-night!* She was to resume, after to-night, the character that was supposed to lie behind the disguise of Gypsy Nan! She was to resume her supposedly true character—that of Pierre Danglar's wife!

"What do you mean?" she demanded tensely.

"Aw, come on!" he said abruptly. "This isn't the place to talk. Pierre wants you right off. That's what the message was for. I thought you were out, and I left it in the usual place so you'd get it the minute you got back and come along over. So, come on now with me."

HE was moving down the hallway, blotching like some misshapen toad in the shadowy light, lurching in his walk, that was, nevertheless, almost uncannily noiseless. Mechanically she followed him. She was trying to think, striving frantically to bring her wits to play on this sudden and unexpected turn of affairs. It was obvious that he was taking her to Danglar. She had striven desperately last night to run Danglar to earth in his lair. And here was a self-appointed guide! Yet her emotions conflicted and her brain was confused. It was what she wanted, what through bitter travail of mind she had decided must be her course; but she found herself shrinking from it with dread and fear, now that it promised to become a reality.

Suppose she refused to go!

They had reached the street now, and now she obtained a better view of the misshapen thing that lurched jerkily along beside her. The man was deformed, miserably deformed. He walked most curiously, half bent over; one arm, the left, seemed to swing helplessly, and the left hand was like a withered thing. Her eyes sought the other's face. It was an old face, much older than Danglar's, and it was white and pinched and drawn; and in the dark eyes, as they suddenly darted a glance at her, she read a sullen, bitter brooding and discontent. She turned her head away. It was not a pleasant face; it struck her as being both morbid and cruel to a degree.

"What did you mean by 'after to-night'?" she asked again.

"You'll see," he answered. "Pierre'll tell you. You're in luck—that's all. The whole thing that has kept you under cover has bust wide open your way, and you win. Pierre's going through for a clean-up. To-morrow you can swell around in a limousine again. And maybe you'll come around and take me for a drive, if I dress up, and promise to hide in a corner of the back seat so's they wont see your handsome friend!"

The creature flung a bitter smile at her, and lurched on.

He had told her what she wanted to know—more than she had hoped for. The mystery that surrounded the character of Gypsy Nan, the evidence of the crime at which the woman who had originated that rôle had hinted on the night she died, and which must necessarily involve Danglar, was hers, Rhoda Gray's, now for the taking. Her lips tightened as she walked along. As well go and give herself up to the police as the White Moll and have done with it all, as to refuse to seize the opportunity which Fate, evidently in a kindlier mood toward her now, was offering her at this instant. It promised her the hold upon Danglar that she needed to force an avowal of her own innocence, the very hold that she had but a few minutes before been hoping she could obtain through the Adventurer.

There was no longer any question as to whether she would go or not.

II

HER hand groped down under the shabby black shawl into the wide, voluminous pocket of her greasy skirt. Yes, her revolver was there. She knew it was there, but the touch of her fingers upon it seemed to bring a sense of reassurance. She was perhaps staking her all in accompanying this cripple here to-night,—she did not need to be told that,—but there *was* a way of escape at the last if she were cornered and caught. Her fingers played with the weapon. If the worst came to the worst, she would never be at Danglar's mercy while she possessed that revolver, and if the need came, turned it upon herself.

They walked on rapidly, the lurching figure beside her covering the ground at an astounding rate of speed. The man made no effort to talk. She was glad of it. She need not be so anxiously on her guard as would be the case if a conversation were carried on, and she must weigh every word. Besides, it gave her time to think. Where were they going? What sort of place was it, this headquarters of the gang? For it must be the headquarters, since it was from there the code-messages would naturally emanate, and this deformed creature, from what he had said, was the "secretary" of the nefarious clique that was ruled by his brother.

And was luck really with her at last? Suppose she had been but a few minutes later in reaching Gypsy Nan's house, and had found, instead of this man here, only the note instructing her to go and meet Danglar! What would she have done? What explanation could she have made for her nonappearance? Her hands would have been tied; she would have been helpless. She could not have answered the summons, for she would have had no idea where this gang-lair was; and the note certainly would not contain such details as street and number, which she was obviously supposed to know. She smiled a little grimly to herself. Yes, it seemed as though Fortune were beginning to smile upon her again—Fortune, at least, had supplied her with a guide.

The twisted figure walked on the inside of the sidewalk, and curiously seemed to seek as much as possible the protecting shadows of the buildings, and invariably shrank back out of the way of the passers-by they met. She watched him narrowly as they went along. What was he afraid of? Recognition? It puzzled her for a time, and then she understood. It was not fear of recognition; the sullen, almost belligerent stare with which he met the eyes of those with whom he came into close contact belied that. The man was morbidly, abnormally sensitive of his deformity.

They turned at last into one of the East Side cross-streets, and her guide halted finally on a corner in front of a little shop that was closed and dark. She stared curiously as the man unlocked the door. Perhaps, after all, she had been woefully mistaken. It did not look at all the kind of place where crimes that ran the gamut of the decalogue were hatched, at all the sort of place that was the council-chamber of perhaps the most cunning, certainly the most cold-blooded and unscrupulous, band of crooks that New York had ever harbored. And yet—why not? Wasn't there the essence of cunning in that very fact? Who would suspect anything of the sort from a ramshackle, two-story little house like this, with a woebegone little store in front?

THE man fumbled with the lock. There was not a single light showing from the place, but in the dwindling rays of a distant street-lamp she could see the meager window-display through the filthy, unwashed panes. It was evidently a cheap and tawdry notion-store, well suited to its locality. There were toys of the cheapest variety, stationery of the same grade,

cheap pipes, cigarettes, tobacco, candy—a package of needles.

"Go on in!" grunted the man as he pushed the door—which seemed to shriek out unduly on its hinges—wide open. "If anybody sees the door open, they'll be around wanting to buy a paper of pins,—curse 'em!—and I aint open to-night." He snarled as he shut and locked the door. "Pierre says you're grouching about your garret. How about me, and this job? You get out of yours to-night for keeps. What about me? I can't do anything but act as a damned blind for the rest of you with this fool store, just because I was born a freak that every gutter-snipe on the street yells at!"

Rhoda Gray did not answer.

"Well, go on!" snapped the man. "What are you standing there for? One would think you'd never been here before!"

Go on! Where? She had not the faintest idea. It was quite dark inside here in the shop. She could barely make out the outline of the other's figure.

"You're in a sweet temper to-night, aren't you?" she said tartly. "Go on, yourself! I'm waiting for you to get through your speech."

He moved brusquely past her, with an angry grunt.

Rhoda Gray followed him. They passed along a short, narrow space, evidently between a low counter and a shelved wall, and then the man opened a door, and shutting it again behind them, moved forward once more. She could scarcely see him at all now; it was more the sound of his footsteps than anything that guided her. And then suddenly another door was opened; a soft yellow light streamed out through the doorway, and she found that she was standing in an intervening room between the shop and the room ahead of her. She felt her pulse quicken, and it seemed as though her heart began to thump almost audibly. Danglar! She clenched her hands under her shawl. She would need all her wits now. She prayed that there would not be too much light in that room yonder.

The man with the withered hand had passed through into the other room. She heard them talking together, as she followed. She forced herself to walk with as nearly a leisurely, defiant air as she could. The last time she had been with Danglar—as Gypsy Nan—she had, in self-protection, forbidding intimacy, played up what he called her "grouch" at his neglect of her.

She paused in the doorway. Halfway across the room, at a table, Danglar's gaunt, swarthy face showed under the rays of a shaded oil lamp. Behind her spectacles she met his small, black ferret eyes steadily.

"Hello, Bertha!" he called out cheerily. "How's the old girl to-night?" He rose from his seat to come toward her. "And how's the throat?"

Rhoda Gray scowled at him.

"Worse!" she said curtly—and hoarsely. "And a lot you care! I could have died in that hole, for all you knew!" She pushed him irritably away as he came near her. "Yes, that's what I said! And you needn't start any cooing game now! Get down to cases!" She jerked her hand toward the twisted figure that had slouched into a chair beside the table. "He says you've got it doped out to pull something that will let me out of this Gypsy Nan stunt. Another bubble, I suppose!" She shrugged her shoulders, glanced around her, and locating a chair—not too near the table—seated herself indifferently. "I'm getting sick of bubbles!" she announced insolently. "What's this one?"

He stood there for a moment biting at his lips, hesitant between anger and tolerant amusement; and then, the latter evidently gaining the ascendancy, he too shruggled his shoulders, and with a laugh returned to his chair.

"You're a rare one, Bertha!" he said coolly. "I thought you'd be wild with delight. I guess you're sick, all right—because usually you're pretty sensible. I've tried to tell you that it wasn't my fault I couldn't go near you, and that I had to keep away from—"

"What's the use of going over all that again?" she interrupted tartly. "I guess I—"

"Oh, all right!" said Danglar hurriedly. "Don't start a row! After to-night I've an idea you'll be sweet enough to your husband, and I'm willing to wait. Matty maybe hasn't told you the whole of it."

Matty! So that was the deformed creature's name. She glanced at him. He was grinning broadly. A family squabble seemed to afford him amusement. Her eyes shifted and made a circuit of the room. It was poverty-stricken in appearance, bare-floored, with the scantiest and cheapest of

furnishings, its one window tightly shuttered.

"Maybe not," she said carelessly.

"Well, then, listen, Bertha!" Danglar's voice was lowered earnestly. "We've uncovered the Nabob's stuff! Do you get me? Every last one of the sparklers!"

Rhoda Gray's eyes went back to the deformed creature at Danglar's side, as the man laughed out abruptly.

"Yes," grinned Matty Danglar, "and they weren't in the *empty* money-belt that you beat it with like a scared cat after croaking Deemer!"

HOW queer and dim the light seemed to go suddenly—or was it a blur before her own eyes? She said nothing. Her mind seemed to be groping its way out of darkness toward some faint gleam of light showing in the far distance. She heard Danglar order his brother savagely to hold his tongue. That was curious, too, because she was grateful for the man's gibe. Gypsy Nan, in her proper person, had murdered a man named Deemer in an effort to secure—

Danglar's voice came again:

"Well, to-night we'll get that stuff, all of it—it's worth a cool half-million; and to-night we'll get Mr. House-Detective Cloran for keeps—bump him off. That cleans everything up. How does that strike you, Bertha?"

Rhoda Gray's hands under her shawl locked tightly together. Her premonition had not betrayed her. She was face to face to-night with—the beginning of the end.

"It *sounds* fine!" she said derisively.

Danglar's eyes narrowed for an instant; and then he laughed.

"You're a rare one, Bertha!" he ejaculated again. "You don't seem to put much stock in your husband lately."

"Why should I?" she inquired imperturbably. "Things have been breaking fine, haven't they?—only not for us!" She cleared her throat as though it were an effort to talk. "I'm not going crazy with joy till I've been shown."

Danglar leaned suddenly over the table.

"Well, come and look at the cards, then," he said impressively. "Pull your chair up to the table, and I'll tell you."

Rhoda Gray tilted her chair, instead, nonchalantly back against the wall—it was quite light enough where she was!

"I can hear you from here," she said coolly. "I'm not deaf, and I guess Matty's suite is safe enough so that you wont have to whisper all the time!"

The deformed creature at the table chortled again.

Danglar scowled.

"Damn you, Bertha!" he flung out savagely. "I could wring that neck of yours sometimes, and—"

"I know you could, Pierre," she interposed sweetly. "That's what I like about you—you're so considerate of me! But suppose you get down to cases. What's the story about those sparklers? And what's the game that's going to let me shed this Gypsy Nan stuff for keeps?"

"I'll tell her, Pierre," grinned the deformed one. "It'll keep you two from spitting at one another; and neither of you have got all night to stick around here." He swung his withered hand suddenly across the table, and as suddenly all facetiousness was gone both from his voice and manner. "Say, you listen hard, Bertha! What Pierre's telling you is straight. You and him can kiss and make up to-morrow or the next day, or whenever you damned please; but to-night there aint any more time for scrapping. Now, listen! I handed you a rap about beating it with the empty money-belt the night you croaked Deemer with an overdose of knockout drops in the private dining-room up at the Hotel Marwitz, but you forget that! I aint for starting any argument about that. None of us blames you. We thought the stuff was in the belt too. And none of us blames you for making a mistake and going too strong with the drops, either; anybody might do that. And I'll say now that I take my hat off to you for the way you locked Cloran into the room with the dead man, and made your escape when Cloran had you dead to rights for the murder; and I'll say, too, that the way you've played Gypsy Nan and saved your skin, and ours too, is as slick a piece of work as has ever been pulled. That puts us straight, you and me, don't it, Bertha?"

Rhoda Gray blinked at the man through her spectacles; her brain was whirling in a mad turmoil.

"I always liked you, Matty," she whispered softly.

DANGLAR was lolling back in his chair, blowing smoke-rings into the air. She caught his eyes fixed quizzically upon her.

"Go on, Matty!" he prompted. "You'll

have her in a good humor, if you're not careful!"

"We were playing more or less blind after that." The withered hand traced an aimless pattern on the table with its crooked and half-closed fingers, and the man's face was puckered into a shrewd reminiscent scowl. "The papers couldn't get a lead on the motive for the murder, and the police weren't talking for publication. Not a word about the Rajah's jewels. Washington saw to that! A young potentate's son, practically the guest of the country, touring about in a special for the sake of his education, and dashed near ending it in the river out West if it hadn't been for the rescue you know about—all that wouldn't look well in print; so there wasn't anything said about the slather of gems that was the reward of heroism from a grateful nabob, and we didn't get any help that way. All we knew was that Deemer came East with the jewels, presumably to cash in on them, and it looked as though Deemer were pretty clever—that he wore the money-belt for a stall, and that he had the sparklers safe somewhere else all the time. And I guess we all got to figuring it that way, because the fact that nothing was said about any theft was strictly along the lines the police were working, anyway, and it was a toss-up that they hadn't found the stuff all right among his effects. Get me?"

Get him! This wasn't real, was it, this room here—those two figures sitting there under that shaded lamp? Something cold, an icy grip, seemed to seize at her heart, as in a surge there swept upon her the full appreciation of her peril through these confidences to which she was listening. A word, an act, some slightest thing, might so easily betray her; and then— Her fingers, under the shawl and inside the wide pocket of her greasy skirt, clutched at her revolver. Thank God for that! *It* would at least be merciful! She nodded her head mechanically.

"But the police didn't find the jewels—because they weren't there to be found. Somebody got in ahead of us. Pinched 'em, understand, maybe only a few hours before you got in your last play, and from the way you say Deemer acted, before he was wise to the fact that he'd been robbed."

Rhoda Gray let her chair come sharply down to the floor. She must play her rôle of Bertha now as she never had before. Here was a question that she could not only ask with safety, but one that was obviously expected.

"Who was it?" she demanded breathlessly.

"She's coming to life!" murmured Danglar through a haze of cigarette-smoke. "I thought you'd wake up after a while, Bertha. This is the big night, old girl, as you'll find out before we're through."

"Who was it?" she repeated with well-simulated impatience.

"I guess she'll listen to me now," said Danglar with a little chuckle. "Don't overtax yourself any more, Matty. I'll tell you, Bertha; and it will perhaps make you feel better to know it took the slickest dip New York ever knew to beat you to the tape. It was Angel Jack, alias the Gimp."

"How do you know?" Rhoda Gray demanded.

"Because," said Danglar, as he lighted another cigarette, "he died yesterday afternoon up in Sing Sing."

SHE could afford to show her frank bewilderment. Her brows knitted into furrows as she stared at Danglar.

"You—you mean he confessed?" she said.

"The Angel? Never!" Danglar laughed grimly, and shook his head. "Nothing like that! It was a question of playing one fence against another. You know that Witzer, who's handled all our jewelry for us, has been on the lookout for any stones that might have come from that collection. Well, this afternoon he passed the word to me that he'd been offered the finest unset emerald he'd ever seen, and that it had come to him through old Jake Luertz's runner, a very innocent-faced young man who is known to the trade as the Crab."

Danglar paused—and laughed again. Unconsciously Rhoda Gray drew her shawl a little closer about her shoulders. It seemed to bring a chill into the room, that laugh. Once before, on another night, Danglar had laughed, and with his parted lips she had likened him to a beast showing its fangs. He looked it now more than ever. For all his ease of voice and manner, he was in deadly earnest; and if there was merriment in his laugh, it but seemed to enhance the menace and the promise of unholy purpose that lurked in the cold glitter of his small black eyes.

"It didn't take long to get hold of the

Crab"—Danglar was rubbing his hands together softly—"and the emerald with him. We got him where we could put the screws on without arousing the neighborhood."

"Another murder, I suppose!" Rhoda Gray flung out the words crossly.

"Oh, no," said Danglar pleasantly. "He squealed before it came to that. He's none the worse for wear, and he'll be turned loose in another hour or so, as soon as we're through at old Jake Luertz's. He's no more good to us. He came across, all right—after he was properly frightened. He's been with old Jake as a sort of familiar for the last six years, and—"

"He'd have sold his soul out, he was so scared!" The withered hand on the table twitched; the deformed creature's face was twisted into a grimace; the man was chuckling with unhallowed mirth, as though unable to contain himself at the recollection of a scene which he had witnessed himself. "He was down on his knees and clawing out with his hands for mercy, and he squealed like a rat. 'It's the sixth panel in the bedroom upstairs,' he says; 'it's all there. But for God's sake don't tell Jake I told. It's the sixth panel. Press the knot in the sixth panel that—'" He stopped abruptly.

Danglar had pulled out his watch, and with exaggerated patience was circling the crystal with his thumb.

"Are you all through, Matty?" he inquired monotonously. "I think you said something a little while ago about wasting time. Bertha's looking bored; and besides, she's got a little job of her own on for to-night." He jerked his watch back into his pocket, and turned to Rhoda Gray again. "The only one who knew all the details is Angel Jack, and he'll never tell now, because he's dead. Whether he came down from the West with Deemer or not, or how he got wise to the stones, I don't know. But he got the stones, all right. And then he tumbled to the fact that the police were pushing him hard for another job he was wanted for, and he had to get those stones out of sight in a hurry. He made a package of them and slipped them to old Luertz, who had always done his business for him, to keep for him; and before he could duck, the bulls had him for that other job.

"Angel Jack went up the river. See? Old Jake didn't know what was in that package; but he knew better than to monkey with it, because he always thought something of his own skin. He knew Angel Jack, and he knew what would happen if he didn't have that package ready to hand back the day Angel Jack got out of Sing Sing. Understand? But yesterday Angel Jack died—without a will; and old Jake appointed himself sole executor—without bonds! He opened that package, figured he'd begin turning it into money—and that's how we get our own back again. Old Jake will get a fake message to-night calling him out of the house on an errand uptown; and about ten o'clock Pinkie Bonn and the Pug will pay a visit there in his absence, and—well, it looks good, don't it, Bertha, after two years?"

RHODA GRAY was crouched down in her chair. She shrugged her shoulders now, and infused a sullen note into her voice.

"Yes, it's fine!" she sniffed. "I'll be rolling in wealth in my garret—which will do me a lot of good! That doesn't separate me from these rags, and the hell I've lived, does it—after two years?"

"I'm coming to that," said Danglar with his short, grating laugh. "We've as good as got the stones now, and we're going through to-night for a clean-up of all that old mess. We stake the whole thing. Get me, Bertha—the whole thing! I'm showing my hand for the first time. Cloran's the man that's making you wear those clothes; Cloran's the only one who could go into the witness-box and swear that you were the woman who murdered Deemer; and Cloran's the man who has been working his head off for two years to find you. We've tried a dozen times to bump him off in a way that would make his death appear due purely to an *accident,* and we didn't get away with it; but we can afford to leave the accident out of it to-night, and go through for keeps—and that's what we're going to do. And once he's out of the way,—by midnight,—you can heave Gypsy Nan into the discard."

It seemed to Rhoda Gray that horror had suddenly taken a numbing hold upon her sensibilities. Danglar was talking about murdering some man, wasn't he, so that she could resume again the personality of a woman who was dead? Hysterical laughter rose to her lips. It was only by a frantic effort of will that she controlled herself. She seemed to speak involunta-

rily, doubtful almost that it was her own voice she heard.

"I'm listening," she said; "but I wouldn't be too sure. Cloran's a wary bird, and there's the White Moll."

She caught her breath. What suicidal inspiration had prompted her to say that! Had what she had been listening to here, the horror of it, indeed turned her brain and robbed her of her wits to the extent that she should *invite* exposure? Danglar's face had gone a mottled purple; the misshapen thing at Danglar's side was leering at her most curiously.

It was a moment before Danglar spoke; and then his hand, clenched until the white of the knuckles showed, pounded upon the table to punctuate his words.

"Not to-night!" he rasped out with an oath. "There's not a chance that she's in on this to-night—the she-devil! But she's *next!* With this cleaned up, she's next! If it takes the last dollar of to-night's haul, and five years to do it, I'll get her, and get—"

"Sure!" mumbled Rhoda Gray hurriedly. "But you needn't get excited! I was only thinking of her because she's queered us till I've got my fingers crossed; that's all. Go on about Cloran."

Danglar's composure did not return on the instant. He gnawed at his lips for a moment before he spoke.

"All right!" he jerked out finally. "Let it go at that! I told you the other night in the garret that things were beginning to break our way, and that you wouldn't have to stay there much longer, but I didn't tell you how or why—you wouldn't give me a chance. I'll tell you now; and it's the main reason why I've kept away from you lately. I couldn't take a chance of Cloran's getting wise to that garret and Gypsy Nan." He grinned suddenly. "I've been cultivating Cloran myself for the last two weeks. We're quite pals! I'm for playing the luck every time! When the jewels showed up to-day, I figured that to-night's the night—see? Cloran and I are going to supper together at the Silver Sphinx at about eleven o'clock—and this is where you shed the Gypsy Nan stuff, and show up as your own sweet self. Cloran'll be glad to meet you!"

She stared at him in genuine perplexity and amazement.

"Show myself to Cloran!" she ejaculated heavily. "I don't get you!"

"You will in a minute," said Danglar softly. "You're the bait—see? Cloran and I will be at supper and watching the fox-trotters. You blow in and show yourself,—I don't need to tell you how; you're clever enough at that sort of thing yourself,—and the minute he recognizes you as the woman he's been looking for that murdered Deemer, you pretend to recognize him for the first time too, and then you beat it like a scared cat for the door. He'll follow you on the jump. I don't know what it's all about, and I sit tight, and that lets me out.

"And now get this! There'll be two taxicabs outside. If there's more than two, it's the *first* two I'm talking about. You jump into the one at the head of the line. Cloran wont need any invitation to grab the second one and follow you. That's all! It's the last ride he'll take. It'll be our boys, and not chauffeurs, who'll be driving those cars to-night, and they've got their orders where to go. Cloran wont come back. Understand, Bertha?"

THERE was only one answer to make, only one answer that she dared make. She made it mechanically, though her brain reeled. A man named Cloran was to be murdered; and she was to show herself as this—this Bertha—and—

"Yes," she said.

"Good!" said Danglar. He pulled out his watch again. "All right, then! We've been here long enough." He rose briskly. "It's time to make a move. You hop it back to the garret, and get rid of that fancy dress. I've got to meet Cloran uptown first. —Come on, Matty, let us out."

The place stifled her. She got up and moved quickly through the intervening room. She heard Danglar and his crippled brother talking earnestly together as they followed her. And then the cripple brushed by her in the darkness and opened the front door; and Danglar had drawn her to him in a quick embrace. She did not struggle; she dared not. Her heart seemed to stand still. Danglar was whispering in her ear:

"I promised I'd make it up to you, Bertha, old girl. You'll see—after to-night. We'll have another honeymoon. You go on ahead now—I can't be seen with Gypsy Nan. And don't be late—the Silver Sphinx at eleven."

She ran out on the street. Her fingers mechanically clutched at her shawl to loosen it around her throat. It seemed as

though she were choking, that she could not breathe. The man's touch upon her had seemed like hideous profanation; the scene in that room back there like some nightmare of horror from which she could not awake.

She hurried onward, back toward the garret, her mind in riot, in turmoil and dismay. It was not only the beginning of the end; it was very *near* the end! What was she to do? The Silver Sphinx—at eleven! That was the end—after eleven—wasn't it? She could impersonate Gypsy Nan; she could not, if she would, impersonate the woman who was dead! And then too, there were the stolen jewels at old Jake Luertz's! She could not turn to the police for help there, because then the Pug might fall into their hands, and—and the Pug was—was the Adventurer.

And then a sort of fatalistic calm fell upon her. If the masquerade was over, if the end had come, there remained only one thing for her to do. There were no risks too desperate to take now. It was she who must strike, and strike first. Those jewels in old Luertz's bedroom became suddenly vital to her. They were *tangible* evidence. With those jewels in her possession, she should be able to force Danglar to his knees. She could get them—before Pinkie Bonn and the Pug—if she hurried. Afterward she would know where to find Danglar—at the Silver Sphinx. Nothing would happen to Cloran, because, through her failure to cooperate, the plan would be abortive; but veiled as the White Moll, she could pick up Danglar's trail again there. Yes, it would be the end—one way or the other—between eleven o'clock and daylight!

She quickened her steps. Old Luertz was to be inveigled away from his home about ten o'clock. At a guess she made it only a little after nine now. She would need those skeleton-keys she had discovered in the secret hiding-place in the garret, in order to get into old Luertz's place; and she would need a flashlamp too. Well, she would have time enough to get them, and time enough, then, to run to the deserted shed in the lane behind the garret and change her clothes.

RHODA GRAY, as Gypsy Nan, went on as speedily as she dared without inviting undue attention to herself, reached the garret, secured the articles she sought, hurried out again, and went down the lane in the rear to the deserted shed. She remained longer here than in the attic, perhaps ten minutes, working mostly in the darkness, risking the flashlamp only when it was imperative; and then, the metamorphosis complete, a veiled figure, in her own person, as Rhoda Gray the White Moll, she was out on the street again, and hastening back in the same general direction from which she had just come.

She knew old Jake Luertz's place, and she knew the man himself very intimately by reputation. There were few such men and such places that she could have escaped knowing in the years of self-appointed service that she had given to the worst, and perhaps therefore the most needy, element in New York. The man ostensibly conducted a little secondhand store; in reality he probably "shoved" more stolen goods for his clientele than any other fence in New York. She knew him for an oily, cunning old fox who lived alone in the two rooms over his miserable store—unless of late his young henchman the Crab had taken to living with him—though, as far as that was concerned, it mattered little to-night, since the Crab, for the moment, thanks to the gang, was eliminated from consideration.

She reached the secondhand store—and walked on past it. There was a light upstairs in the front window. Old Luertz therefore had not yet gone out in response to the gang's fake message. She knew old Luertz's reputation far too well for that; the man would never go out and leave a gas-jet burning—which he would have to pay for!

There was nothing to do but wait. Rhoda Gray sought the shelter of a doorway across the street. She was nervously impatient now. The minutes dragged along. Why didn't the man hurry and go out? "About ten o'clock," Danglar had said—but that was very indefinite. Pinkie Bonn and the Pug might be as late as that; but, equally, they might be *earlier!*

It seemed an interminable time. And then, her eyes strained across the street upon that upper window, she drew still farther back into the protecting shadows of the doorway. The light had gone out.

A moment more passed. The street-door of the house opposite to her—a door separate from that of the secondhand store—opened, and a bent, gray-bearded man stepped out, peered around, locked the

door behind him and scuffled down the street.

Rhoda Gray scanned the dingy and ill-lighted little street. It was virtually deserted. She crossed the road and stepped into the doorway from which the old fence had just emerged. It was dark here, well out of the direct radius of the nearest street-lamp, and, with luck, there was no reason why she should be observed—if she did not take too long in opening the door! She had never used a skeleton-key in her life before, and—

She inserted one of her collection of keys in the lock. It would not work. She tried another and still another—with mounting anxiety and perplexity. Suppose that—yes! The door was open now! With a quick glance over her shoulder, scanning the street in both directions to make sure that she was not observed, she stepped inside, closed the door, and locked it again.

HER flashlamp stabbed through the darkness. Narrow stairs immediately in front of her led upward; at her right was a connecting door to the secondhand shop. Without an instant's hesitation she ran up the stairs. There was no need to observe caution, since the place was temporarily untenanted; there was need only of haste. She opened the door at the head of the stairs, and with a quick, eager nod of satisfaction as the flashlamp swept the interior, stepped over the threshold. It was the room she sought—old Luertz's bedroom.

And now the flashlamp played inquisitively about her. The bed occupied a position by the window; across one corner of the room was a cretonne hanging that evidently did service as a wardrobe; across another was a large and dilapidated washstand; there were a few chairs and a threadbare carpet; and opposite the bed another door, closed, which obviously led into the front room.

Rhoda Gray stepped to this door, opened it and peered in. She was not concerned that it was evidently used for kitchen, dining-room and the stowage of everything that overflowed from the bedroom; she was concerned only with the fact it offered no avenue through which any added risk or danger might reach her. She closed the door as she had found it, and gave her attention now to the walls of old Luertz's bedroom.

She smiled a little whimsically. The Crab had used a somewhat dignified term when he had referred to "panels." True, the walls were of stained wood, but the wood was of the cheapest variety of matched boards, and the stain was of but a single coat, and a very meager one at that! The smile faded. There were a good many knots; and there were four corners to the room, and therefore *eight* boards, each one of which would answer to the description of being the sixth panel.

She went to the corner nearest her, and dropped down on her knees. As well start with this one! She had not dared press Danglar, or Danglar's deformed brother, for more definite directions, had she? She counted the boards quickly from the corner to her right; and then, the flashlamp playing steadily, she began to press first one knot after another in the board before her, working from the bottom up. There were many knots; she went over each one with infinite care. There was no result.

She turned then to the sixth board from the corner to her left. The result was the same. She stood up, her brows puckered, a sense of anxious impatience creeping upon her. She had been quite a while over even these two boards, and it might be any one of the remaining six!

Her eyes traversed the room, following the ray of the flashlamp. If she only knew *which* one, it would— Was it an inspiration? Her eyes had fixed on the cretonne hanging across one of the far corners from the door, and she moved toward it now quickly. The hanging might very well serve for another purpose than that of merely a wardrobe! It seemed suddenly to be the most likely of the four corners because it was ingeniously concealed.

She parted the hanging. A heterogeneous collection of clothing hung from pegs and nails. Eagerly, hastily now, she brushed these aside, and close to the wall, dropped down on her knees again. The minutes passed. Twice she went over the sixth board from the corner to her right. She felt so *sure* now that it was this corner. And then, still eagerly, she turned to the sixth board at her left.

It was warm and close here. The clothing hanging from the pegs and nails enveloped her, and with the cretonne hanging itself, shut out the air, what little of

it there was, that circulated through the room.

Over the board, from the tiniest knot to the largest, her fingers pressed carefully. Had she missed one anywhere? She must have missed one! She was sure the panel in question was here behind this hanging. Well, she would try again, and—

What was that?

IN an instant the flashlamp in her hand was out, and she was listening tensely. Yes, there was a footstep—two of them—not only on the stairs, but already just outside the door. It seemed as though a deadly fear, cold and numbing, settled upon her and robbed her of even the power of movement. She was caught! If it was Pinkie Bonn and the Pug, and if this corner hid the secret panel as she still believed it did, this was the first place to which they would come, and they would find her here among the clothing that had evidently been the cause of deadening any sound on those stairs out there—until it was too late.

She held her breath, her hands tight upon her bosom. There was no time to reach the sanctuary of the other room—the footsteps were already crossing the threshold from the head of the stairs. And then a voice reached her—the Pug's. It *was* the Pug and Pinkie Bonn.

"Strike a light, Pinkie! Dere's no use messin' around wid a flash. De old geezer'll be back on de hop de minute he finds out he's been bunked, an' de quicker we work de better."

A match crackled into flame. An air-choked gas-jet, with a protesting hiss, was lighted. And then Rhoda Gray's drawn face relaxed a little, and a strange, mirthless smile came hovering over her lips. What was she afraid of? The Pug was the Adventurer, wasn't he? This was one of the occasions when he could not escape the entanglements of the gang, and must work for the gang instead of appropriating all the loot for his own personal and nefarious ends; but he *was* the Adventurer. The White Moll need not fear him, even though he appeared, linked with Pinkie Bonn, in the rôle of the Pug! So there was only Pinkie Bonn to fear.

Rhoda Gray took her revolver from her pocket. She was well armed—and in more than a material sense. The Adventurer did not know that she was aware of the Pug's identity. Her smile, still mirthless, deepened. She might even turn the tables upon them, and still secure the stolen stones. She had turned the tables upon Pinkie Bonn last night; to-night, if she used her wits, she could do it again!

And then suddenly she stifled an exclamation, as the Pug's voice reached her again:

"Wot are youse gapin' about? Dere aint anything else worth pinchin' around here except wot's in de old gent's safety-vault. Get a move on! We aint got all night! It's de corner behind de washstand. Give us a hand to move de furniture!"

It *wasn't* here behind the cretonne hanging! Rhoda Gray bit her lips. Well, her supposition had been natural enough, hadn't it? And she would have tried every corner before she was through, if she had had the opportunity.

She moved now slightly, without a sound, parting the clothing away from in front of her, and moving the cretonne hanging by the fraction of an inch where it touched the side wall of the room. And now she could see the Pug, with his dirty and discolored celluloid eye-patch, and his ingeniously contorted face; and she could see Pinkie Bonn's pasty-white, drug-stamped countenance.

It was not a large room. The two men in the opposite corner along the wall from her were scarcely more than ten feet away. They swung the washstand out from the wall, and the Pug, going in behind it, began to work on one of the wall boards. Pinkie Bonn, an unlighted cigarette dangling from his lip, leaned over the washstand watching his companion.

A minute passed—another. It was still in the room, except only for the distant sounds of the world outside—a clatter of wheels upon the pavement, the muffled roar of the elevated, the clang of a trolley-bell. And then the Pug began to mutter to himself. Rhoda Gray smiled a little grimly. She was not the only one, it would appear, who experienced difficulty with old Jake Luertz's crafty hiding-place!

"Say, dis is de limit!" the Pug growled out suddenly. "Dere's more damned knots in dis board dan I ever saw in any piece of wood in me life before, an'—" He drew back suddenly from the wall, twisting his head sharply around. "D'ye hear dat, Pinkie!" he whispered tensely. "Quick! Put out de light! *Quick!* Dere's some one down at de front door!"

RHODA GRAY felt the blood ebb suddenly from her face. She had heard nothing save the rattle and bump of a wagon along the street below; but she had had reason to appreciate on a certain occasion before that the Pug, alias the Adventurer, was possessed of a sense of hearing that was abnormally acute. If it was some one else—who was it? What would it mean to her? What complication here in this room would result? What—

The light was out. Pinkie Bonn had stepped silently across the room to the gas-jet near the door. Her straining eyes could just make out the Adventurer's form kneeling by the wall, and then—was she mad! Was the faint night-light of the city filtering in through the window mocking her? The Adventurer, hidden from his companion by the washstand, was working swiftly and without a sound —or else it was a phantasm of shadows that tricked her! A door in the wall opened; the Adventurer thrust in his hand, drew out a package, and leaning around, slipped it quickly into the bottom of the washstand—where, with its little doors, there was a most convenient and very commodious compartment. He turned again then, seemed to take something from his pocket and place it in the opening in the wall, and then the panel closed.

It had taken scarcely more than a second.

Rhoda Gray brushed her hand across her eyes. No, it wasn't a phantasm! She had misjudged the Adventurer—quite misjudged him! The Adventurer, even with one of the gang present—to furnish an unimpeachable alibi for him!—was plucking the gang's fruit again for his own and undivided enrichment!

Pinkie Bonn's voice came in a guarded whisper from the doorway.

"I don't hear nothin'!" said Pinkie Bonn anxiously.

The Pug tiptoed across the room and joined his companion. She could not see them now, but apparently they stood together by the door listening. They stood there for a long time. Occasionally she heard them whisper to each other; and then finally the Pug spoke in a less guarded voice.

"All right," he said. "I guess me nerves are gettin' de creeps. Shoot de light on again, an' let's get back on de job. An' youse can take a turn dis time pushin' de knots, Pinkie; mabbe youse'll have better luck."

The light went on again. Both men came back across the room, and now Pinkie Bonn knelt at the wall while the Pug leaned over the washstand watching him. Pinkie Bonn was not immediately successful; the Pug's nerves, of which he had complained, appeared shortly to get the better of him.

"Fer Gawd's sake, hurry up!" he urged irritably. "Or else lemme take another crack at it, Pinkie, an'—"

A low, triumphant exclamation came from Pinkie Bonn, as a small door in the wall swung suddenly open.

"There she is, my bucko!" he grinned. "*Some* nifty vault, eh? The old guy—" He stopped. He had thrust in his hand, and drawn it out again. His fingers gripped a sheet of notepaper—but he was seemingly unconscious of that fact. He was leaning forward, staring into the aperture. "It's empty!" he choked.

"Wot's dat!" cried the Pug, and sprang to his companion's side. "Youse're crazy, Pinkie!" He thrust his head toward the opening—and then turned and stared for a moment helplessly at Pinkie Bonn. "So help me!" he said heavily. "It's—it's empty." He shook his fist suddenly. "De Crab's handed us one; dat's wot! But de Crab'll get his fer—"

"It wasn't the Crab!" Pinkie Bonn was stuttering his words. He stood, jaws dropped, his eyes glued now on the paper in his hand.

The Pug, his face working, the personification of baffled raged and intolerance, leered at Pinkie Bonn.

"Well, who was it, den?" he snarled.

Pinkie Bonn licked his lips.

"The White Moll!" He licked his lips again.

"De White Moll!" echoed the Pug incredulously.

"Yes," said Pinkie Bonn. "Listen to what's on this paper that I fished out of there! Listen! She's got all the nerve of the devil! *'With thanks, and my most grateful appreciation—the White Moll.'*"

The Pug snatched the paper from Pinkie Bonn's hand, as though to assure himself that it was true.

Rhoda Gray smiled faintly. It was good acting, very excellently done—seeing that the Pug had written the note and placed it in the hiding-place himself!

"My God!" mumbled Pinkie Bonn

thickly. "I aint afraid of most things, but I'm gettin' scared of her. She aint *human*. Last night you know what happened, and the night before, and—" He gulped suddenly. "Let's get out of here!" he said hurriedly.

The Pug made no reply, except for a muttered growl of assent and a nod of his head.

THE two men crossed the room. The light went out. Their footsteps echoed back as they descended the stairs, then died away.

Then Rhoda Gray moved for the first time. She brushed aside the cretonne hanging, ran to the washstand, possessed herself of the package she had seen the Pug place there, and then made her way, cautious now of the slightest sound, downstairs.

She tried the door that led into the secondhand shop from the hall, found it unlocked, and with a little gasp of relief slipped through and closed it gently behind her. She did not dare risk the front entrance. Pinkie Bonn and the Pug were not far enough away yet, and she did not dare wait until they were. Too bulky to take the risk of attempting to conceal it about his person while with Pinkie Bonn, the Pug, it was obvious, would come back alone for that package, and it was equally obvious that he would not be long in doing so. There was old Luertz's return that he would have to anticipate. It would not take wits nearly so sharp as those possessed by the Pug to find an excuse for separating promptly from Pinkie Bonn!

Rhoda Gray groped her way down the shop, groped her way to a back door, unbolted it, working by the sense of touch, and let herself out into a back yard. Five minutes later she was blocks away, and hurrying rapidly back toward the deserted shed in the lane behind Gypsy Nan's garret.

Her lips formed into a tight little curve as she went along. There was still work to do to-night—if this package really contained the stolen legacy of gems left by Angel Jack. She had first of all to reach a place where she could examine the package with safety; then a place to hid it where it would be secure; and then—Danglar!

She gained the lane, stole along it, and disappeared into the shed through the broken door that hung, partly open, on sagging hinges. Here she sought a corner and crouched down so that her body would smother any reflection from her flashlamp. And now, eagerly, feverishly, she began to undo the package; and then, a moment later, she gazed, stupefied and amazed, at what lay before her. Precious stones, scores of them, nestled on a bed of cotton; they were of all colors and of all sizes—but each of them seemed to pulsate and throb, and from some wondrous, glorious depth of its own to fling back from the white ray upon it a thousand rays in return, as though into it had been breathed a living and immortal fire.

And Rhoda Gray, crouched there, stared—until suddenly she grew afraid, and suddenly with a shudder she wrapped the package up again. These were the stones for whose fabulous worth the woman whose personality she, Rhoda Gray, had usurped, had murdered a man; these were the stones which were indirectly the instrumentality—since but for them Gypsy Nan would never have existed—that made her to-night, now, at this very moment, a hunted thing, homeless, friendless, fighting for her very life against police and underworld alike!

She rose abruptly to her feet. She had no longer any need of a flashlamp. There was even light of a sort in the place—she could see the stars through the jagged holes in the roof, and through one of these, too, the moonlight streamed in. The shed was all but crumbling in a heap. Underfoot, what had once been flooring was now but rotting, broken boards. Under one of these, beside the clothing of Gypsy Nan which she had discarded but a little while before, she deposited the package; then she stepped out into the lane, and from there to the street again.

NOW she became suddenly conscious of a great and almost overpowering physical weariness. She did not quite understand at first, unless it was to be attributed to the reaction from the last few hours—and then, smiling wanly to herself, she remembered. For two nights she had not slept. It seemed very strange. That was it, of course, though she was not in the least sleepy now—just tired, just near the breaking-point.

But she must go on. To-night was the end, anyhow. To-night, failing to keep her appointment as Bertha, the crash

must come; but before it came, as the White Moll, armed with the knowledge of the crime that had driven Danglar's wife into hiding, and which was Danglar's crime too, and with the evidence in the shape of those jewels in her possession, she and Danglar would meet somewhere—*alone*. Before the law got him, when he would be closemouthed and struggling with all his cunning to keep the evidence of other crimes from piling up against him and damning whatever meager chances he might have to escape the penalty for Deemer's murder, she meant—yes, even if she pretended to compound a felony with him—to force or to inveigle from him a confession of the authorship and details of the scheme to rob Skarbolov that night when she, Rhoda Gray, in answer to a dying woman's pleading, had tried to forestall the plan, and had been caught, apparently, in the very act of committing the robbery herself! With that confession in her possession, with the identity of the unknown woman who had died in the hospital that night established, her own story would be believed.

And so, if she were weary, what did it matter? It was only until morning. Danglar was at the Silver Sphinx now with the man he meant that she should help him murder—only that plan would fail, because there would be no Bertha to lure the man to his death, and she, Rhoda Gray, had only to keep track of Danglar until somewhere, where he lived, perhaps, she should have that final scene, that final reckoning with him alone.

It was a long way to the Silver Sphinx, which she knew, as everyone in the underworld and everyone in New York who was addicted to slumming knew, was a combination dance-hall and restaurant in the Chatham Square district. She tried to find a taxi, but without avail. A clock in a jeweler's window which she passed showed her that it was ten minutes after eleven. She had had no idea that it was so late. At eleven sharp, Danglar had said. Danglar would be growing restive! She took the elevated. If she could risk the protection of her veil in the Silver Sphinx, she could risk it equally in an elevated train!

But in spite of the elevated it was, she knew, well toward half-past eleven when she finally came down the street in front of the Silver Sphinx. From under her veil she glanced half curiously, half in a sort of grim irony, at the taxies lined up before the dance-hall. The two leading cars were not taxies at all, though they bore the earmarks, with their registers, of being public vehicles for hire; they were large, roomy, powerful, and looked, with their hoods up, like privately owned motors. Well, it was of little account! She shrugged her shoulders as she mounted the steps of the dance-hall. Neither Bertha nor Cloran would use those cars to-night!

A BEDLAM of noise smote her ears as she entered the place. A jazz band was in full swing; on the polished section of the floor in the center a packed mass of humanity swirled and gyrated and wriggled in the contortions of the latest dance, and laughed and howled immoderately; and around the sides of the room the waiters rushed this way and that amongst the crowded tables, mopping at their faces with their aprons. It seemed as though confusion itself held sway!

Rhoda Gray scanned the occupants of the tables. The Silver Sphinx was particularly riotous to-night, wasn't it? Yes, she understood! A great many of the men were wearing little badges. Some society or other was celebrating—and was doing it with abandon! It was certainly a free-and-easy night! Everything went!

Danglar! Yes, there he was—quite close to her, only a few tables away—and beside him sat a heavy-built, clean-shaven man of middle age. That would be Cloran, of course—the man who was to have been lured to his death. Danglar was nervous and uneasy, she could see. His fingers were drumming a tattoo on the table; his eyes were roving furtively about the room; and he did not seem to be paying any but the most distrait attention to his companion, who was talking to him.

Rhoda Gray sank quickly into a vacant chair. Three men, linked arm in arm, and decidedly more than a little drunk, were approaching her. She turned her head away to avoid attracting their attention. It was *too* free and easy here to-night, and she began to regret her temerity at having ventured inside; she would better, perhaps, have waited until Danglar came out—only there were two exits, and she might have missed him—and—

A cold fear upon her, she shrank back

in her chair. The three men had halted at the table and were clustered around her. They began a jocular quarrel among themselves as to who should dance with her. Her heart was pounding. She stood up and pushed them away.

"Oh, no, you don't!" hiccoughed one of the three. "Gotta see your—hic!—pretty face, anyhow!"

She put up her hands frantically and clutched at her veil—but just an instant too late to save it from being wrenched aside. Wildly her eyes flew to Danglar. His attention had been attracted by the scene. She saw him rise from his seat; she saw his eyes widen—and then, stumbling over his chair in his haste, he made toward her. Danglar had recognized the White Moll!

She turned and ran. Fear, horror, desperation, lent her strength. It was not like this that she had counted on her reckoning with Danglar! She brushed the roisterers aside and darted for the door. Over her shoulder she glimpsed Danglar following her. She reached the door, burst through a knot of people there and, her torn veil clutched in her hand, dashed down the steps. She could only run—run, and pray that she might escape.

And then a mad exultation came upon her. She saw the man in the chauffeur's seat of the first car in the line lean out and swing the door open. And in a flash she grasped the situation. The man was waiting for just this—for a woman to come running for her life down the steps of the Silver Sphinx. She put her hand up to her face, hiding it with the torn veil, raced for the car and flung herself into the tonneau.

The door slammed. The car leaped from the curb. Danglar was coming down the steps. She heard him shout. The chauffeur, in a startled way, leaned out, as he evidently recognized Danglar's voice—but Rhoda Gray was mistress of herself now. The tonneau of the car was not separated from the driver's seat, and bending forward, she wrenched her revolver from her pocket, and pressed the muzzle to the back of the man's neck.

"Don't stop!" she gasped, struggling for her breath. "Go on! Quick!"

THE man, with a frightened oath, obeyed. The car gained speed. A glance through the window behind, showed Danglar climbing into the other car.

And then for a moment Rhoda Gray sat there fighting for her self-control, with the certain knowledge in her soul that upon her wits, and her wits alone, her life now depended. She studied the car's mechanism over the chauffeur's shoulder, even as she continued to hold her revolver pressed steadily against the back of the man's neck. She could drive a car—she could drive this one. The presence of this chauffeur, one of the gang, was an added menace; there were too many tricks he might play before she could forestall them, any one of which would deliver her into the hands of Danglar behind there—an apparently inadvertent stoppage due to traffic, for instance, that would bring the pursuing car alongside—that, or a dozen other things which would achieve the same end.

"Open the door on your side!" she commanded abruptly. "And get out—without slowing the car! Do you understand?"

He turned his head for a half incredulous, half frightened look at her. She met his eyes steadily—the torn veil, quite discarded now, was in her pocket. She did not know the man; but it was quite evident from the almost ludicrous dismay which spread over his face that he knew her.

"The—the White Moll!" he stammered. "It's the White Moll!"

"Jump!" she ordered imperatively—and her revolver pressed still more significantly against the man's flesh.

He seemed in even frantic haste to obey her. He whipped the door open, and before she could reach to the wheel, he had leaped to the street. The car swerved sharply. She flung herself over into the vacated seat and snatched at the wheel barely in time to prevent the machine from mounting the curb.

She looked around again through the window of the hood. The man had swung aboard Danglar's car, which was only a few yards behind.

Rhoda Gray drove steadily. Here in the city streets her one aim must be never to let the other car come *abreast* of her; but she could prevent that easily enough by watching Danglar's movements, and cutting across in front of him if he attempted anything of the sort. But ultimately what was she to do? How was she to escape? Her hands gripped and clenched in a sudden almost panic des-

peration at the wheel. Turn suddenly around a corner, and jump from the car herself? It was useless to attempt it; they would keep too close behind to give her a chance to get out of sight. Well, then, suppose she jumped from the car and trusted herself to the protection of the people on the street? She shook her head grimly. Danglar, she knew only too well, would risk anything, go to any length, to put an end to the White Moll. He would not hesitate an instant to shoot her down as she jumped—and he would be fairly safe himself in doing it. A few revolver-shots from a car that speeded away in the darkness offered an even chance of escape. And yet, unless she forced an issue such as that, she knew that Danglar would not resort to firing at her here in the city. He would want to be sure that was the only chance he had of getting her, before he accepted the risk that he would run of being caught for it by the police.

SHE found herself becoming strangely, almost unnaturally cool and collected now. The one danger, greater than all others, that menaced her was a traffic-block that would cause her to stop and allow those in the other car behind to rush in upon her as she sat here at the wheel. Danglar *would* fire then, because the issue would be forced, and furthermore he would be absolutely certain of his aim! And sooner or later, if she stayed in the city, a block such as that was inevitable. She must get out of the city, then. It was only to invite another risk, the risk that Danglar was in the *faster* car of the two—but there was no other way.

She drove more quickly, made her way to the bridge and crossed it. The car behind followed with immutable persistence.

They passed through Brooklyn; and then, reaching the outskirts, Rhoda Gray, with headlights streaming into the black, with an open Long Island road before her, flung her throttle wide, and the car leaped like a thing of life into the night. It was a sudden start, it gained her a hundred yards—but that was all.

The wind tore at her and whipped her face; the car rocked and reeled as in some mad frenzy. There was not much traffic, but such as there was, it cleared away from before her as if by magic as, seeking shelter from the wild, meteoric thing running amuck, the few vehicles that she encountered hugged the edge of the road, and the wind whisked to her ears fragments of shouts and execrations. Again and again she looked back—two fiery balls of light blazed behind her—always those same two fiery balls.

She neither gained nor lost. Rigid, like steel, her little figure was crouched over the wheel. She did not know the road. She knew nothing save that she was racing for her life. She did not know the end; she could not see the end. Perhaps there would be some merciful piece of luck for her that would win her through—a breakdown to that roaring thing, with its eyes that were balls of fire, behind.

She passed through a town with lighted streets and lighted windows—or was it only imagination? It was gone again, anyhow, and there was just black road ahead. Over the roar of the car and the sweep of the wind, then, she caught, or fancied she caught, a series of faint reports. She looked behind her. Yes, they were firing now. Little flashes leaped out above and at the sides of those blazing headlights.

How long was it since she had left the Silver Sphinx? Minutes or hours would not measure it, would they? But it could not last much longer! She was growing very tired; the strain upon her arms, yes, and upon her eyes, was becoming unbearable. She swayed a little in her seat, and the car swerved, and she jerked it back again into the straight. She began to laugh a little hysterically—and then, suddenly, she straightened up, tense and alert once more.

That swerve was the germ of an inspiration! It took root swiftly now. It was desperate—but she was desperate. She could not drive much more, or much longer like this. Mind and body were almost undone. Besides, she was not outdistancing that car behind there by a foot; sooner or later they would hit her with one of their shots, or perhaps what they were really trying to do, puncture one of her tires.

AGAIN she glanced over her shoulder. Yes, Danglar was just far enough behind to make the plan possible. She began to allow the car to swerve noticeably at intervals, as though she were weakening and the car was getting beyond her control—which was, indeed, al-

most too literally the case. And now it seemed to her that each time she swerved there came an exultant shout from the car behind. Well, she asked for nothing better; that was what she was trying to do, wasn't it?—inspire them with the belief that she was breaking under the strain.

Her eyes searched anxiously down the luminous pathway made by her high-powered headlights. If only she could reach a piece of road that combined two things—an embankment of some sort, and a curve just sharp enough to throw those headlights behind off at a tangent for an instant as they rounded it too, in following her.

A minute, two, another passed. And then Rhoda Gray, tight-lipped, her face drawn hard, as her own headlights suddenly edged away from the road and opened what looked like a deep ravine on her left, while the road curved to the right, flung a frenzied glance back of her. It was her chance—her one chance. Danglar was perhaps a little more than a hundred yards in the rear. Yes—*now!* His headlights were streaming out on her left as he too touched the curve. The right-hand side of her car, the right-hand side of the road were in blackness. She checked violently, almost to a stop, then instantly opened the throttle wide once more, wrenching the wheel over to head the machine for the ravine; and before the car picked up its momentum again, she dropped from the right-hand side, darted to the far edge of the road and flung herself flat down upon the ground.

The great black body of her car seemed to sail out into nothingness like some weird aërial monster, the headlights streaming uncannily through space—then blackness—and a terrific crash.

And now the other car had come to a stop almost opposite where she lay. Danglar and the two chauffeurs, shouting at each other in wild excitement, leaped out and rushed to the edge of the embankment. And then suddenly the sky grew red as a great tongue-flame shot up from below. It outlined the forms of the three men as they stood there, until, abruptly, as though with one accord, they rushed pellmell down the embankment toward the burning wreckage. And as they disappeared from sight Rhoda Gray jumped to her feet, sprang for Danglar's car, flung herself into the driver's seat, and the car shot forward again along the road.

A shout, a wild chorus of yells, the reports of a fusillade of shots reached her; she caught a glimpse of forms running insanely after her along the edge of the embankment—then silence save for the roar of the speeding car.

SHE drove on and on. Somewhere, nearing a town, she saw a train in the distance coming in her direction. She reached the station first, and left the car standing there, and with the torn veil over her face again, took the train.

She was weak, undone, exhausted. Even her mind refused its functions further. It was only in a subconscious way she realized that the garret, whither she had thought never to go again, and the rôle of Gypsy Nan, were more than ever now her sole refuge. The plot against Cloran had failed, but they could not blame that on Bertha's nonappearance; and since it had failed, she would not now be expected to assume the dead woman's personality. True, she had not, as had been arranged, reached the Silver Sphinx at eleven, but there were a hundred excuses she could give to account for her being *late* in keeping the appointment, so that she had arrived just in time, say, to see Danglar dash wildly in pursuit of a woman who had jumped into the car that *she* was supposed to take!

The garret! The garret again—and Gypsy Nan! Her surroundings seemed to become a blank to her, her actions to be prompted by some purely mechanical sense. She was conscious only that finally, after an interminable time, she was in New York again; and after that, long, long after that, dressed as Gypsy Nan, she was stumbling up the dark, ladderlike steps to the attic.

How her footsteps dragged! She opened the door, staggered inside, locked the door again and staggered toward the cot, and dropped upon it; and the gray dawn came in with niggardly light through the grimy little windowpanes, as though timorously inquisitive of this shawled and dissolute figure prone and motionless, this figure that in other dawns had found neither sleep nor rest—this figure that lay there now as one dead.

Further adventures of the "White Moll" will be told by that master-narrator Frank Packard in the next, the January, Blue Book Magazine.

The Three Man-Trailers

THE Pennsylvania State police have won a remarkable reputation. Here is a spirited story of one adventure which three of them shared.

By Frank A. Halverson

"WAIT a minute, trooper."

Sid Hartley, trooper of the State Police, stood at attention, his lithe, muscular body incased in a well-fitting constabulary uniform. His smiling face, tanned to a nut-brown, the complexion of the big outdoors, stamped him at a glance as quite ready for any emergency, either an adventure or a man's-size frolic.

"Sorry," said the captain, turning from the telephone, "I'll have to revoke that half-holiday. Some foreigners are raising Cain at Larryville. They've beaten up the constable, and they're terrorizing the town. The sheriff just phoned that he can't handle them at all. He wanted the whole troop." The captain smiled; such requests were common when a disturbance broke loose. "Go up and see what you can do, Sid."

"Dang it!" said the trooper under his breath, saluting.

As he turned to go, the captain caught a glimpse of Sid's woebegone face. The captain smiled slyly, saying:

"Is she a pretty girl, Sid?"

"Shucks!" blurted the State trooper disgustedly. "I'll never make another date; some fight busts 'em up every time. I'm sure unlucky with women."

In record time Sid galloped away from the barracks. A cloud of dust hid him till he struck the road that led to Larryville. He rode easily. A few low words came from his lips denouncing the squabbling foreigners who had robbed him of the promised holiday. "But it's in the day's work, anyhow," soliloquized Sid, pulling out his riot-stick and swinging savagely at the overhanging leaves of the wooded roadway.

As the trooper neared Larryville, a man passed him. Sid had seen him coming head down, but thought nothing of it until when the man looked up a startled expression of fear blanched the swarthy face.

Trooper Sid threw his horse back on its haunches. Where had he seen that face before? He ransacked his memory. No answer. The man leaped off the road hurriedly. The recognition of the State trooper's uniform caused him to plunge headlong into the woods, and soon he was hidden in the small oaks on the hillside.

"Thunderation!" muttered the State policeman. "Why did the sight of me put the fear of God in him that way? And that face! Where have I seen it?"

BUT he could not loiter, and giving his horse the rein, Trooper Sid came into Larryville on a gallop. Noticing a group of people by one of the low houses where the foreign coal-miners lived, Sid swung off his horse and pushed his way into the crowd. A strange hush fell over the throng; some were muttering prayers. A way opened at the sight of the dark uniform. Sid walked into the house briskly.

On an unkempt cot a man was lying. By the pallor of his ashen face Trooper Sid sensed the solemnness of the crowd. Death was in their midst.

"Who maka da stab?" asked Trooper Sid in the miners' polyglot, bringing his hand down as if it held a stiletto, so that the foreigner would understand what he was asking.

"B-l-a-c-k T-o-n-y," murmured the dying man weakly.

Sid's body stiffened instantly. The man by the roadside! His picture was in the Rogues' Gallery, labeled *"An escaped criminal, dangerous, wanted for murder. Reward for his capture."*

In the dying man Trooper Sid knew that he was now on the trail of a crime committed a year ago, when the Rocky Hill paymaster had been waylaid and killed, and the men's wages stolen. The criminals had made a clean get-away. The deed had occurred in "A" Troop's district of the State's constabulary. The troopers were therefore eternally on the lookout for the criminals. Black Tony and Italian Joe had been suspected. They had been working in Larryville at the time, and later on they had left the mining-town when the State troopers had become too active for permanent security.

Trooper Sid recognized the dying man as Italian Joe, and he had also seen Black Tony by the roadside. Why had they returned? Something all-powerful must have forced them back to the scene of the crime, when they knew that the State troopers were on their trail.

"Why you come back?" asked the trooper.

"We come for da mon'," whispered Italian Joe weakly.

"You ketchum?" questioned the trooper.

"Tony got," murmured Joe laying his hand over the wound. "I ketchum da stab."

That was the secret of their return: a fight over their ill-gotten spoils! Black Tony must have feared that Italian Joe might weaken and give the secret away. Perhaps Tony wanted the lion's share, for he was, no doubt, the craftier of the two, and therefore Trooper Sid surmised that Tony had given his pal the pay of a treacherous stiletto to keep him quiet forever.

"Where's Black Tony living?" The trooper shot the question quickly, for Joe was sinking fast.

"Steeltown," muttered Joe weakly.

The trooper motioned for the doctor, and mounting his horse he was soon back at the barracks, where his report was received by the captain with a grim smile. Black Tony had returned, and this time he would pay to the law he had so far succeeded in eluding.

"Black Tony's scooted with the money," concluded Trooper Sid positively, in closing his report.

"Would you know him?" asked the captain quietly.

"I would," responded Sid.

"Get him; he's your man," commanded the captain.

These instructions comprised the State trooper's code, "Get your man!"—nothing more.

Trooper Sid left on the first train for the busy steel city west of the barracks, having first exchanged the dark service uniform for citizen's clothes in his man-trailing quest. Black Tony would no doubt strike for his home haunts, the steel mills, where in the maelstrom of America's melting-pot Trooper Sid might seek in vain for him.

Among the thousands Tony would be lost in the mass of humanity that looked alike, acted alike, talked alike, and who were alike in every respect; and nowhere would he be likely to see the face of the man that he had met by the roadside.

HARDLY had Trooper Sid left the barracks to hunt down Black Tony in the steel-mills, before Recruit Jim Harvey, new member of the State's force, received his first glimpse of Sergeant Irish Hemminway, whom he saw entering the commanding officer's quarters.

"He's some man, isn't he?" said Rookie Jim admiringly.

"Some man's right," agreed a veteran trooper. "Bet he's going on Black Tony's trail too. Sid and Irish, still-hunting, one in the city and one on the track, you know. But Rookie, when you see Irish in action, you'll agree that a battery of guns has nothing on him. He's all muscle and tough as whalebone. There isn't a thing under the sun that pleases Irish better than a mix-up, either. That's his diet for an enjoyable life."

"Uh huh!" nodded the rookie. He could believe that. He had seen his broad back and sturdy legs, and about him there was snap and pep in abundance.

"Yes sir," continued the trooper, "Irish has a record for getting his man; or if there's more, that's better. Why, when the coal miners were squabbling— Here he comes; I'll tell you about it later." And the trooper hurried away as Irish approached the new trooper leisurely.

Admiration was in the rookie's eyes as Irish sauntered up to him. He had just come in that morning with "his man," and Rookie Jim had joined the troop the night before; so they were not acquainted.

"My new partner!" greeted Irish amiably. "You're taking the late Trooper Chesco's place, I understand? He was a great true pal, and he fought death with his teeth shut and eyes defiant. The stuff in him was genuine, and he was the whitest man on this side of heaven."

Irish blinked his blue eyes. A mist had gathered over their blueness, and Rookie Jim understood that Sergeant Irish Hemminway carried a tender heart for a comrade under the dark State uniform. Exultation surged through Trooper Jim's wild young blood. Irish's side-partner! That was luck. And he a rookie! Then Jim recalled Irish's remark about Chesco's being a fighter; he himself was in a sense untried. Wouldn't Hemminway want a test? Jim looked up and found Irish's eyes appraising him in a searching scrutiny. He seemed to be determining his worth in a steady gaze that penetrated Trooper Jim like a knife.

"Captain wants to see you," said Irish, smiling slightly and rather mysteriously.

ROOKIE JIM obeyed instantly. The new young State soldier appeared fit for any task when he saluted the captain. His flexible body moved gracefully as if composed of steel springs; his face shone ruddily, radiating perfect health; his eyes were keen and fearless as he faced the commanding officer of the constabulary.

The captain surveyed the young rookie with a swift glance of admiration.

"Ready for your initiation trip?" asked the officer kindly.

"I am," came Rookie Jim's ready answer.

"Good!" said the captain.

He too eyed Jim in a peculiar way. Behind it lurked something that puzzled the young trooper. Irish had smiled in a like manner, and now the captain! What was back of those mysterious smiles, anyhow?

"It's a three-cornered man-chase that I'm putting you on to begin with," said the captain. "Trooper Sid Hartley is in the steel city after Black Tony; Sergeant Irish Hemminway is taking Tony's trail from Larryville; and I want you to call and see Mr. Martin Kelly about a blackmailing scheme which I think Tony is back of in one of the steel town's suburbs. See Mr. Kelly for fuller instruction, and then act for yourself."

That was all, and Jim departed. When outside, Jim felt happily elated. His first commission! He had made good so far.

The following day found Trooper Jim in the steel city too. He had no knowledge of Trooper Sid or Sergeant Hemminway, as they were each working alone. In the industrial town Jim found that special orders were rushing the great furnaces day and night. The intense flares from coke, gas and chemicals roared toward the sky, illuminating the low, closely built houses in an orange hue of snapping sparks.

JIM crossed the street and entered the bank, where he found business to be brisk. It was some time before Mr. Kelly appeared. He was a big, bulky man. He stood a moment in the doorway and appraised Jim with narrowed eyes, while a frown spread over his broad face.

"I asked for a man," growled the banker crustily, "not a boy."

Jim's face flushed at the apparent insolence. He advanced a step. His face was a bit pale; his lips were tightly drawn; and in his eyes there smoldered sparks of fire. The banker reluctantly reached out his big, fluffy hand in response to Jim's greeting—and Jim gripped his fingers with the spring of a steel trap so that the banker exclaimed, "O-o-o-ch!" in a long-drawn wail of surprise.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed the banker. "My mistake," he continued, apologizing. "Trooper, you are a young fellow, but that grip of yours—my!"

"Now," began Jim, businesslike, "what's up?"

"A blackmailing scheme!" said the banker. "I'm to 'place the money on the Monongahela bridge on Monday night. Put it under the center arc-light between two loose boards. If you tell the police—'"

Mr. Kelly showed Jim a sketch of a coffin with a skull and crossbones above, and a black hand gripping a dagger underneath.

Jim whistled knowingly.

"These fellows mean it," said the banker slyly. "They've been reaping a rich harvest among the fear-stricken workers. No one has dared tell the police, because a shot in the dark, a knife in the back, or a bomb under the house of the informer is their method of working. But —frightening foreigners is different from Americans. I'm going to fight. That's why I asked for a good man of the State troopers. I'll try to help you get 'em, even if I take a ride in the long box they've sent me."

"On Monday night, eh?" said Jim musingly. "Have you the money, Mr. Kelly?"

The banker crashed his hand on the table.

"Never," he exclaimed. "They wont get a cent from me!"

"Of course not," replied Jim. "I expect to land 'em when the money is picked up. See! Mark it, you understand, and then I'll watch the bridge and nab them."

"Fine chance!" scoffed the banker. "You can't shadow on the bridge. It's lighted up too well. If you're loitering around, they'll not show up. They've got it figured out nicely."

"CLEVER scoundrels," muttered Rookie Jim an hour later in walking over the bridge. He did not seem to be inspecting the lay-out as closely as he really was. To shadow the spot where the money was to be placed was out of the question; Jim saw that instantly. At night the bridge would be deserted, and then it would be impossible.

Rookie Jim wanted to do the job alone, perhaps nab Black Tony in the act, as this would put him in the Troop permanently; he therefore lost no time in laying his plans. He worked quietly, and he devised a trick that would be a new one on the schemers and land them safely in the State's stone house.

So, when the banker placed the money according to directions, the bridge was empty. Overhead a few stars faintly reflected their diamond brilliancy in the ruffled water of the river. Mr. Kelly, the banker, advanced to the designated spot, smiling all the while, and wondering where his trooper was stationed. Silence brooded over the sleeping steel town. An hour passed. Late pedestrians hurrying home walked by the hidden money. The graying tinge of dawn was faintly beginning to brighten the western horizon, while from the river rose a white mist, thick and heavy, enveloping the bridge.

Out of the silence came a faint footstep. A man, smiling slightly, passed stealthily under the arc-light. Cautiously he worked his way toward the hidden money. A dark mask hid his face; yet a pair of steel-blue eyes, keenly alert, quickly found the spot where the secreted money had been placed, and in jig time he held the bank-notes in his hand.

A shrill whistle sounded in the morning's silence. The blackmailer made a run for the opposite side of the bridge. He did not go very far, however. Coming out of the shadows, Rookie Jim met him face to face.

The man turned quickly.

"Halt!" commanded Rookie Jim, knowing that he had Black Tony covered.

The masked man did not obey, but raised his arm to throw the money into the river, and about the same time Jim's revolver snapped out an orange flash in the morning's grayness.

"The game's up," admitted the masked man, apparently subdued. "State trooper, eh?" he grunted, looking at Jim's uniform. "I aint kickin' 'bout bein' nabbed, but I'd like to know how you did it. Say, who whistled when I got the money?"

"My helpers," replied Rookie Jim rather pompously, failing to note the quick gleam of the steel-blue eyes peering out from the mask. "You see, there's always a slip in the best-laid plans. Yours was no exception. I couldn't shadow the bridge, you know, but had you looked closely this evening, when the railroad section-gangs came in from work, you'd have noticed that each crew had two tool-boxes when they need only one. To-night they had two because I had a boy in each one of them. The railroad embankment being higher than the bridge made it easy for one of them to spot you taking the money. When he whistled, it wasn't hard for me to get here from my place of concealment."

"Huh!" snorted the man contemptuously. "That's clever work. So's this!"

"Bing!" Jim stopped a terrific blow under the jaw. It was his payment for carelessness. The punch caught him squarely and lifted him off his feet. His revolver cluttered over the bridge into the water. Reeling, he staggered against the railing, but he did not go down, for his

legs were still strong. In a stooped position, he waited for another blow. It did not come. In the meantime he straightened up. He realized that he had given the masked man a glorious opportunity, in his pompous pride of having trapped him. The man had accepted the opportunity on the spot.

"Took you a long time, State trooper, to come back from dreamland," chided the masked man rather affably. "I understand your code is to get your man, and that's why I waited to give you another chance. Take me! I'm yours."

Jim took the invitation and rushed blindly. In the graying shadows of the not distant morning, Jim saw red. The face behind the mask smiled; the man sidestepped, and again Rookie Jim measured his length on the bridge from a wicked smash on the neck. When Jim opened his eyes, he was alone on the bridge. It was now early daylight.

"He was game, anyway," muttered Jim, rising to his knees. Pain racked his body with every move. "He must have hit me all over, and I thought I was some mixer!" Struggling to a standing position, Rookie Jim mumbled: "It's Irish or Sid you should have met instead of me; I'm green! Oh, gee! I've missed my first man! Missed him clean, at that—outfought, outwitted and beaten when I had him. Good Lord! What a failure to report to the captain!"

BUT if Trooper Jim had missed, still, in the three-cornered man-hunt Trooper Sid and Irish were somewhere; that same evening Sid had been shadowing a saloon where the worst element congregated, hidden, as he supposed, from view, when from behind his back a revolver snapped its sharp bark, and at the same time a bullet grazed Sid's head burningly. The trailing was still on.

Sid dropped, muttering: "Hello, Tony!"

His man had recognized him. Trooper Sid could hear him running, the echoing steps sounding faintly in the darkness.

"Thought he got me," mused the State trooper, rising out of the position for a shot. "Why didn't he come up to see if I had got mine for keeps? Taking no chances, eh? Well—we'll meet again."

They did, unexpectedly, the next day in a restaurant. Face to face in the doorway, they confronted each other. The trooper recognized Tony as the man by the roadside. He edged close and shoved his bulging coat pocket against the supposed criminal's side, where he could feel the round ring of steel from the trooper's service-revolver against his ribs.

"Hello," greeted Sid in a whisper. "Glad to see you, Tony."

The man coldly shrugged his shoulders, saying: "You maka mistake for me, Misteer."

"No," laughed the State trooper. "Step right along. Sorry you didn't wait last night."

The trooper nudged him with the muzzle of his revolver. "I would have talked back in the same language. Guns all speak alike, Tony."

"What do you want?" demanded the man, forgetting his pigeon English and speaking plainly.

"You," snapped the State trooper.

"Oh, you're an officer!" replied the man suavely. "Such being the case, I submit."

"Man!" ejaculated Sid in surprise. Tony's change was too sudden, and it took him off his balance. He was going to play innocent, eh?

"What's the charge?" asked the prisoner.

"Two murders and a robbery."

The captive laughed sarcastically, holding out his hands for the handcuffs. "That makes me a desperate criminal—until I clear myself. And of course, Officer, you'll put the bracelets on."

There was a sinister note of challenge in the man's words that struck the State trooper unpleasantly. Man for man, the trooper had no fear of any man breaking away. Sid was trained, hard as steel, and while desperate men take desperate chances, he felt equal to coping with them at all times. Yet the insinuation was all too plain, and Trooper Sid's conception of a foreigner taunting him brought a quick retort of disdain to his lips.

"Thanks," replied the man with a slight bow. "I sha'n't try to escape. Such a move would only come from a guilty man. I am innocent; I have nothing to fear. I shall come back here to live when I have proven my innocence. That I can readily do. No doubt my resemblance to the man you are seeking is responsible for my arrest."

"That's nerve," muttered Trooper Sid under his breath. Then to his prisoner: "That's all right, but Black Tony, you're going with me, and then you can talk to the judge. Get me?"

"I do," replied the man. "I wish, however, that you would call me Antonio Picato. I am a mission-worker."

"Step along," urged Trooper Sid determinedly.

TO reach the railroad station with his prisoner it was necessary to pass the steel workers' settlement on the hillside. This was a desolate stretch of road littered with rubbish of all kinds. A tall fence encircled the steel-mill. Mr. Picato seemed in the best of spirits. Trooper Sid was puzzled. How could a man be unconcerned who was going to pay the final settlement to the law, unless he was innocent? With natural ease, Picato appeared the part he professed. However, Trooper Sid had handled bad men before, and therefore he did not take his eyes off of the self-styled mission-worker; nor did he allow the muzzle of his revolver to point in any other direction than straight at Picato's side.

"Ah!" This exclamation came from Picato. "My shoestring's loose. May I tie it?"

"Sure," agreed the State trooper instantly.

A red flare from the steel ovens shooting a shower of orange sparks into the air drew the trooper's attention from his prisoner. And then the trooper in a fleeting instant saw something more, but too late to avoid it. A terrific upper-cut found his jaw. Trooper Sid spun headlong off the road, landing in the briars and rubbish, and sank into troubled darkness, insensible.

Later on, Trooper Sid arose from his unwelcome sleep, holding his swollen face.

"Kick me," muttered Trooper Sid, "for being a conglomerate fool. Knocked out! Had him, and let him break away!" His wail was nearly the same as that of Trooper Jim's back on the Ridge. Sid looked around. No one was in sight. On the right rose the fence around the steel-mill; ahead was the station and the railroad-yard with its passing freight-trains, and on the left was the storing-place of great steel tubes lying in rows and in tiers. With a gloomy prospect of getting his man, Trooper Sid viewed the surroundings. Every way offered an avenue of escape. Which way had Tony gone?

The trooper studied them all. Puzzled, he stood gently holding his aching face. What could he do? Spread the alarm and have every section of the country watched? That would admit his inability to get his man, and the boys back in the barracks would certainly have a just cause in giving him the laugh for his failure.

"No sir," said Sid to himself, "I must get him alone; he's not gone far. I'll wager he's sticking round here some place, waiting for night to come. And where's he likely to be just now? The steel-mill? No, the guards would keep him away. The railroad? Not until he could safely board a freight-train after dark would he leave. The big steel tubes!

"There's where he is!" exclaimed the State trooper.

But in drawing his gun, a piece of paper fluttered out of the holster. Trooper Sid picked it up and unfolded it, to read it with genuine astonishment:

> Report to the Captain immediately.
> SERGEANT HEMMINWAY.

"Suffering cats!" exploded Trooper Sid. "The Sergeant must have been following me. But he saw Tony lay me out. Wonder if he got him—"

WHILE Trooper Sid had been in dreamland, the grim game of the man-trailers had not abated. Irish Hemminway had, indeed, been following the trail unseen like a thoroughbred, even after Trooper Sid had had his man, and that was why he saw Black Tony break away after putting Trooper Sid out with his wicked blow. When Irish reached the scene, Tony was out of sight.

"He's here," muttered Irish, doggedly taking up the race. "Gosh!" he exclaimed a little later as he noticed that where the tubes lay side by side a cavity was formed between them. Cautiously he bent down and looked through the opening. He could see daylight seeping in from the other side. That indicated to the wily Irish that no one was hiding between them. Crawling on his hands and knees, revolver ready, he could see daylight between all the tubes until he reached the last one. It was blocked completely.

Grim determination spread over Irish's face. Black Tony had dug a burrow hole, and he was between the two tubes.

"Come out!" commanded the officer.

The echo of his voice answered, "Come out," but that was all.

"It's you or me," said Irish quietly.

He dropped on his knees and crawled

into the opening. His gun was pointed straight ahead. His pull would come with the flash from Tony's shot. Edging his way in farther, sticking close to the curving sides of the tube, Irish crawled on, every nerve set on a hair-spring ready to meet the attack from the cornered quarry. Pulling himself ahead, Irish reached the obstruction that shut out the daylight. His heart gave a leap of adventurous joy, for a bank of dirt presaged the fact that Black Tony had dug himself in, barricaded the passage like an army trench; no doubt Tony was waiting for the trooper to come close enough to guarantee a hit before he fired. He reasoned it out this way as he dragged himself closer, moving his arm in a circle to ward off Black Tony's weapon as he edged himself upon the embankment. He tried to see into the dugout, but the darkness was too great. However, a glitter flashed ahead, a quick silvery twinkle like a falling star on a dark night. Irish drew back quickly, his tense nerves relaxing a bit.

"He hasn't got a gun," confided Irish to himself, "—only a knife. Got back in time, I guess, or he would have carved me like he did Italian Joe, his pal. I've got to get him out alive, so that the law can do the rest. But how?"

A shot fired high brought only a sarcastic laugh from Black Tony.

"Next one will get you," answered Irish, "unless you crawl out feet first."

"Will it?" taunted Black Tony. "I'll never come out alive."

He meant it. As a doomed man he would fight to the last. Tony had no hope in the law, and he knew it.

Irish thought quickly. Picking up a small stone, after shoving his revolver into the holster, he shouted: "Come in on his back, Sid," using the name of the trooper that Tony had broken away from, and at the same time throwing the stone over Black Tony's head. It fell, and the ruse worked, for Black Tony turned, expecting to be attacked from the rear, and Irish sprang on him out of the darkness. The knife spun out of Tony's hand from the sudden impact. They grappled for an advantage. Heavy breathing and muttered curses came out of the darkness. Man met man at his worst, and Irish fought as he never had fought before, until at length his superior training wore Tony out, and with a sigh of relief he heard the click of the handcuffs that manacled the criminal.

BUT when Irish returned to the barracks with his man, the captain had him go into a side room, where he could hear Rookie Jim telling his story of how Black Tony got away from him on the bridge.

"Oh, that's all right," said the captain lightly. "Your man came in about three hours ago."

"Came in?" exclaimed Rookie Jim. "By himself?"

"Yes," corroborated the captain, "and now explain why you tried to arrest one of the troop's best men."

"I—I—" stammered Jim, in bewilderment.

"Yes?"

"I was arresting Black Tony."

"No," denied the captain, smiling, "you tackled Sergeant Hemminway. You were not on Black Tony's trail at all."

"What?" stammered Jim, hopelessly puzzled.

"Of course, you don't understand," enlightened the captain. "Sergeant Hemminway wanted to try you out to see if you had the stuff of a trooper in you. So he fixed up the scheme with Mr. Kelly, the banker, while Sid was on the trail of Black Tony. Sergeant Hemminway told me that those tool-boxes with the boys in them was a new one on him, and he's recommended you for the troop, but he tells me that he must teach you how to fight."

A flushed smile played hard for a place on Rookie Jim's astonished face, while he muttered to himself: "You son of old Ireland, I've got it in for you."

"And now, Trooper Sid," said the captain, turning on the second luckless State soldier, "where's your man?"

"If Sergeant Hemminway didn't get him," replied the trooper frankly, "God only knows where he is. I had him, but he outwitted me—knocked me cold; and when I came to, I found this order from Sergeant Hemminway."

The captain grinned. "Ah! Here's Sergeant Hemminway," he exclaimed.

Irish advanced, smiling. He grasped Rookie Jim's and Trooper Sid's hands warmly.

"No hard feelings, boys, between us; we've landed our man. A good piece of work at that, eh?"

Jim rubbed his chin and clenched his hand, keeping it low so that the captain would not see it, and Irish smiled his acceptance by showing him his knotted fist from the side of his uniform.

Leatherneck Tales

The Repeater

By Barney Furey

FAR inland, in the Colorado mountains, two men of the Marine Corps encounter one of their interesting adventures.

CORPORAL MICKEY BROGAN of the United States Marines was stepping high, wide and handsome. Before a dun-colored building on Larimer Street, in Denver, he paraded, the brass buttons of his blue coat catching every glint of the bright Colorado sun, his white belt newly blancoed, his duck trousers displaying a crease as sharp as a cheese-knife, and his Enfield cocked over his shoulder at an angle that displayed the utmost complacency in life.

Bald little Mickey Brogan was on recruiting duty, back from the fever and the jungles of the "spick" countries, living the life of Reilly, and with nothing more on his mind than to guard the Marine Corps "A" sign with its appeal for recruits, and to direct the applicants up the wide stairway to his partner, Sergeant Ed Delaney, just as gloriously attired, the bright golden chevrons and enlistment stripes on his blue blouse giving him an appearance all the more exalted, in spite of its zebralike tendencies.

For Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan of the Marines, the world was unusually roseate. Stationed in a summer-resort in place of the tropical banana republics, with commutations for food and lodging, with motion-picture theaters, good restaurants, flashy recruiting uniforms, no drills and no reveille, and best of all an officer in charge who was all that one could ask for, life seemed to be running pretty much on the level. Perhaps that was why Mickey's voice bore such a sirenlike strain as he approached every man who stopped before the "A" sign with its Reisenberg painting of the flag-raising in a far-away clime, and chirped:

"Hey, buddy, better hit the upper deck and ask for some of our booklets. Good pay, great chow, fine chance to see the world; serve on land, sea and air. Three-in-one service, and something doing every minute!"

But there was one time when Mickey Brogan did not speak first. A man had hurried around the corner, glanced up at the recruiting flag, and then, seeing the resplendent corporal, stopped.

"Enlisting anybody now?" he asked; and Mickey Brogan, in the flashing glance before he answered, noticed a certain mien about the man that one does not get from civilian life. Nor was it the bearing of a trained soldier—rather the strained, self-conscious appearance of a "boot" in the recruit-camp, incessantly alert for the bark of the drill-sergeant, constantly in an atmosphere of "squads east," and intermi-

nably reminded of the "run around the barrel" at the slightest infraction of regulations. Mickey grinned.

"Surest thing you know, buddy. Thinking about signing up for another hitch?"

"Me? I've never been in service before."

"No? What'd you do during the war?"

"Munitions. They exempted me Powder-tester."

"Nice job! I'd rather fight. Want to enlist, huh? Walk right up the stairs and ask for Sergeant Delaney."

MICKEY BROGAN watched sharply until the man was headed safely up the stairs; then he stepped out into the street, and assuring himself that Sergeant Delaney was watching, sharply presented arms and returned to the sidewalk. Upstairs, Ed Delaney turned to the "Top Cutter" and winked.

"There's a repeater on the way up," he said quietly. "I just got the flash from Mickey Brogan."

In the parlance of the Corps, that meant a great deal. The curse of the recruiting office, the bane of headquarters and the nuisance of the "boot-camp," is the "repeater." He is the man who has deserted from the army, the navy or the Marine Corps and then entered the service again, in the hope of eluding the punishment that follows him until the statute of limitations has expired. Sometimes he is the man with a dishonorable discharge, or one who has failed to complete his enlistment at a previous time, who is again seeking service and depending upon an alias and his protestations of no prior service to elude the sleuths of the organization—and those sleuths comprise every officer and every man who is loyal at heart to the outfit whose insignia he wears.

Therefore a keen-eyed group awaited the man who had made his way into the recruiting office—a group, however, that apparently had no desire in life save the enlistment of men to fill the vacancies in the Corps. Straight, tall, well-balanced in weight and carriage, the applicant paused at the door, gazed at the brass-buttoned men within the office, then removed his hat.

"I'm looking for Sergeant Delaney," he announced. The veteran of the Marine Corps rose genially.

"Right here, buddy!" he answered. "What can I do for you?"

"I thought I'd like to join the Marine Corps for a—for an enlistment."

He had almost said "hitch," the service man's slang for enlistment. But Delaney covered the fact that he had discerned it.

"You've come to the right man," he jollied. "Ready for the examination now?"

"Sure."

Clue number two! In spite of all he may know of the corps from outside sources, the "first-timer" invariably asks questions, looks at pamphlets, inquires into the chances of travel, and thinks, last of all, of the extremely necessary physical examination that inevitably precedes the primary acceptance of the recruit. Nor was that all.

Instinctively, during that examination, the tall, good-looking applicant betrayed himself—once when he shut his eyes during the hearing test, again when he kept the eye behind the "paddle" open during the sight-test, and again when his heels came suspiciously together as the naval examining surgeon entered the room.

Phase by phase the examination progressed. Minute by minute Delaney waited for the final betrayal to display itself. At last it came, as the surgeon finished his examination:

"Do you know of any illness or disease that I have not detected which would keep you from entering a military life?"

"I don't know of any, sir."

There was the stamp of service, that one word "sir" addressed to an officer. Delaney smiled ever so slightly as he pushed the printer's-ink roller for the taking of the finger-prints.

"You've gotten over great," he cajoled as he pressed the fingers of the applicant on the chart, "but you wont ship out for a week or so. We're holding recruits now until we get a batch of ten before we let 'em shove off for camp."

"I don't go east, do I?"

Delaney repressed a desire to smile at the further betrayal of the applicant's knowledge of the Corps.

"No," he answered as he reached for the benzol to clean the ink from the recruit's fingers. "You go to California—Mare Island. Come on over to the desk now, until I make out your enlistment papers."

A HALF-HOUR later Major Eugene Fortson, officer in charge of recruiting, looked up from his work to find Sergeant

Delaney standing at attention in the doorway.

"Sir," the Sergeant began when the Major had nodded him forward, "we've just examined a man who gave the name of Thomas Martin. He made certain breaks which gave him away as a repeater. I've taken the liberty, sir, of writing a letter for the Major to sign, informing the finger-print section that he's suspected."

"Good! What about the man?"

"Martin, sir? I've told him that there'll be a delay to wait for other recruits. I have his address, sir—the Manx Hotel."

"Keep your eyes on him. You asked for telegraphic reply on those finger-prints?"

"Yes sir."

"Good! Better bring it in for signature now. I'll send it special delivery."

Four days later Sergeant Ed Delaney was again in the Major's office, while the officer read a telegram, then handed it to the Sergeant:

Marine Recruiting,
Denver, Colo.
Finger-prints applicant Thomas Martin 120643 show enlisted under name Robert Thorn 104382, November 12, deserted Paris Island, December 22. Arrest and return Paris Island.
114316. MARCORPS.

The Major nodded. "Proceed with the arrest. Take Corporal Brogan with you."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Blancoed belts gave way to the dark tan that goes with side-arms. Then Ed Delaney and his bald, chunky companion hurried out of the recruiting-office toward the lower section of town and the Manx Hotel. A frowsy landlady greeted them.

"Mr. Martin?" she asked. "He's gone."

"Where?"

"Back home, I guess, back near Pine Ridge. His wife's sick."

"Wife?" Brogan looked at Delaney. "He didn't say anything about a wife to you?"

"Not a word."

"Well," the landlady had interrupted vigorously, "he's got one—and a baby too. I know—he told me when he came back from the post office. That's why he was so worried. The baby's only a couple of months old."

"Gosh!" The two Marines stared hard at each other now. Their task suddenly had assumed difficult proportions. Hurriedly they returned to the recruiting-office and reported. The Major's kind face suddenly became wrinkled and old.

"Proceed with the arrest," he said at last with a voice into which the coldness had been injected by pure force. "Handle the affair as gently as possible. If the woman is dangerously ill, do nothing that will aggravate her condition, but wait until she has improved. Remember, however, you are responsible for the arrest of the man!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Just outside the door, Mickey Brogan turned to his companion.

"I'd rather be fighting spicks," he murmured. A voice from the rear called to him.

"Corporal Brogan!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Mickey whirled.

"What was that you just said?"

Mickey's fingers twitched.

"I—I just said, sir, that fighting spicks was a lot easier job than this job, sir."

A slight smile touched the corners of the Major's lips, but there was no humor in it.

"That goes for all three of us, Corporal," came quietly. "It's as hard for me to order the arrest as for you to carry it out. I shall depend on you men to act in such a way as to bring no discredit to the Corps from a standpoint of humanity, justice and fair dealing. Remember that this woman is not an offender against the law, and protect her feelings and health in every possible way."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

THEY wheeled and made their way to the Top Cutter's desk for their transportation-requests. Two hours later, in the stuffy, hot smoker of the narrow-gauge line, they were making their circuitous way through the tumbled hills toward Pine Ridge.

Higher and higher, through cañon and along mountain-side, crossing one range after another, only to find a taller one just ahead; farther and farther the train made its way, while passengers dozed, and the two marines forgot the flaring colors of the tumbled scenery in the thoughts of the task before them. On and on; then sudden interest took the place of lethargy within the train.

Blue-white streaks of smoke were beginning to make their way across the hills; the air slowly became inflamed with the

odor of pitch and the tang of burning pine. A screech of warning sounded from the laboring locomotive; at a small station an excited agent ran forth, hatless, coatless, holding high a flimsy message for the conductor to catch as the train ground past. There was no need for explanation—those first trailing wisps of blue-white had told their story: a forest fire!

A great curve, and a chance to peer ahead. Above the range in the distance the clouds hung low and heavy and sullen, but they were not the clouds of rain. Far away, where the snow of the high mountains threw the lower hills into sharp relief, a great blackened scar, fringed by wisps of trailing white, gave evidence of the path of the destroyer. Straight ahead a dull pink showed in the heavy billows of smoke, the faint color of flames, powerful enough to reflect even in spite of glaring sunlight. A roaring voice made itself heard above the buzzing speculation of the smoker:

"This train stops until further orders at Pine Ridge, because of forest-fires. All passengers traveling to further destinations will be furnished meals and lodging at the Pine Ridge Hotel."

Mickey Brogan shrugged his shoulders.

"That lets us out. We'll get to our job, all right. Our work's in Pine Ridge."

"Near Pine Ridge," Delaney corrected.

The train ground on into heavier smoke, thicker, hotter, and air contaminated by the scorched odors of destroyed vegetation. Down a grade, while the smoke grew thicker; then the train came to a lurching stop in the excited, milling little town of Pine Ridge. And of the throng which crowded the train platforms, the first to step to the ground were the figures of the two Marines.

FROM one to another they went, making their inquiries and learning of the extent of the great blaze, which, through a streak of fortune, had swept onward just beyond a cañon which separated the Ridge from the range proper. Quickly, thoroughly, they questioned as to the extent of loss, the relief-parties, the dangers to those who made their homes in the recesses of the hills. An informant rubbed his chin.

"Far as I can make out," he speculated, "we're mostly safe around here. Over by Carystown, they're in a bad way—least, they said so just before the wires went out. But we can't do anything there; it's fifteen mile over the range, with the fire in front of us."

"Everybody around here escaped?"

The informant shook his head.

"Not everybody. We're just counting ourselves lucky, in fact, that nearly everybody got out of it. There were a couple of families over the hogback that didn't have a chance—and there wasn't no way for us to help 'em!"

"You're certain?"

"Certain?" The mountaineer pointed toward the blackened, smoking stretches beyond. "Could anything live in that? It's the same way for miles."

"But"—and the faces of the two Marines were white with seriousness—"haven't you made any investigation?"

The old mountaineer, a veteran of forest flame, smiled sadly.

"We don't need none, sonny. We've called the roll. They aint here."

"That's the hogback over there, is it?" Sergeant Delaney pointed into the blackened distance.

"Yep."

"Where did these families live?"

The mountaineer pointed again.

"Well," he said at last, "the MacDonalds—there were four of 'em—lived three miles over the hogback, straight as the crow flies. About two mile beyond that was a fellow named Thorn and—"

"A wife and baby?" Delaney snapped out the question.

"Yep. He just got in here last night. The woman was sick. Doc Masters was just about to start out there when the fire showed up. Seems—"

But Sergeant Delaney was not listening. He had turned and grasped his corporal by the arm.

"It's us over the hill, Mickey!" he said grimly, and the bald little companion of many an adventure made no answer—in words. Ten minutes later they were at the edge of town and making their way into the deep cañon that separated them from the blackened char of the forest fire.

A long, scrambling descent, then, forgetting their immaculate uniforms, they fought their way across the plunging stream that roared through the cañon and began the slow climb to the desolated regions above.

An earthly inferno it was, of blackened, smoking trees, their gaunt, charred trunks stretching heavenward as though transfixed in agony; of stones cracked and

crumpled from the intense heat; of great stretches of nothing save withered twigs and twisted, seared remains of vegetation. Here pools of water steamed and spluttered as the branches of trees, cracking at last, dropped into them, still aflame at the core. Now and then they glimpsed the flattened, blackened carcass of a chipmunk or a rabbit; once they stumbled upon the burned body of a deer that still gasped; and the booming of Mickey's service revolver roared through the stricken hills as they ended the animal's misery.

The heat of the flame-swept earth crept through the soles of their heavy shoes. The polluted air cut their nostrils and turned their throats to raw avenues of agony.

THREE miles through a terrestrial hades; then Ed Delaney, his clothes blackened, his face smudged and greasy, suddenly ran forward toward the smoldering remains of a log cabin. Quickly he bent, then rising, motioned Mickey back.

"Let's go around this way," he said in a queer, harsh voice as he rejoined his companion. "No need of you looking. They're gone, all four of them. The man had a revolver in his hand."

"Bullets are better than fire," mused the tired little Corporal as he dragged his way over the next hill beside the Sergeant. Then, after a long silence: "I—I hope we have better luck—farther on."

Ed Delaney did not answer. He had stopped to raise a still-hot boulder and crush out the remaining life of a rattlesnake that writhed, not in anger but the anguish of burns. Time was when it would have been an act of natural enmity; now it was one of mercy. Mickey Brogan, whirling at a sudden warning, slapped out the sparks of a blouse that had just begun to burn from too frequent contact with the flickering blazes which lingered all about them. The Marines went on.

A mile—two. Ed Delaney, veteran that he was, again took the difficult task on his shoulders. Carefully, slowly, he made his way through the ruins of what once had been a cabin. Unmindful of the scorching heat, he swung rafters and charred timbers aside with his bare hands, and poked his way into every recess, to turn at last with a look of wondering relief in his eyes.

"Not there!"

"We've got a chance!"

"Where's a stream around here? It'd be the place they'd hit for."

Quickly they surveyed the surrounding hills, then pointed simultaneously far ahead. Streaking white against the somber black of the scarred range, a waterfall made its jagged way downward from the higher mountains above, lost itself for a moment in the heavy masses of giant boulders, then burst forth again. And as they looked, the Marines shook their heads in discouragement.

That stream meant nothing in safety. To its very edges the things that once had been fragrant pines were twisted and blackened and burned; the flames had crossed and recrossed—no great pools were there to check the rush of fire, to stop the all-pervading flame and offer a refuge. Even at this distance the cluttering forms of burned branches and seared trunks could be seen where they had splashed into the stream and seethed a moment in angry flames before they became deadwood. A place for a man, perhaps, a man strong enough to go through hell and live, but not a place for a woman weakened by illness, not a place for a baby. Glumly Delaney kicked at a twig, flaring with a new blaze, then turned to his comrade.

"It's our only chance. Come on."

Mickey started forward.

"I'm afraid I know how we'll find them."

"Pipe down!" There was the asperity of conviction in Sergeant Delaney's voice—the conviction that Mickey was correct.

They made the stream and started along its winding, tumbling course, fighting their way along the banks or through the rapids, stopping, then working doggedly forward again, their jaws set, their faces gray, looking, searching for the thing they were afraid to find.

Onward, upward, through a tiny cañon and into a small valley that once had shown the brilliant green of a mountain meadow, now only a stretch of stubbed yellow and floating black. Onward into the rocks again, into the avenues where anguished arms of the forest stretched painfully upward in seared horror. Onward—then Brogan's fingers clenched at his Sergeant's arm with the bite of steel.

"Look!"

FAR ahead the shoulders and head and arms of a man showed at the edge of the water, bared arms from which the clothing had been torn and burned, arms that stretched outward toward what seemed to be a wall in the rocks. For a long time

the Marines splashed forward, then stopped again.

There was a story in the still picture before them, a story that held the two Marines transfixed for a moment. Those arms had not been outstretched in vain. The thing that seemed a wall in the rocks was what it really appeared, a wall of mud and silt scraped from the river-banks by those torn hands that now lay still, a wall that was dry and cracking now, a wall fashioned in a last struggling attempt at completion before the roar and rush of flame should come upon this form that now lay sagging and quiet on the river-bank. And beyond the wall—what?

"Gosh! If he only won!" It was Mickey's voice, fervent, prayerful. The Marines had started forward again now, wading waist-deep in the small pool that separated them from the figure on the bank. Delaney shook his head.

"He did his best—that's a cinch!" There was a queer catch in the husky voice of the Sergeant. "But it was a gamble. There must be a cave behind there. If he got enough mud in that hole before the smoke started coming heavy, there was a chance. But Mickey,"—there was an anguished stare in his eyes,—"I hate to look!"

They forced themselves across the pool. Tenderly they lifted the man from the stream, their eyes half closed that they might dim the sight of those blackened arms, those hands, torn and raw and blood-caked from the cuts of sharp stones and grating pebbles in his struggle for the lives of others. Hesitatingly they stood beside him, each hoping for the other to volunteer in the search for some evidence of life. At last Mickey tensed.

"You took the hard job before," he said quietly. Then he went to his knees and pressed his head against the chest of the form on the ground.

He blinked. His mouth opened in a quick, surprised manner. His eyes rolled. Then with a cry, he leaped to his feet.

"Eh!" he shouted. "He's alive—his heart's pounding good—good, I tell you! He aint bad off, honest, from that heart! Listen—I've got a hunch! He pulled through—stayed under water enough to keep from burning to death. Look—it's mostly his arms! See? Probably was trying to pull down that wall when he went down and out. Quick! Let's get at it!"

They leaped to the barricade of caked mud and silt, now a hard-baked mass from the intense heat. Hurriedly they jabbed at its hard outer surface with their knives, at last to make an indentation to the softer interior. Then, with their bare hands they dug and tore at the heavy mass which blocked their entrance to the mystery beyond.

Larger and higher grew the pile of earth dug from the passageway; then together the Marines leaned forward and shouted. The faint sound of a voice had come from beyond—a woman, calling a name! The hands of Brogan and Delaney, fast becoming raw, dug more feverishly than ever.

A small hole at last, opening into a dark interior. A Marine's face pressed hard against the silt.

"Are you safe?"

"Bob!"—a woman's voice. Then in anguished fear: "You're not Bob! Where's Bob—my husband! He was outside. He said—"

"Don't worry." Then Sergeant Delaney turned to his companion. "Feel hefty enough to lift that fellow?" he whispered. "I want to get him out of the way before—before she sees him!"

Corporal Mickey Brogan swung his arms quickly as though to give more strength to his shoulders.

"To Pine Ridge?" he whispered.

"Yeh. Then send somebody back with a stretcher. The woman's sick, you know."

CORPORAL BROGAN nodded. Then Sergeant Ed Delaney, telling falsehoods wreathed in white, blocked the hole in the silt wall and made excuses for the delay. And as he talked, as he lied, as he shut off the view of the outside world to the woman within the small cave, a sturdy, bald little corporal, stumbling now and then, made his slow way down the bank of the stream, an inert form over his shoulders. Then the lies of Ed Delaney ceased—for his mind had gone back to other days and other things; a torn, blackened wood just like this, and a sturdy little man carrying another on his shoulders, six kilometers to the dressing-station, out of the evil forest of Belleau that now has the name on the war-maps of France as "Bois de la Brigade de Marine." Was it any wonder therefore that the orders from headquarters were that Corporal Mickey Brogan and Sergeant Ed Delaney should be detailed together to the end of their serv-

ice in the Corps? Was it any wonder that—

But a voice called Ed Delaney back to a present day, the tiny voice of a crying child. Hastily he turned as Mickey Brogan passed out of sight in the boulders below.

"Hey, there, youngster!" he called cheerily. "Just you pipe down and cork off for a while. Everything's fine an' dandy—only it's going to take me a little while to open up this apartment. How'd you get along for air in there, Mrs. Thorn?"

"All right. It was a little smoky, but not much. Are you sure my husband's safe?"

"Sure." Ed Delaney said it wholeheartedly. "He may be laid out for a while, but—but he's safe."

The last words dragged on his lips. Sergeant Ed Delaney had thought of the mission which had brought him to Pine Ridge.

A thought that lingered—lingered late that night as Mickey Brogan and Sergeant Delaney sat in the hall of the tiny hospital at Pine Ridge. Both had been silent a long time, at last to hunch forward as the physician approached.

"How is he?"

"Better." The physician looked at them sharply. "Are you good friends of his?"

"Why?"

"He keeps saying he must see you. Better go up there and let him get rid of what's on his mind."

The jaws of the two Marines set. Slowly they turned. A minute later they faced the bandaged figure of Robert Thorn. From one to the other the burned man stared, then shot the question:

"You didn't tell her?"

"About what?" Delaney forced the inquiry. A twisted smile came to the man's lips.

"No use beating around the bush. I know what you two came up here for. There—there wasn't a chance for me to get away with it—but I'd told her I came back on furlough, and—and I had to make good."

"But the alias."

"It was my only chance. I told her I was going to adopt a service name." He smiled again. "She doesn't know there isn't such a thing." Then again he queried. "She doesn't know I—I deserted?"

"No."

A silence. Then Delaney's voice:

"You're not the sort of man that usually pulls such stuff, Thorn."

"Thanks. But—I had to. She wired me—about—the baby. I had to go to her —without waiting." Then a bandaged hand was raised painfully, to beckon the leathernecks closer. A glazed look came into the man's eyes. "I'm trusting you," he whispered. "You're marines. I—I—had to come—I couldn't wait for a furlough. It was her honor or mine. I married her four days after I deserted!"

The straining, bandaged head sank back on the soft pillow. The arms dropped. A sagging droop came to the eyelids. Quietly Ed Delaney nodded and touched a finger to his lips as a nurse turned the knob of the door. A forced, casual remark; then the two Marines tiptoed down the hall.

Back to their seats they went; then Ed Delaney spoke—with the snap of command:

"Mickey!"

"Yes."

"You stay on guard. You can do it as well in the hotel as here. That man can't move for a week. I'm going to Denver to report."

"Listen!" Mickey was grasping his arm. "You'll see the Major, wont you? You'll—"

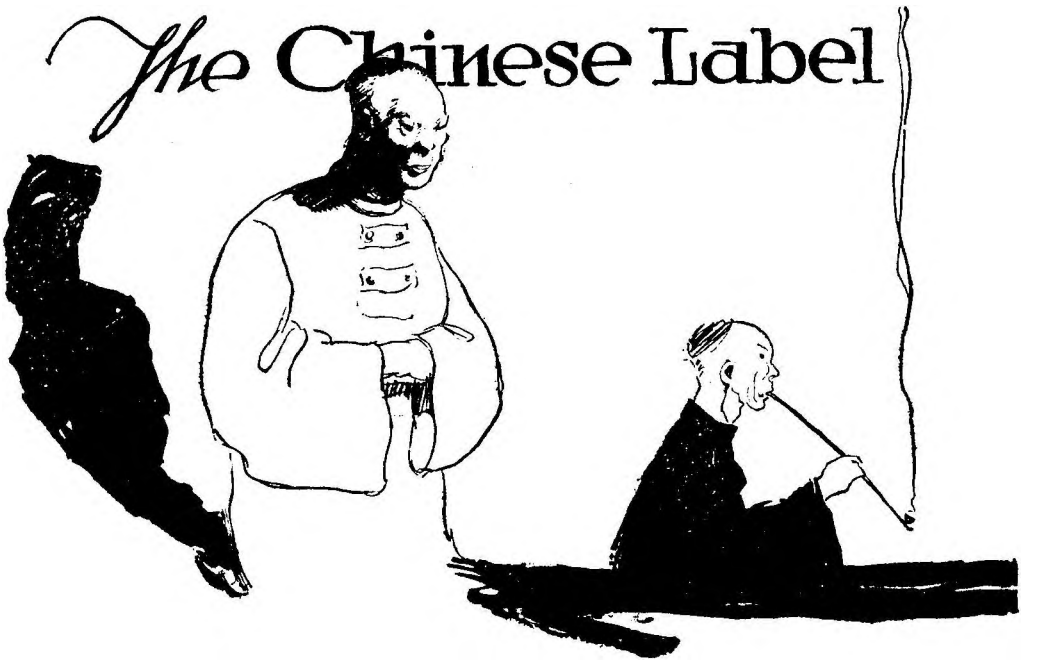
"Pipe down. I've got to look up a regulation. I think there's something about—about—" He ceased suddenly. "I'll be back in a few days," he said at last. "S'long."

Into the night! An automobile and a friendly driver that whirled along the twisting roads, despite their dangers. A wearied, disheveled form that presented itself before the Major and watched the door with anxious eyes, in spite of its fast-turned lock. Weary hours. Then a flashing form that streaked toward the Union station. Three hours later two grinning leathernecks stood before a bandaged man in the little hospital at Pine Ridge.

"Got a telegram down in Denver this morning," chirped Sergeant Ed Delaney. "It's signed 'Barnett.' And it says that under the regulation providing clemency in the case of the display of extraordinary heroism, a certain gyrene named Robert Thorn is granted an honorable discharge from the United States Marines!"

Another story of the fighting United States Marines will appear in an early issue of The Blue Book Magazine.

The Chinese Label



(Events of the Preceding Installments:)

JULIAN NAPIER, representative of the American Treasury Department, was attending the Fiesta of San Jacinto in San Antonio, Texas, in the guise of a tourist. His real purpose, however, was the search for two diamonds, and for Kalat Pasha, prominent in Young Turk circles, suspected as the smuggler.

Napier's unusual knowledge of the Orient led him to begin his search in the Chinese colony of San Antonio. Collector of Customs Lamb told him that the best-known of the local Chinese was a restaurant-keeper named Charles Toy.

Mingling with the holiday crowds in the hope of seeing Kalat, Napier saw two women whom he had met abroad. One was Madame Frezzi, an Italian (?) "with a conveniently absent husband;" the other an American, Ruth Glenn. Both smiled and bowed. That evening a Mexican brought a message to his hotel: the lady who had smiled at him wished him to follow this guide to her.

A slip of yellow paper covered with Chinese characters had fallen from the Mexican's pocket as they stood in conversation, which the man had grasped and replaced with every indication of terror. In a dark alleyway, on the way to the rendezvous, the messenger was stabbed. Napier, following, and falling over his body, found a fragment of the paper in his hand.

SEÑOR VILLABOSA, who had been in the hotel lobby during the meeting between Napier and Angel Puenta, the messenger, slipped out to a telephone-booth as the two men left the hotel, returning immediately to the lobby when he had sent his message, and loitering there with careful obviousness until midnight.

Napier called upon Miss Glenn, who was staying with her father, a retired army officer, at the Hotel Edgemont. When he led the conversation in the direction of the events of the preceding night, she showed no knowledge of his hidden meaning; but later, when he had followed a chance clue to the dark yard of Charles Toy's home, he saw her descend from an automobile and enter that mysterious mansion alone! Then something struck him unconscious.

When Napier came to, he found that Villabosa had attacked him, only himself to be knocked unconscious by Gordon, another secret-service agent. Napier took Villabosa to the collector of customs and tried to get a confession regarding the smuggling affair, but had scant success.

On returning to his hotel, Napier learned that an urgent message had come for him during the night, asking him to telephone Miss Glenn. He went to see

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her personally but was told that the urgency of her need had passed.

Meeting an old Chinese friend, Kwong Li, Napier invoked his aid.

In a hotel dining-room Napier met Madame Frezzi in company with Kalat Pasha. At her suggestion he visited her at her boarding-house. There he discovered that the Mexican messenger had come from her, and that he had been killed at her very gate. She had remained silent for fear of being involved, but now she told Napier that she had found the knife with which the murder had been accomplished. She told him also that she had sent for him to give him this information regarding opium-smuggling: Captain Glenn was engaged in it.

Meanwhile, Gordon had trailed Kalat Pasha and found that he was staying for the night in the same boarding-house with Madame Frezzi.

(The story follows in detail:)

CHAPTER XVII

NO one sat on the front gallery of the little grocery store as Napier approached, and the one-string fiddle was silent. Except for a pencil of light from a closed and curtained window at the rear, the building was in darkness, but the front door opened instantly to his guarded tap, and Kwong Yet motioned (first quickly closing and securing the door) for him to pass on to the living-room at the back. Old Kwong Li met him there with a greeting that fulfilled the requirements of simple etiquette, and invited him to take the seat of honor on the west side of the room.

The young Chinaman filled tobacco-pipes and presented them to his uncle and the guest. Old Kwong smoked a moment and then came to the object of Napier's call with unusual directness.

"This day, since noon, I have tended the grocery," he said, adding complacently: "I have not forgotten how to trade profitably. While I was here, Kwong Yet has been taking a holiday. You will tell him, Kwong Yet."

"All the afternoon and all the evening, until ten o'clock, I have been at places where fan-tan is played," Yet obeyed. "I have gambled much money."

"It would not be the part of a friend for me not to reimburse you for the losses, seeing they were made on my errand," Napier said.

"There were no losses," Kwong Yet told him simply. "On the contrary! So the day passed until well into the evening, and

I had not met any man who would be valuable to me. Then I fell in with one who is of the Society of the Fragrant Lily, whose losses had been considerable, and whose head was muddled with the fumes of poppy. I loaned him a little money when his was gone, and afterward I went home with him and smoked tobacco while he had a pipe of opium—three pills. He did not realize how much he told me; I made him think I already knew."

The young Chinaman paused a moment and went on, as evenly as before:

"If he remembers all he told me, and asks those in authority whether it was right for him to speak of it, I think my days draw toward their end. However—"

" 'If a man in the morning hear the right way, he may die in the evening without regret,' " quoted old Kwong from the sayings of the Master.

"However," Kwong Yet went on, after a respectful wait to make sure his uncle had finished speaking, "I do not think he will remember; and if he does, I think he will be more afraid to tell than not to tell. What sentence would be passed on me, for knowing, would hardly be less than that passed upon him for talking. No, I think he will not speak of the matter."

NAPIER waited in patience.

"As to the great house," Kwong Yet proceeded, "it is, as you thought, the headquarters of those who deal in bitter cargoes. Ng Choy, who goes here under the name of Charles Lee, is the master of those who are of our people, but there are said to be white men who are chief above him. My drowsy-headed friend does not know who they are. He does not even know whether they live here in San Antonio or elsewhere. They could be in Mexico, or near the border."

Again old Kwong quoted, this time from the "Book of Poetry:"

" 'In hewing an ax-handle, the pattern is not far off.' "

"I think likely that is so," his nephew agreed. "So I asked what white men came to the house. There are three. My friend did not know the names of any of them. He might have heard them, he said, but he could not be expected to remember, because they are barbarous." Kwong Yet inclined his head deferentially toward Napier, as though to say: "You understand my meaning of *barbarous* is merely *unpronounceable*."

"Did he describe the white men?" Napier asked.

"Somewhat. Two are Mexicans, he thinks. Of these one is round and very black of hair. The other is older, somewhat gray, and has been sick at some time of the demon's breath, so that there are marks on each side of his nose. The third man who comes is an American. He is tall and thin and old. My friend has heard that he was once in the American army."

"Which of them seems to be chief?"

"The smoking one did not know. He did not even know that they are concerned in the matter, except that they come to the house to see Ng Choy. One other thing, however, he was more positive about. You asked me to learn about the kind and quality of the bitter cargoes. My friend is very sure they are not concerned with anything but opium. If there were diamonds, such as you mentioned, or other things except opium, he would know, he said. He told me there is a strict accounting among the members for the profits—large shares for the leaders, small shares for the lesser ones, but an accounting, with an exact division. The opium comes to the big house, but he does not know where it is kept before it is sold. It may leave there for some better hiding-place very soon after its arrival. It is brought by a messenger from near the Mexican border."

"You mean from the other side?"

"From this side. The messenger who brings it to San Antonio does not know how it comes across the river, and no one but the chiefs and the messenger himself know from whom he receives it on this side; that is a secret from the ordinary members. The messenger departs from here and returns, with ten or twenty or thirty cans, as the case may be. Just now, unless one has been selected within a day, there is no messenger to go to the border for the supply.

"AND that," pursued Kwong Yet, "brings us to your matter of a Mexican who was killed. He was the messenger. And he did not keep his lips locked."

"How did they know? Had your opium-smoking friend heard?"

"He knew *when* they heard, and where. Joe Fong, he who is half Chinese and half Mexican, spoke over the telephone at the restaurant of Ng Choy. Then he came

hastily and called for three men who are waiters there and who belong to the society. He went with them, making four, and it is said there were two more—from the great house, perhaps. There were six ways the Mexican might approach, and they spread to meet him by whatever road he came. I do not know which one was chosen by Heaven to strike. Is it of any importance? Whichever one met him was a proper executioner. He had been a traitor to the *tong* that trusted him; so he went speedily to join the departed." This, quite obviously, was to Kwong Yet's mind exactly as it should be.

"It is of importance," Napier said.

"Then I will inquire into it further." The promise was made courteously and sincerely; far be it from him, the young Chinaman's manner said, to attempt to delve into the workings of a white official's brain. Napier, with his knowledge of China and Chinese, ought to understand that this execution had been quite regular, and probably did, but he was bound by the laws of America, which are usually unreasonable and not at all to be comprehended.

"It is of importance, also, to learn if the opium is kept at the great house, or if not, where," Napier went on. "You know, of course, that I would seize it. It would not do to search a place where it was not, for they would be warned."

"I will try to learn as to that too. I regret I have failed to find out all you wished. I am slow and dull."

"You are rapid and alert," Napier amended, making the reply that politeness required to this purely rhetorical deprecation. "Yet I would know a little more, and I will come again to-morrow night at this hour or the night after, if I may."

"Is it not your house?" protested old Kwong. "Shall a man ask permission to come into his own?"

NAPIER produced the weapon that Madame Frezzi had hidden in the tree, and laid it on the table. "There is the knife that killed the messenger," he said. "Does it tell you any story?"

Both the others examined it dispassionately. "It means nothing to me," the older one said. "It is certainly not of any unusual make or pattern. I have seen fifty knives near enough like it to have been fashioned the same day by the same hand."

"I myself have one almost like it, and another that does not differ except as to the thickness of the blade," Kwong Yet added. "I think you will not trace it to its owner."

"All the more need for you to make inquiry," Napier remarked as he wrapped the weapon again and restored it to his pocket. "It is needful that I know who handled it."

"Six there were," said old Kwong Li, thoughtfully. "It could have been any one of the six. But I shall burn scented sticks to-night before the spirits of those who sit honorably on high, to the end that it shall prove to be that sneering-faced, loud-mouthed son of disgraced ancestors who gibed at my years and my music, and caused me to lose face with my neighbors if any heard." He spoke regretfully. "If one of the other five did the killing, I shall be sorry, although he is no clansman of mine, because you will punish him under your laws, and he has only done a just thing. But if Joe Fong did it, I shall be glad, because he is an incumbrance on the flatness of the earth, and it would be better if his breath and his body occupied separate places."

The old man shrewdly realized whither this outburst might lead in Napier's mind, and he rose to his feet with hand extended:

"Notwithstanding which," he said gravely, "I will strike palms with you and promise by my forbears whom I honor that the name that shall be given to you by Kwong Yet or by me shall be the true one, whether it be the name of Joe Fong or another."

Napier's palm met his, and the younger Chinaman also stretched forth his hand. "As my uncle, so also do I promise," he said.

NAPIER returned to the Bonham and found a long cipher telegram in his box from his chief in Washington. Decoding it was a long but interesting occupation, as the information it contained grew slowly under his pencil. As finally translated, it read:

> Paris has secured information you asked regarding Madame Lucia Frezzi through French intelligence department. Her nationality is not positively known, but believed to be Greek, although while in France she claimed Italian allegiance. Prior to the war she resided principally in Paris, supposed by the French to be engaged in lesser diplomatic espionage work in behalf of Italy. When Italy joined the Allies, inquiries regarding

Frezzi were made at Rome which developed the information (Italy having in some manner become aware of her true allegiance) that she had never been in the Italian service but was employed by Turkey. She was probably aware of this investigation, for she crossed to Spain before the French could arrest her.

Madrid informs us she remained in Spain a short time and then sailed for New York. Passport showed Spanish nationality. She has since resided in and near New York, with a few visits to Washington. Has not been under espionage, of course. Regret this is the limit of our information.

Have been able to get the following additional data concerning Captain Glenn:

From former army associates, confidential, we learn that he was requested to resign from army because he had become an opium-eater. When under influence, he associated with Chinese. There was nothing against him except this habit, and he was allowed to quit with a clear record. From Cleveland we learn he has taken treatment two or three times in attempt to break the habit, without permanent results, that he was badly affected by the enforcement of the Harrison Law, and is believed to have gone South because of greater ease in procuring drug near the border.

CHAPTER XVIII

DALTON'S car had gone five miles or more beyond the city limits when the Captain looked over his shoulder and addressed Ranger Hard: "You might take that gag out now, I reckon. Better leave the cuffs on; they wont give him no discomfort to speak of. If, when we are going through any village or passing another car, or anything, he takes a notion to yawp, bend a pistol-barrel against the side of his head."

"I shore will," Hard promised grimly as he removed the impediment to Villabosa's speech. His voice and manner implied that he was still thinking of the girl he had been forced to leave behind in San Antonio.

Villabosa did not "yawp." He sat perfectly quiet in the corner of the covered car and took no chances. After a time he dozed, and finally slept. All night the car drove ahead, most of the time over roads that were far from being State highways. The sun had risen when they turned off toward a small farmhouse that stood well back from the road—Dalton's little property in San Miguel County.

A youngish, red-haired, competent-looking man came out of the house and awaited the stopping of the car by the gallery. He said, "Mawnin', Cap'n," quite as though Dalton were in the habit of appearing at this hour, nodded to Hard, and eyed Villabosa as the Captain ordered him to the ground. Dalton got out himself and took off the prisoner's handcuffs.

"Gentleman I've brought to stay with us a few days—maybe more an' maybe less, depending," he explained. "I reckon, if you don't mind, we'd all like a little breakfast. After that, Hard and me need some sleep. Prob'ly our friend does too. However, it wouldn't be fittin' for *everybody* to sleep all at once. You wasn't doing anything that would prevent you keeping an eye on him while we catch up a little, was you, Jim?"

"Nothing a-tall, Cap'n," the farmer replied. "Me, I went to bed with the little birds and got up with the same, and I aint got nothing important on my mind to-day a-tall." He entered the house and began to prepare a second breakfast. Villabosa chafed his wrists gently and gloomed in silence. Except when addressed, which had been only two or three times, he had not spoken all night.

"Mr. Manning, here, will look out for you," Dalton told him crisply, when they had eaten. "You can take that cot bed in that front room there, and sleep as long as you want to. If you want to move around any, ask him. It wont be healthy to try it otherwise. —Jim, I want to talk to you outside."

THEY were gone five minutes, while Ranger Hard smoked a cigarette and yawned mightily. When they came in, Manning went through into another room and came back with a pistol in its holster hanging from his belt. Villabosa's lip curled.

"If you think I am going to try to get away," he sneered at Dalton, "you are mistaken. No. That would be playing your game. 'Shot while trying to escape.' No, thank you. If you murder me, you will do it in cold blood. I shall not give you the excuse."

"You're safer thataway," Dalton commented dryly. He and Hard went into the back room, whence very soon came sounds of their slumber. Villabosa, stretched on the cot the Captain had pointed out, also slept. Only Jim Manning remained awake, sitting by the window where he had the prisoner in full sight, smiling once in a while to himself at the recollection of that five minutes' conversation he had had with Dalton, no part of which had been

on the subject of safely guarding the Mexican. At noon he got his dinner so quietly that none of the sleepers wakened. Toward mid-afternoon Dalton and Hard came to life and ate. Villabosa was already awake, but they paid little attention to him. After he had been given food and tobacco, he returned to the cot. Manning went about his farm work, and Ranger Hard took his place as guard. Dalton mentioned in Villabosa's hearing that he didn't believe the people who wanted to identify the prisoner would be over before the next day, or perhaps the day after that. He implied that he had written a letter to some sheriff about it.

In the evening something happened that Villabosa could not understand. Manning, at supper, had seemed a little sullen and Dalton and he had exchanged few words. Later they went out and stood talking near the shed that sheltered agricultural implements and the automobile. Villabosa could not hear their words, but their voices were slightly raised. He was quite sure they were arguing, and not in best of temper. Finally Dalton, from the sound, turned toward the house, and Manning said something while he was on his way. The Captain spoke sharply in reply over his shoulder, and now his words reached Villabosa's ears. "You can do exactly as you please about that, Jim," he said. "Stay or leave; it don't make no difference to me a-tall. Think it over and let me know in the mawnin'."

Then Dalton came in and took a nap. Manning entered the house some time later and went to bed without a word. Hard remained on guard until midnight, when he woke Dalton, who took his place.

VILLABOSA found it hard to get to sleep. He was puzzled at their tactics. Quite clearly it was not their intention to put him in jail or otherwise lock him up, but they had no notion of letting him out of their sight. The unusualness of this procedure worried him. He was free to eat, to sleep, to get up and move around (always under somebody's eye) and to make himself as comfortable as he pleased; yet he would have felt somehow safer behind the doors and bolts of a jail. His last waking recollection was of the Ranger captain sitting by the window, smoking, wide awake, stern.

When Villabosa awoke in the morning, he was first conscious that there was no one sitting in the chair by the window. Next he realized that voices were coming from the room in which the two Rangers slept. The walls were thin, and although the voices were pitched low, he could make out nearly every word. He closed his eyes, against the possibility of a sudden opening of the door, and listened intently.

"But I've got to go to town; you know that," Dalton was saying. "You've just natchully got to do it."

There was the sound of some one moving to get out of bed and falling back again.

"Gee!" Hard exclaimed. "My head goes around like one of these flying hawse things at the carnival. I kain't, Cap'n. I don't know when I ever been so dizzy. It's my stummick, I reckon. I'll prob'ly be all right by and by. It must be something I et."

There was a brief silence. "Well, if you kain't, I s'pose you kain't," Dalton said. "But it shore leaves me in a fine mess, having to go to town and a prisoner to watch, and Manning quitting."

"Maybe, in a little while, I'll be able to get up. I'd be all right now, I guess, if my head didn't go around so like blazes. I can watch this Mex all right."

"And have him jump you, maybe, and you toppling over if you moved quick. Not any," Dalton decided. "But I've got to go, just the same. With only you and me left when Manning goes, we've got to get another one of the boys down, and I've got to telephone for him. Why the thunder couldn't Manning wait until some time when I didn't absolutely have to have an extra man here?"

"Maybe he had that in mind," Hard suggested. "He didn't look, when we came in yesterday mawnin', like he was aimin' to start something. It come to him afterward. Held you up a plenty, did he?"

"He didn't get away with it. I told him he could stay for what he is getting, or go. Well, he's got to stay through to-day, till I get back from town anyway, if I have to call upon him to do it in the name of the Service. He'll watch the Mex and get you what you want to eat."

"Eat!" ejaculated Hard. "Ugh! Did he get mad and talk rough, Cap'n?"

"He didn't talk rough, not to *me*," Dalton said grimly. "He knew better. But he was good and mad, all right. I told him where he got off on this man's place, and he didn't take to it."

FOOTSTEPS came around the house, and there were sounds, in the kitchen, of breakfast-preparation. The voices in the next room stopped, and Dalton came out and went toward the back of the house. Villabosa kept his eyes closed, breathing evenly. After a minute he heard voices in the kitchen, short, choppy sentences from both Dalton and Manning, but could not make out any words. He awoke officially, signaling the event by a prodigious stretching, and got up.

Except that Manning and Dalton spoke no more than was necessary during breakfast, there were no visible signs of the difficulty. Ranger Hard's absence from the table was not explained. As soon as he had finished eating, the Captain went out and tinkered with his car. He drove away, not long after, and Manning, after looking in on Hard and perhaps finding him asleep, as they did not speak, came and sat by the window in the room with Villabosa. He was scowling, and once or twice the Mexican saw his lips move. He was mentally reciting, apparently, the things he wished he had nerve enough to say to Captain Dalton.

"Can I go outside? It's hot in here," Villabosa asked after a time.

Manning nodded, and followed the Mexican, who carried a chair out on the gallery and to the end of it farthest from the room where Hard lay and, he was quite sure, out of hearing of it. Manning took along another chair and they made themselves comfortable. More than a half-hour passed without a word. Then Villabosa, his voice only loud enough to reach Manning's ears, began to carry out the plan he had been formulating ever since he had been so fortunate as to awake and overhear Dalton and Hard.

"Want to make twenty-five dollars?" he asked.

Manning turned cold and suspicious eyes in his direction and let them rove away again before he replied with an uninterested monosyllable:

"No."

"Fifty?"

"No."

Villabosa shrugged his shoulders, and a shadow passed over his face. "I can't bid higher," he said. "What I wanted is not wrong—and no one in the world would ever know you did me the favor."

Three minutes passed. Then:

"How?" Manning asked.

"Carry a little note for me to a friend." As Manning did not reply, he added: "There will be nothing whatever in it except word that I am a prisoner. It will be up to him to do what needs to be done."

"Habeas corpus, I s'pose," Manning suggested.

"Yes. They didn't let me get word to anybody that I was arrested." Villabosa sighed. "I didn't suppose you would do it, but there is nobody else. It wouldn't please your friend Captain Dalton, of course. It would put a—crimp, is it not?—a crimp in his plans. It would be lawful and right that somebody should know I was arrested, but that would not please him. I admit that. You will tell him, of course, that I asked you, but that doesn't make any difference. I told him I should get word to my friends somehow. He doesn't know for sure that I haven't already done it." He paused. "Neither do I, for that matter. I tried, in the police station at San Antonio, and some of those messages may have gone through. He wont know, when my friends act, how they found out about it."

PERHAPS five minutes more passed without a word from either. Manning's face was expressionless, his eyes on a distant clump of live-oak trees that shaded a little creek. Finally he said:

"Who to?"

"No," Villabosa said, smiling slightly. "I am not as simple as that."

"Where is he? San 'Ntonio?"

"Not as far as San Antonio, but not in this county, either. I suppose you couldn't leave this place to deliver it without explaining to Captain Dalton. I had thought maybe you could get a few days off on some excuse, and earn a little bit of *dinero* on the side. Maybe you couldn't."

"How come you've got as much as fifty dollars on you?" Manning asked after a little. "Didn't they take your money away?"

"I haven't," the Mexican told him promptly. "I haven't got a cent. The payment would be made on the other end when you delivered the message."

"Proud chance!" Manning remarked. "Nothing doing."

Another period of silence ensued. "I have money," Villabosa said. "Not much,"—hastily,—"but a little. The man I want to send word to is a man with money. He would pay as much as fifty

dollars—or more—on my written order. You would only have to gamble enough of your own money to get to him, and that would not be much. I would expect to add that to the fifty—your expenses to get to him and get back."

Manning got up and went into the house. Villabosa smiled slightly as he heard him cross the front room and look in upon Ranger Hard. After a moment or two he came back and hitched his chair a little nearer to the Mexican before he sat down.

"Then when he gets the message, he tells me to go take a running jump at myself," he remarked.

"I thought of that. I will give you *two* notes. One of them tells him to pay you the sixty-five dollars,—fifteen dollars for expenses,—and the other tells him I am arrested. You do not give him the second one until he has paid you the sixty-five."

"The hundred," Manning corrected him. "Seventy-five dollars for doing the errand and twenty-five for expenses."

"He might not be willing to advance me that much," Villabosa hesitated.

"If you're good for fifty with him, you're prob'ly good for a hundred—if you make that first note strong enough."

It was Villabosa's turn to sit in silence, considering. He said, then:

"I need paper and pencil—and envelopes."

Manning went into the house and came out with a pencil, a pad and one envelope. "The first note don't need to be in no envelope," he remarked significantly, "—the one I give him that tells him about the hundred. I'll want to know it is written right."

"You can read it—that is, if you can read Spanish. I can't write English."

"I don't read Spanish much," Manning said, "but maybe I can read enough to know the substance of what you're saying." He looked uneasily toward the road. "Better get busy. The Cap'n didn't aim to get home before evenin', but he might make it quicker'n he thought. Or Hard might come out."

Villabosa wrote hurriedly.

THE first note, when it was finished, he handed to Manning, who pored over it slowly. He couldn't make out every word, having told the truth when he said he didn't read Spanish well, but he spoke the language quite fluently, although ungrammatically, and he was able to see that Villabosa had put nothing in that he had agreed to leave out. He handed it back and commanded: "Read it out loud."

" 'Very important,' " Villabosa read. " 'Please pay to the man who gives you this letter one hundred dollars, which I agree to repay to you at the first possible moment. When you have paid it, he will give you another letter, which contains information worth more than one hundred dollars to both of us.—Salvador Villabosa.' "

"You haven't put his name at the top," Manning objected.

"No. And it is better that I should not. I tell you the name, and the address, and when he receives it, he will know."

"All right. It's you that's tryin' to get loose; if you don't play your cards right, it hurts you worse'n it does me. "I think," Manning said, as an afterthought, "I think I'll need to look at the other letter too. I gotta make sure there isn't anything in it that gives me away."

Villabosa went to work on the second letter. He looked up once to ask: "How do I describe this place? I have to tell him where I am."

"Cap'n Dalton's farm in San Miguel County."

The Mexican finished the note and handed it to Manning, who puzzled over it for some minutes; plainly he was not having as easy a time translating this one as he had had with the first. "Read it," he finally said, passing it back. "I guess I got it pretty well, but I'd like to hear you go over it—in English."

Villabosa read:

" 'I am an unlawful prisoner. I was arrested in San Antonio, without any charge being made against me, and put in the police station *incomunicado*. I was turned over to Captain Dalton of the Texas Rangers, and he brought me here to his farm in San Miguel County. I am not allowed to send word to friends or get a lawyer. I do not know why I am arrested, and am not guilty of any crime. Habeas corpus should be started at once. Get a good lawyer and see to it, please.

" 'The messenger who used to serve us being dead, I advise, without waiting, that you get another from across the river at once.

" 'SALVADOR VILLABOSA.' "

"What's that mean about a messenger?" Manning asked suspiciously.

"It has nothing to do with my getting free. It is a reply to a letter he wrote me, which he wanted me to answer at once. I don't see how it does any harm to put it in."

"Oh, I s'pose not," Manning agreed. "Now, where do I take these?"

"To Pedro Flores, in Eagle Pass. He lives—" Villabosa gave directions for finding the house. "Almost always you will find him at home. He is retired from active business."

"All right." Manning took the sealed envelope with the longer letter and put it carefully away with the note that called for his payment. "And look here, *hombre!* If this man Flores don't live up to what you say and come across with that hundred, I'll put this whole business up to Cap'n Dalton—I don't have to tell him I've been down there, you know; all I'll need to say to him is that you've turned me over these letters and that I *said* I'd deliver 'em—and what he'll do to you will prob'ly be a-plenty."

"You'll get the hundred," Villabosa said.

Manning hitched his chair farther away from the prisoner, and they relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER XIX

DALTON drove in at one o'clock; and Manning, as soon as the Captain had eaten dinner, saddled his horse and left the place. He and Dalton had spoken briefly, while the Ranger was eating, and Villabosa had not been able to hear what they said. He knew, however, that Manning had asked Dalton if it was all right for him to go now, and that Manning had expected him to think that he was asking Dalton for permission to take a brief vacation.

Ranger Hard's health improved as the day went on, and he was able (although Villabosa was not aware of the details, because Hard ate earlier than the others) to partake of some slight nourishment—two slices of ham, four fried eggs, much bread and butter and half a can of peaches, to be exact. He said, when he came out of the kitchen, that his stummick was certainly better.

While Hard guarded Villabosa, a little after dark, Dalton went out of the house and sauntered circuitously to the clump of live-oaks that shadowed the creek. There, beyond a little rise which would have made them invisible from the house even if there had been no trees, he came upon Jim Manning, reclining comfortably on his back and smoking.

"It worked," Manning informed him without preface, and handed Dalton the two notes. "For Pedro Flores, Eagle Pass."

He recounted the forenoon's happenings.

"Did you read this sealed letter?" the Captain asked. "Does it say anything about being sealed?"

"No."

Dalton slit the envelope. He switched on a flashlight and ran his eye over the contents.

"I don't read Spanish much, you know," Manning said, "but it seemed to me, as near as I could follow it, that he translated it to me pretty straight, except perhaps that last paragraph. I can tell you how he read that: 'The messenger who used to work for us being dead, I advise that you don't wait, but get another from across the river at once.' "

Captain Dalton's face, in the reflected light of his torch, expressed grim satisfaction.

"What it says," he remarked, reading carefully, "is: 'The messenger who last served us is dead. Without waiting for me to get another, get the other across the river at once.' "

"Not much difference, is there? Although that 'another' and 'other' don't seem exactly to make sense."

" 'The other' doesn't refer to a messenger," Dalton declared, positively.

"To what?"

THE Captain left the question unanswered. He was studying the sheet of paper before him. Finally, coming to a decision, he took his pocketknife and cut it across between the two paragraphs. Then he trimmed the lower part at sides and bottom, so there was no margin at all. When he had finished, there remained two sentences and a signature:

> The messenger who last served us is dead. Without waiting for me to get another, get the other across the river at once.
>
> SALVADOR VILLABOSA.

He handed this to Manning. "There! That's a nice little letter for Mr. Flores," he said. "It'll get us the kind of action we want, without causing him to get all

worked up about his friend Villabosa's being in the hands of the law."

"You mean I'm to deliver this?"

"To Pedro Flores, at Eagle Pass—not in too much of a hurry, not until I have a chance to get down there and hang around about twenty-four hours looking into things. I've sent for another man, and Ranger McQuestion will get here to-morrow mawnin'. Then I'll leave and move on down to Eagle Pass. I'll be there to-morrow evenin'. To-morrow's Saturday. You blow in about Monday mawnin', and do your little errand with Flores without paying any attention to me a-tall. Stop at the hotel, and I'll find a way to get word to you if there's anything I want to tell you. After you've seen Flores, you can hunt me up, when there's nobody around, and tell me what happened. I'll be stopping at the hotel too."

"Wait a minute. Do my errand, you say. I kain't do it the way Villabosa laid it out without both letters."

"And the trimming I gave that letter costs you exactly one hundred iron American dollars," Dalton grinned. "You don't give him that one a-tall. He'd know something was wrong with Villabosa in a minute, because Villabosa's got plenty of money and wouldn't have to give a messenger an order for pay at the other end. No. You just give him this here little short message, and you tell him Villabosa wrote it small and trimmed the paper so's you could carry it in the sweatband of your hat, and if anything happened that you got searched, it'd prob'ly get overlooked. I don't believe it would do any harm if you sort of let Flores think there are reasons why getting arrested and searched wouldn't come as a great surprise to you at any minute. And you tell him Villabosa gave you the letter in San Antonio. He didn't explain to you when he hired you why he didn't want to use the mails or the telegraph or the telephone, but you got the idea that the matter was too darn' secret to take any chances with 'em. And if he asks you what the letter means about the messenger that is dead, you tell him you don't know."

"I don't," Manning remarked invitingly.

"Then you'll be able to tell him so convincingly that he kain't help but believe it. All right. You go out and lose yourself somewhere until over Sunday, and slide into Eagle Pass Monday mawnin' with your note, and get it into Flores' hands, secret, as soon after as convenient. In the meantime, there's something I want you to do to-night. Call William B. Lamb of San Antonio on the telephone. He's the collector of customs there, but you'll prob'ly have to get him at his house. Tell him you are talking for a man who went in an automobile-party to San Miguel County; don't mention my name unless you have to, but ask him if he understands. If he doesn't, you can give my name. Then you tell him I want him to get word to a man named Napier to catch the first train for Eagle Pass."

THE telephone message, relayed by Collector Lamb, reached Napier at the Bonham after a most unsatisfactory day. He had made absolutely no progress at all. His visit to the Chinese grocery had developed no new information; Kwong Yet's travels had not brought him in touch with anyone of whom it was safe to ask questions; he and Kwong Li hoped another twenty-four hours would have better results; meantime they accepted the situation Orientally.

Back in his room Napier had received Gordon's report as to the espionage of Kalat, and it had unsettled him. Kalat had remained at home until noon, when he had taken a walk that seemed aimless but brought him finally to the Chinese "great house," where he remained not more than ten minutes. He went, then, to the Bonham, where he inquired for Villabosa. The hotel people, not unused to having their Mexican refugees absent themselves mysteriously from the house for two or three days without explanation, had informed him merely that Villabosa was not in. Kalat had then done much as he did the afternoon before, wandering about the plazas and seeming to get entertainment out of the shows. He had eaten a leisurely dinner at the St. Francis Hotel, smoked on the loggia for an hour, and then walked to the Edgemont, where he sent his name to Captain Glenn and was invited to come up. Sometime later he came down in the elevator, accompanied by Miss Glenn, and they talked for a few minutes alone in the little lounge off the lobby. After this, Kalat walked to the nearest car-line, transferred at the most direct point, and returned to his boarding-place at 311 Chiromoya Street, where Gordon had been relieved for the night by another agent.

Kalat had been to see Ng Choy or one of Ng Choy's men at the "great house." He had tried to find the missing Villabosa. He had called on Captain Glenn and talked confidentially with Miss Glenn.

Napier had a troubled conscience. He had done nothing whatever that day to have Captain Glenn's movements followed. He had not mentioned to Lamb what Madame Frezzi told him regarding the army man. He had put it off, saying to himself that he would take care of that detail of the investigation in person—but he had not begun to do so. He would not believe that Ruth Glenn was willingly involved with criminals; yet he hadn't done a thing to prove she wasn't, because—he grimaced as he admitted it to himself—it might turn out she was. He had neglected an obvious duty.

It was while he was revolving this disquieting thought that Lamb called him and gave him Dalton's message. Scarcely more than a half-hour remained before train-time.

Notifying the hotel office that he would be out of town for a day or two but wished to keep his room, and ordering an automobile to be ready to take him to the station, he packed for the trip.

HE had finished, locked his trunk and suit-case, and stood at the door, bag in hand, taking one final look about to be sure he had forgotten nothing, when the telephone-bell tinkled.

"Mr. Napier?" came in Ruth Glenn's voice.

"Yes, Miss Glenn."

"I seem to be fated always to call you late at night. But you said night or day. Can you come to see me, please? I—" Her voice shook a trifle. "It has happened, I think—or is going to."

He had promised when "it" happened, to "come a-running," and she was so sure he would keep his word that she was going on without waiting for his answer. "I am not in my room," she said, "but downstairs in the booth. There is no place here where we could be sure not to be disturbed. Can you come in an automobile? We can ride a little, and talk. I will be waiting in that little lounge-room."

"I'm so sorry, but I can't," Napier cried, fuming inwardly that he had to talk rapidly and sharply if he would not miss the train. "I am going out of town for a few days and my train leaves in fifteen minutes. The car to take me to the station is waiting right now. I'm so sorry, Miss Glenn, but just as soon as I get back—"

"*Can't* you come to-night?"

"I'm afraid it is absolutely impossible."

"If you can't, you can't," she said, and there was a hopeless note in her voice—or was it a frightened one? "Well—I mustn't make you miss your train."

"The very minute I get back—" he began, but she said:

"That may be—too late. I hope it wont. Good-by."

He caught the train with seconds to spare. Through half the night, while he tossed and turned and tried to summon sleep, the thought persisted that Kalat had talked with her, alone, not an hour before she telephoned. The car-wheels spurning the joints of the rails clicked an interminable message: *"Kalat was there! Kalat was there!"*

What had Kalat told her that made her believe the thing she feared had happened or was about to happen?

CHAPTER XX

ACROSS the wide, slow-sweeping Rio Grande at Eagle Pass stretches an international bridge, high above the coffee-colored tide, at its further end a rough-paved street that leads up a hill between adobe houses, on past the *cuartel* to a plaza with a squat-towered church. The City of Porfirio Diaz it used to be called, new-named Piedras Negras, since the brief day in power of Don Panchito Madero.

There was a time, not so many years ago, when crossing this bridge did not mean much of a formality unless one had a certain reputation or aroused suspicion. That was when Don Porfirio administered the high, the low and the middle justice in Old Mexico, and Americans were not only welcome across the border, but safe.

But now those whose business calls them across run a stricter gantlet. There are passports to be inspected, or "border-permits," which are issued only to persons living within ten miles of the border and good only for a belt of ten miles on the other side. One does not, unchallenged, pass the guardhouses on the bridge with a nod; unless he has the proper documents and carries nothing upon him that the reg-

ulations of one country or the other forbid, he does not pass at all.

THE long bridge looked deserted as a horseman clattered out upon it on Monday afternoon. There were men, to be sure, in the American guardhouse, a hundred yards this side of the white monument that marks the place where one steps from the States into Mexico, and men in the Mexican guardhouse beyond the boundary, and of course they were looking at him through the windows of their little stations, but for the moment they were invisible.

The rider was a man of thirty or thereabouts, dressed rather elaborately in the fashion that often represents a cowboy's ideal of sartorial elegance, although his outfit was not at all new. His peaked hat was a little higher and a little broader brimmed than common, and obviously expensive. His corduroy trousers were tucked into high boots that cost as much as or more than the hat—custom-made boots of finest leather, with heels so high that walking meant discomfort, and with fancy straps dangling at each side of their tops. His shirt, open at the neck with a loose-knotted tie, was of fancy material.

He dismounted in front of the American guardhouse, hitched his horse to the rail, and nodded to the inspector whose face appeared at the window. "Good evenin', Mr. Burke," he said easily. He caught sight of Julian Napier, sitting in a corner of the little building behind the inspector, saw that he was a stranger, and nodded again casually to include him in the greeting.

His right hand was already at his hip, lifting a six-shooter from a holster that hung inside his trousers. He handed it, butt first, to the inspector. He collected a half-dozen cartridges from a pocket, and turned them over. "That's all," he said. The inspector came out of the house and ran a practiced hand over his clothes. Arms and ammunition, under the American law, may not be carried into Mexico. Whether the rider had anything in his pockets that the Mexicans would not want him to bring into their country was a matter of concern only to the inspectors at the other end of the bridge beyond the white stone monument.

"All right, Mr. Sanders," Inspector Burke said. The man turned and limped to his horse. It was not a very noticeable limp, merely a slight stiffness of the right ankle, apparently. He threw his leg over his horse, and steadied the animal as it would have set off.

"Better come over with me and get a li'l' snifter," he grinned. "This side of the river gets awful dry."

"It sure does," Inspector Burke replied, not taking the invitation for more than the pleasantry it was intended to be. "Take two—one for me."

"By golly, that's a great idea!" Sanders cried. "Dogged if I don't." He let his horse go, and they saw him alight again at the Mexican guardhouse and submit to search. After a bit he went his way.

HE had disappeared up the hill in the direction of the plaza when Captain Dalton, afoot, came out on the bridge and entered the American guardhouse. No one except the officers was in within hearing; they could talk freely.

"What has he been doing, all this time?" Napier asked eagerly, the moment the Captain arrived.

"Nothing—just loafing around. Looks like he had been waiting for some special time to go across. Manning gave Villabosa's note to old man Flores at half-past eight, and Flores sent for this Sanders *pronto*. Sanders didn't stay at his house more than ten or fifteen minutes. Since then he's been killing time, as near as I can make out. Is he in the habit of crossing pretty often?" he asked the inspector.

"Pretty nearly every day," Burke replied. "He has a border-permit."

"Does he usually go about this time?"

The inspector thought. "I don't remember his ever going in the morning," he said. "Yes, I guess it's always at just about this time. He says he goes over on business, and laughs. Doesn't make any bones of the fact that mostly he slips over to get a couple of drinks. If he made any practice of coming back drunk, he'd lose his permit, but he doesn't. He always has a fine ripe smell of ex-American whisky on him, but I've never seen him even pleasantly jingled."

"Do you know where he goes, over there?"

"We make it our business to find that out, regarding people who cross a good deal," Burke smiled. "He mostly goes to just one place. It's a barroom—run by a Chink named Tom Sing."

"You've searched him?"

"Of course."

"Ever investigate those high heels on his shoes?"

"No. We've never had grounds to especially suspect him, you know."

"We wont overlook the heels this time," Napier said. "What have you found out about him, Captain?"

"Not much, because folks here in Eagle Pass know mighty little about him. He's been here about two months, without any visible means of support, but with enough money in his clothes so he hasn't had to hang up any debts. Says he used to have some cattle in West Texas, and sold 'em. Talks about maybe going into business here, if he finds something he likes, but hasn't found it yet. Principal friend is old Pedro Flores—and that's against him, to start with; he isn't the kind of a feller, by his looks, that chums with any Mexican just to be chummy. There is talk that he used to be more or less bad, out there in West Texas, but of course I haven't had time to look that up. He explained that little limp of his, once, by saying he and another feller were having a little argument and the feller got him in the ankle. Didn't go into any details, but sort of left the impression that *his* bullet landed higher than that."

"He wears a gun regular," Burke said. "Always checks it here."

"He hasn't any legal right to—not in this county, anyway. I inquired about that. It's handy to know—gives a reason for arresting him, if you want him, and there isn't any better one."

NAPIER nodded. "It certainly looks as though Flores might be sending him after the diamond, doesn't it?"

"Either sending him after it, or sending orders by him to somebody else to bring it in," the Captain agreed. "And if the orders were to go to somebody else, why did Flores have to send a messenger? He could have telephoned."

"Where is Flores? Is he being watched?"

"I didn't have a chance to tell you, when we had those few words this forenoon, that I ran into Cap'n Williams of the Service. He had written me a letter, by the way, which of course I hadn't got yet, containing a lot of nice, valuable information about our friend Villabosa. It may come in handy. Well, I asked the Cap'n to help me out, and he's over in Flores' house at this minute, questioning him about a cattle mix-up between some Mexicans across the river and some over here on this side that Flores never heard of, because the whole thing is imaginary. The Cap'n will stay there, though, until we get somewhere or don't. If we should happen to get the goods on Mr. Sanders, there wont be any danger of Flores' making a get-away or doing any telephoning. And Manning is within reach, if he needs him."

"How much is this diamond worth?" Inspector Burke asked Napier.

"Two hundred thousand dollars—perhaps more."

The inspector whistled. "Forty thousand dollars' duty! No wonder the owner can afford to hire able men to slip it across for him. You said there were two, didn't you?"

"Yes, but the other, unless I am mistaken, is already in. That's forty thousand more we didn't get. And it looks as though it came through here."

Burke did not take offense. He was not on duty the entire twenty-four hours, and so the responsibility for the post was divided; moreover a competent customs officer seldom fools himself into thinking he can never be outwitted. "If Sanders is the man, it could have been in one of those heels, at that," he admitted, thoughtfully.

"It didn't take him long to get his two drinks this afternoon," Captain Dalton remarked. "Here he comes onto the bridge. While you pull your search, I'll go out and lean up against the rail, like I was just a caller who didn't want to get underfoot."

SANDERS came to the Mexican guardhouse and alighted. They saw two officers come out and examine his horse, and Sanders emptied all his pockets to show them he was not bringing out of the country any gold or an illegal amount of silver. Presently he remounted, and came cantering across the boundary.

"I took your drink, Mr. Burke, and it tasted just as good as mine did," he laughed as he slid off his horse and limped toward the guardhouse. "Nothing dutiable," he added perfunctorily. "Let me come in and sit down a minute, will you? I've got something in my boot that's hurting like blazes."

He came through the door, sat in the chair that Dalton had just vacated, hauled off his right boot, turned it upside down, and let a forty-five pistol-cartridge fall to the floor.

"That's a nice little thing to have squeezed up against the side of your foot!" he remarked. "I was cleaning my pistol this noon and dropped that cartridge and it fell into the top of my boot. 'Stay there!' says I. 'You'll be safe.' And I never looked for it to give me any trouble. But the darned thing slipped down. Man, it felt as big as a house."

"Let's have a look at that boot, while you've got it off," Burke said.

He examined it carefully, saw that the heel was fastened on in the usual manner, and ran his arm down inside the boot to satisfy himself there was no entrance to it from the interior. Sanders watched his movements with a grin. "Want the other one?" he asked, and stuck out his left foot. "Pull it off, will you, please, suh?"

Burke accommodated and gave the second boot an examination as thorough as the first, during which Sanders put on the other. The inspector handed it back, after a moment or two, and Sanders put it on, also. "All right?" he asked good-naturedly.

"All right so far as the boots go," the inspector told him. "Stand up, please. We'll look you over a little." He smiled. "Have to do this to our regular customers about once in so often, you know."

Sanders not only made no objection to the search, but cheerfully assisted in it. He chatted with Burke and Napier, who looked sharply on, and showed no impatience at the inspector's thoroughness. When they had satisfied themselves that nothing so small as a one-carat diamond, much less one almost as large as a pigeon's egg, could possibly be concealed on his person, they went outside and paid careful attention to the trappings of his horse. He watched them tolerantly from the doorway.

Burke succeeded in showing no disappointment as, after a glance at Napier which the special agent answered with a nod, he told Sanders the inquisition was over. "That's all," he smiled. "Sorry to have to make you so much trouble, after that drink you bought me—and drank."

"No trouble at all," Sanders told him cordially. "It's your job. Now if you will let me have my pistol, please, suh!"

Burke handed it over, together with the extra cartridges, and he stowed it in the holster inside his waistband. He unhitched his horse and prepared to mount, Burke and Napier both standing outside the doorway of the guardhouse.

"Well, so long, gentlemen," he called, and put his left toe to the stirrup. Something in the way his other foot twisted on the ground gave Napier a sudden flash of inspiration.

"Wait!" he called. "Stop!" And as Sanders' leg had already lifted lightly over the horse and he was settling into the saddle: "Get down again, please. We overlooked that foot."

ONE swift look Sanders cast toward Napier and Burke; they had no weapons in their hands and were not reaching for any. His glance flew in the direction of Eagle Pass; the road was clear. His face set into hard, determined lines; his eyes narrowed; his right hand moved toward the pistol on his hip.

"Leave that gun alone! You're under arrest!" snapped Captain Dalton, from the previously unobserved sidelines.

Sanders looked at Dalton, and saw that he had not moved to draw a pistol. He could overawe three with a waving gun as well as two. His hand snapped to his revolver and his fingers closed on the butt; as it came from its holster, Dalton drew and fired with what seemed to be one uninterrupted motion, and shot him through the right shoulder. He reeled in the saddle; his horse spun, pitched and threw him; and his pistol went flying and rebounded from the plank roadway.

Dazed anger substituted in his brain for ordinary discretion. He staggered to his knees, to his feet, and stumbled toward the pistol, his right arm hanging helpless, his left hand extended.

"Leave it alone!" warned Dalton. "Don't pick up that gun!" He paid no heed. "You fool!" Dalton cried, almost dispassionately, and fired again. The bullet shattered Sanders' left forearm. "Now if you've got any more ways of picking it up, try 'em, and I'll just natchully have to let you have it *right*."

"What quarrel is this of yours?" Sanders demanded, weakly. He swayed, fell over, came to a sitting position and contemplated his bleeding arm. Napier ran and kicked his gun away from him, then picked it up.

"Ranger Service," the Captain explained tersely. "You was arrested for totin' a gun, and you resisted. If you want to tell anybody it was for anything else, that's *your* business. Understand?"

The man was suffering and faint. "You shore handle a pistol some quick," he mumbled, trying to smile, and fell back on the boards. "You'd better get me to a doctor, hadn't you? I'm all shot to pieces."

Dalton was already busy with crude first aid. "Don't worry, *hombre,*" he said, not at all angrily, almost soothingly. "You aint bad hurt. It's lucky for you I most always hit where I'm looking, and know I can. If I didn't, I prob'ly wouldn't have taken no chances, you with your hand on a gun thataway. We'll have you fixed up all right." He turned to Napier and Burke, as men came running along the bridge from the town. "I went to take a gun off him, and he started something," he said. "That's all we'll tell 'em. Nothing about your being mixed into it a-tall. When we get him to a doctor,—you come with me, Napier,—we'll get this foot off" —he tapped Sanders' ankle with his knuckles—"and have a look. Wasn't I a darn' fool not to think of it? He doesn't limp hardly any." He looked down at the white-faced Sanders, frank admiration in his eyes. "And wasn't it a foxy stunt for him to get that right foot off and on again himself, first thing, so you natchully wouldn't investigate that corner of him a-tall."

IN a room next to the one where the wounded man lay, a half-hour later, Dalton and Napier and one of the two doctors examined an artificial lower leg. Out of its cavity, which had been cleverly enlarged, Napier drew a package with a bright orange label, marked in Chinese. "Please note, in order that you can testify to it when called upon, Doctor," Napier said, "that this is found in the leg that you yourself detached from the prisoner."

"Opium, eh?" the physician commented.

"Wait a minute. If we have guessed right—" Napier pried off the top of the box and disclosed the usual brown, gummy mass of the forbidden drug. "Is there something we can empty this into?" The doctor brought a flat metal basin, and the others stood close as Napier carefully dumped the contents of the tin into it.

At the bottom of the can, quite hidden in the opium, was a symmetrically shaped object wrapped in oiled silk and sealed. Napier ripped its covering with the point of his pocketknife, and held on the palm of his hand, its facets flashing in the afternoon sunlight—a magnificent unmounted diamond. As his hand moved with his breathing,—and perhaps with excitement, —the jewel blazed and glittered with a cold, blue-white iridescence. Even the undemonstrative Captain Dalton caught his breath.

"This is seized by the Government, of course," Napier told the physician. "But for the present there must be no publicity. I ask you to keep it as secret as you would a professional matter."

The doctor nodded agreement. "How much is it worth?" he asked.

"That is a matter for the appraiser. I am not sure which one this is, but I think, from its color, that it is the one called the Gorgeous Lily."

"Are there two?"

"There were, where this came from," Napier evaded, just as he had avoided naming the value. "That is all, I think, Doctor, if you want to get back to your patient."

He rewrapped the stone, and the doctor went reluctantly away.

"This man has been bringing in a can every day," Napier told Dalton confidently. "When the supply got large enough to make it worth while, a messenger came down from San Antonio and got it. There hasn't been any messenger for at least eight or ten days, and we don't know how much longer; *somewhere* hereabouts there are a number of tins of opium—for a best guess, somewhere in or near Pedro Flores' house."

NAPIER, who had put the diamond in the innermost pocket of his vest and pinned the pocket fast above it, took up the tin and scrutinized it. He got out his knife again and picked at the label. The paper, stuck only at the top and bottom, came away readily and disclosed another label of similar appearance beneath it. To the eye which sees all Chinese ideographs as a scrawl of hopeless hieroglyphics, the two would have looked the same, but the ideographs were not identical at all.

"Fastened loosely," he commented to Dalton, "so the outer label could be removed and the tin would not look different from any of the others, once it had been delivered. They could be depended upon there not to mix it with common opium-cans. The messenger, unless he was Chinese, would never realize that one of the tins in his lot was different from the others, or if he did notice that the marks were not the same, would think it merely meant a different shipper."

He got out the fragment of label that Angel Puenta's dying clutch had retained, and compared them. So far as matching was possible, they were identical. He nodded slowly. "When Villabosa wrote 'the other one,' he meant exactly what you thought he meant," he said. "Puenta carried the first stone to San Antonio on his last trip."

He studied the ideographs on the false label.

"Can you read that stuff?" Dalton asked.

"I think so. I'll have to check it up with some plates I've got over in the hotel, but unless I am mistaken—" He let a finger drop from character to character in the left-hand column: "This reads: 'For the Honorable Wu Tsai.'" His finger went to the top ideograph on the right. "And this says: 'Society of the Fragrant Lily.'"

"What does that mean?"

"It is the address. I know the headquarters of the Society of the Fragrant Lily, in San Antonio, and I thought I knew the names of all the leading Chinese in it, but—" His forehead wrinkled with undisguised disappointment. "I don't know who Wu Tsai is, or where he hangs out. I never heard of him. He is a brand-new character."

CHAPTER XXI

VILLABOSA, sitting in the front room of Dalton's farmhouse, maintained an outward appearance of sneering calm, but his eyes glowed with the malignant hatred of a cornered rattlesnake. Napier, who had been doing the talking, sat back with a look at Dalton that inquired whether he had overlooked anything, and the Ranger nodded approval.

"So there you are," Napier summed it up. "We have Flores. We have his man Sanders. We have sixteen five-tael cans of opium from Flores' house. We have the diamond. And we have your letters to Flores, telling him to have it brought over without awaiting the arrival of a messenger, because Angel Puenta is dead."

Villabosa still sat silent.

"In other words, the jig is up," Dalton added.

"If it was, you wouldn't be talking to me at all," the Mexican retorted, with cunning appraisal of the situation. "You would have me on my way back to San Antonio, to go before a Federal court. Suppose you say the rest of it."

"Where is the other diamond?" Napier demanded. "We can find it, of course, but you can make it easier for us. If you do, perhaps you wont hang or go to prison for life as an accessory to Puenta's murder."

"I wont do that, anyway. I had nothing to do with it."

"You didn't see him drop that label on the floor of the Bonham and telephone Joe Fong, I suppose."

This first intimation that they knew to whom he had telephoned must have come as a shock, but Villabosa had had many hours to consider all the possibilities of the law's demands upon him in connection with Puenta's death, and he replied coolly:

"I did not. I don't know what evidence you think you have that makes you say I telephoned to a Joe Fong or anybody else; but even if you were able to prove that I did, and even if you were able to prove that I told him Puenta had a lost paper, that wouldn't prove that I wanted him killed or that I knew he would be killed."

"Where is that other diamond?" Napier asked again.

"I don't know."

He did not say it sincerely; nor did he put himself out particularly to make his words sound sincere.

"Has it been delivered to Kalat?"

THE expression of puzzled surprise that flitted over Villabosa's face was not feigned. "Is that a man or a place?" he asked. "I don't know the name."

"Has Sastanada got it?"

This time his ignorance was counterfeited. "I don't know him, either."

"You don't think you have a chance in a

million of ever doing any more work with this particular gang, do you? Or of getting any share of whatever the gang's profits are from handling that stone for Sastanada? You see, we know you had it brought across. Wouldn't you be showing ordinary common sense if you got in out of the rain while the getting is good?"

"If there is another diamond anywhere," Villabosa replied warily, "and if I had any idea where it was, wouldn't I be showing ordinary common sense if I kept my mouth shut until I found out what the proposition was? You haven't said anything yet to show me where I'd be getting in out of the rain any more by talking than I would by keeping still."

"We'll listen to any proposition you want to make," Napier told him.

Villabosa was prepared with it. "I don't admit I know a thing about any other diamond, or if I did, that I have the slightest idea where it is," he said. "But if I did, I should make a suggestion something like this: I might be willing to tell all I knew, privately—not as State's evidence, in court; I'd take a sentence in jail before I would go that far to antagonize certain people. And when I had done so, and you had had plenty of time to learn whether I told the truth or not, I go free. I have a little money in a bank in San Antonio. Let me get it. Then let me get out of the country. Not to Mexico — say to Cuba or South America."

Napier shook his head. "Not a chance," he remarked.

"Then you can find out where that diamond is by yourself—and by the time you get track of it, they will have heard of what happened at Eagle Pass, and"—he waved his hand widely and concluded with a most characteristic American expression—"blooie!"

Napier turned to Dalton. "You talk to him, Captain."

The Ranger fixed a stern eye on the Mexican, but his first words seemed to refer only to the recent exhibition of American idiom: "You speak English pretty fluently, don't you? Where did you learn?"

"I have a moderately good education," Villabosa shrugged.

"You must have come of a pretty good family. Where?"

"That is my concern. My family has nothing to do with this matter."

"No," Dalton agreed; "I suppose it hasn't. It was just my idea that perhaps there was a time when you wasn't mixed up with a gang of crooks, like you are now. I thought maybe something might have come up that pried you loose from associating with decent people. You might have made a mistake, or something."

Villabosa's eyes were suspicious, but he did not answer.

"Well," the Ranger went on, "as you say, your family and where you came from and all that is your concern. But where you *go* is ours. Now, I've been talking your case over a little with Mr. Napier, here—and with one or two other people—and as long as you've declared so strong and positive what you'll do and what you wont do, I'll do a little declaring myself."

HE paused a second and then went on evenly: "There's something in what you say about going on the witness-stand and testifying against those Chinks; I don't suppose I'd want to do it myself. And we're prepared—I'm speaking for Mr. Napier, of course; he's just letting me do the talking at this stage of the game because I've had a little more experience with fellers of your kind than he has, and— By the way, have you ever happened to hear about any experiences any of your bandit friends ever had with me?"

"I have no bandit friends," Villabosa said sullenly, but it was clear enough his recollection was supplying incidents such as those to which the Ranger referred.

"I merely asked that, so you could remember that I've got a habit of keeping my promises. . . . . Well, as I was saying, maybe you wont have to testify against anybody. Maybe we can produce the evidence that convicts you and all the rest of the gang for the smuggling without any of your fellow-crooks having to know that you gave them away at all. That remains to be seen. If, after you've told us the facts, we can get away with it that way, we will. Then your life will be moderately safe after you get out of the pen'. So that's understood. But you are going to tell us. And in token of our appreciation of your doing it, we are going to try you for smuggling, or let the San Antonio police have you, perhaps, for being accessory to the murder of Puenta—that is, if they want you, which perhaps they wont."

"I'm likely to tell you under those circumstances," Villabosa sneered.

"But if you don't tell us all you know,—who killed Puenta, where the diamond is, who is in the gang and where its headquarters is,—Mr. Napier is going to turn you over to me, and I'm going to take you to the river and push you across."

The prisoner sensed that a threat was concealed in this, but he could not see where. "And shoot me while I'm swimming, or something like that?"

"Oh, we're no murderers," Dalton assured him. "No, I wouldn't harm a hair of your head. I would just take you to the middle of the river and say to whatever Mexican officer came out to get you: 'Here's a fellow-countryman of yours that we don't need over here. You better take him and see that he keeps out of trouble hereafter.' . . . At Matamoros!"

Somewhere in that last word Villabosa knew the threat centered, but still it was meaningless to him. "At Matamoros?" he repeated.

"It's the darndest thing," the Ranger went on conversationally, "how a man's mistakes of judgment will come up to bother him. Take your old friend Pancho Villa, for instance. Right now he's getting his revolution livened up, tying up to some right good men, as I understand it, and hoping the past will be overlooked; but most folks kain't forget that two-three years ago he was raising the devil in the bandit line. It was back of that when you and he were friends, wasn't it?"

"I never knew Villa," the Mexican said shortly.

"That so? Well, one of Pancho's failings has been that he guessed wrong how things were coming out, one time and another. . . . . I heard about another Mexican that shore busted things wide open for himself making a bad guess. He guessed, when Pancho was going at his best, that he was going to win, and there wouldn't be any come-back for those that tied up to him. This feller had been supposed to be quite decent. Had a good family, and a good practice—I didn't mention he was a lawyer, did I? Yes, he was a lawyer. Got part of his education here in the States. Quite a respected citizen there in Chihuahua."

VILLABOSA wet his lips.

"That time when Villa and his gang took the city in Chihuahua where this man lived," pursued the Captain, "folks there had to choose whether they'd tie up to him or stand by old man Carranza. The Carranzistas got out of town—if they could. This lawyer I'm telling you about would naturally have been with the Constitutionalists, I reckon, if it hadn't been for a woman. Not exactly a woman, either; she wasn't more'n a girl, way it was told to me. He'd been trying to make a hit with her for some time, with nothing whatever doing. For one thing, he was about old enough to be her grandfather. For another, she was already in love with a youngster about her own age.

"Well, Villa came in. Some of his *dorados* captured a number of young women, you may have heard—so many, as a matter of fact, that it didn't especially interest Pancho who got some of 'em. And right there was where this lawyer Mexican made his error of judgment. He thought Villa was going to continue to be the big noise not only in Chihuahua but all over Mexico, and he wanted the girl. So he made a trade with Pancho; the lady was his price. Well, when Villa got driven out, there wasn't anything for this Mex lawyer to do but get out too. He forfeited quite considerable property, to say nothing of having no small number of Constitutionalists telling what they would do to him if they ever got a chance. Julia— Did I mention that the girl's name was Julia Trejo, a member of that old Trejo family? Julia wasn't with him when he arrived in Texas. It seems she had committed suicide some time before that. . . . . Within a week after Pancho turned her over to you, wasn't it?"

Villabosa did not answer. He was watching Dalton's face as a captured mouse might watch a leisurely cat.

"Oh, yes. I forgot to say that she had a couple of brothers. The young one—named Roberto—wasn't in Chihuahua at that time. The other was trying to prevent Pancho's *dorados* from taking his sister when one of them ran a bayonet through him. You've never met up with any of the Trejo family since then, have you? It will be quite an interesting reunion."

Dalton leaned over and carefully jammed out the fire at the end of his nearly consumed cigarette. Then he rolled another, and all the while Villabosa stared apprehensively, but said not a word.

"One of the Carranza officers at Matamoros," Dalton remarked casually, as though it were entirely an afterthought, "is Captain Roberto Trejo."

THE prisoner's teeth were showing at the corners of his lips, now, but neither in a smile nor a sneer. Undisguised fear gleamed in his eyes, and his voice shook as he cried:

"Not to him!"

"Afraid he'd take too long killing you?" Dalton asked cheerfully. "Well, I reckon you're right. I happened to hear how he said he'd do it, and the program was quite thorough. However—" The Ranger spread his hands and sat back, inhaling his new cigarette contentedly. "It's up to you, of course. You can go or stay."

Villabosa's restraint broke, and he cursed in two languages.

"I don't blame you," Dalton said sympathetically. "I'd be a little worked up if I was in your place and was going to be turned over to Roberto Trejo—with handcuffs on."

"I am not, and you know I am not!" Villabosa raged. "You've got me, damn you! But I don't know a thing more about that killing of Puenta than I've told you—except that I did telephone Joe Fong he had the label that had disappeared. I don't know who killed him. I didn't ask. And that is all I can tell, because it is all I know. But as to the diamond—" His face worked convulsively. "I hold you to that promise not to turn me over to Trejo. I'll tell where it is."

Fifteen minutes later Napier asked him a final question:

"Does Charles Toy read Spanish or English—or both?"

"He doesn't speak Spanish. I think he reads English more or less; I don't know how much."

At Napier's request, Dalton got paper, pen and ink. "Write what I dictate," the Treasury agent commanded, and Villabosa indited this note:

> CHARLES TOY:
> My associate at the border has been arrested. His messenger was shot. The officers have the package that is of special value. With my partner under arrest, I fear they will be after me, and I am going to get across into Mexico to-night.

"The idea will be, when you see your old friends again, that you were caught after you wrote this letter and before you could make your get-away," Napier explained. "Also that this note, which you are supposed to have given to a Chinaman, was also seized. Perhaps the Chinaman was arrested. All right; we'll continue." Villabosa followed dictation again and wrote:

> The bearer, Charley Chew, happened to be here in Eagle Pass. For value received, I have transferred to him all my interest in the article that is behind the door with the five padlocks, and have given him my key. You will settle with him the same as you would with me if I could get there.

"Sign your name." Villabosa did so; and Napier, as soon as the ink was dry, put the note carefully away in his pocket.

"Will you take me to the first train for San Antonio?" he asked Dalton. "I'll get you word as soon as I find whether he has told the truth."

Dalton nodded agreement. "Having gone this far, I'd shorely like to be in with you at the finish," he said regretfully, "but my job is to stay with this *hombre* until we find whether he's overlooked anything or not. If he hasn't, I'll bring him back to San 'Ntonio. If he has, he and I, with Hard and McQuestion to guard against accidents, will be making a little trip down to the mouth of the Rio Grande."

"Don't worry," Villabosa snarled. "I'm not going to Matamoros."

CHAPTER XXII

AGENT GORDON was waiting when Napier's train, in the early evening, pulled into the palm-surrounded station at San Antonio. "Mr. Lamb would have come down to meet you himself," he said, "but a matter came up that is likely to keep him busy all the evening. So he had Carver relieve me from watching Kalat earlier than usual, and asked me to express his regrets and do the best I could to take his place. If there is anything that needs his special attention, we can get hold of him and he can break loose. I've got my own little car here."

When they were seated in it and on their way to the Bonham, Napier briefly put Gordon in touch with such developments of the case as were subsequent to the Eagle Pass incidents. Then he asked: "What has Kalat been doing?"

"Nothing exciting. Wandering around like a lost soul, principally. He has been

to the Chinese house every day, and he called at the Bonham once to ask for Villabosa, and since then has telephoned five or six times; I suppose he doesn't want the hotel people to get too familiar with his looks. And two evenings he has called on the Glenns at the Edgemont."

"Nothing has happened to the Glenns?"

Gordon looked surprised. "Happened to the Glenns? Not that I know of. The most interesting thing I have observed in keeping track of Kalat is that somebody else is doing it too. There is another man following him a good deal of the time—especially after dark. A stranger to me, a Mexican. Perhaps his own gang has him under observation."

THEY came in sight of the Bonham. "What is the program?" the local agent asked.

"I'm not sure as to all the details yet," Napier told him. "First, if you will, I wish you would go to your office and get that padlock key that Villabosa made such a fuss about when we wouldn't let him keep it. A little later, I'll probably want you to get some men's-clothing-store friend to open up long enough to let me buy quite a lot of stuff I shall need—and there are things I'll want to get at a drug-store, also. I think we could get the diamond without anything more complicated than an ordinary raid, but that wouldn't get the men that are involved, or produce the evidence to convict them. We have to catch them all together, and with their keys in their pockets. And that means—I have been trying to think of some other way, and there isn't any—that I've got to do an absolutely fool thing. For the third time in my life!"

"Remarkable record," Gordon grinned.

"The third time I've done this one particular fool thing," Napier amended, smiling with him. "It worked the other two times, which makes the odds all the bigger against its working again. However— It couldn't be done in the daytime, of course, but perhaps I can get away with it by artificial light."

"The details sound feasible," Gordon agreed dryly.

"You wont think so when you see me with my hair coarsened up with that sticky stuff from the drugstore, and an artistic and quite hopeless attempt to make my eyes look as if they were almond-shaped. You will think it is crazy, wild, foolish *Old Sleuth* stuff, which we know isn't really done."

Gordon was plainly surprised. "Letting your whiskers grow and dressing like a bum and griming up with dirt—I guess we've all done that at one time or another," he said. "But I've always supposed no American or European could act or talk like a Chinaman well enough to fool a real one. And you've got away with it twice, you say?"

"Not as a regular Chinaman. I don't believe that could be done—by anyone except *Nick Carter;* and if it could, I certainly don't talk the language well enough to do it. But an American-born, half-breed Chinaman, educated in the San Francisco schools, and who has never been to China, is a little different. Making breaks with the language is discounted in that case, and that leaves the success of the experiment largely dependent on looks and manners. And the office corner there in Charles Toy's restaurant isn't very brightly lighted."

He grimaced. "But I don't like the idea. It is bound to fail if I meet anybody who ever saw me before—which means Kalat, for one. And it is not only a ticklish job to get away with, but I'll feel like an imitation of a dime-novel deteckertif from the minute I begin it until I get it finished, if I have that much luck. Yet it's the only way I can see to get them all together, and if it fails, we aren't any worse off as regards making a quick raid for the diamond. . . . . Come back as soon as you get the key, will you, and come right up. I'll know by then what I'm going to do and when."

THE moment Napier was in his room he called the Edgemont.

"Miss Glenn?" he asked when her voice came over the wire. "I've just got back to town. I hope it isn't too late."

"No," she said, and even in the monosyllable was such a note of relief and pleasure that he beamed fatuously at the transmitter. "Where are you?" she added.

"In my room at the Bonham."

"Will you please hang up and wait a few minutes? I'll call you."

The bell jangled before he had fairly begun to unpack his bag.

"I am downstairs at the booth," she said. "I didn't want to talk from the room. I was afraid of disturbing my father. He is—lying down."

"I must have seemed terribly curt, the other night, but trains wont wait, and my trip couldn't possibly be postponed. I can't tell you how sorry I was that I couldn't come."

"It's all right. I knew you were from your voice. And now will do just as well."

"Shall I come this evening? Say, in half an hour or so?"

Miss Glenn hesitated. "I couldn't see you here. Could we ride a little way? We couldn't be gone long. I have to get back to Father. He isn't very well."

"I'll be there with a car at half-past eight, if that is agreeable."

"I'll be ready."

Gordon came in while he was hastily getting into clean linen.

"Can I borrow your car?" Napier asked him abruptly. "I have an errand that would call for a deaf and dumb chauffeur, and I don't know any. I wont be gone an hour, probably. It's a nervy thing to ask, but—"

"No nerve at all. You can't do anything to that car that I haven't. Sure you can have it."

"And while I'm gone, you had better round up some of our fellows, as many as you can get, and have them ready for a sudden call. Better have one of them go over and keep an eye on the Chinese house. We may want to call there in force later in the night. The others can just stick around where they can be got at. And then maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to get in touch with the chief of police and see if we can have two or three of his men if we need them. There are at least four people to catch, and several ways to get out of that house; it will need to be well surrounded."

"Better one too many than one too few," Gordon agreed. "I'll attend to it. And that men's-clothing chap that you mentioned?"

"Yes. If he will be at his store at a little after nine— It may be nine-thirty before I get back, but I shall come as soon as I can."

"He wont mind waiting; he's a good friend of mine."

"I'll meet you here at the hotel. And I'll try to bring Tin Lizzie back with all her cylinders and wheels in their normal places."

They went down in the elevator. As they were passing the desk, a clerk called to Napier.

"A lady was here asking for you twice yesterday," he said, low-voiced. "Late in the afternoon and again in the evening. She was here again this afternoon. We couldn't tell her when you would be in, of course. She didn't care to leave her name."

"What sort of looking lady?" Napier asked.

"Very dark—very dark indeed. Spanish, perhaps, although she had no accent."

"Thank you. If she should come in again, tell her I am back, will you, and that she can find me here any time tomorrow."

MISS GLENN was waiting for Napier in the Edgemont entrance. They spoke only commonplaces until they had reached a suburb. Then she said:

"I have to get back; I mustn't leave Father too long. Do you suppose you could find some wide place where we wont be disturbed, and pull up by the side of the road? Perhaps you would rather not drive and listen too." She laughed a little. "Not while driving somebody else's car for the first time, over roads you never saw before, anyway."

He admitted the reasonableness of this, found a place where there was little traffic, drew up at the side and shut off his power. She did not speak at once, clearly at a loss exactly how to begin. "I hope I can be of some real help to you," he said, to make it easier.

"It will help me merely to tell it," she replied. "I don't know whether you can advise me or not, but just knowing that you are also considering what I ought to do will relieve my mind. I have borne it alone just as long as I can."

He waited sympathetically.

"I might as well confess what is at the bottom of it all and have it over with," she went on, after a few seconds, with manifest reluctance. "It—it is a family skeleton. My father—my father has a terrible disease, Mr. Napier. He is addicted to a drug."

She found words more easily now that the worst was told. "It is of old standing. He became addicted in the Philippines, after he was wounded. You believe that using opium *is* a disease, don't you?"

"That is recognized by almost everybody, these days."

"He has tried to be cured. Nobody can ever know how hard he has tried.

But he has always gone back. And now—You can't imagine how I hate to tell you this, but he is in danger. He is in danger of doing something that all the money in the world wouldn't have induced him to do when he was himself. He isn't himself at all, you know. When he cannot get the drug—"

"I know," Napier assured her gently. "They are not really to blame for what they do then."

"There never was a better father," she said. "My mother died when I was five years old, and he was mother and father both. We were chums. I was almost grown when he came out of the hospital and found that he couldn't give up the drug. It is so easy for one to get it over there in the East, in some forms. After a while—" She paused, then went on bravely: "After a while it got the better of him, and he left the army. From that day until now, he has—he has never been better."

"The danger?" Napier prompted her.

"He found a place here where he could get it—from Chinese. And then, after a while, they wanted him to help them distribute it. He said he wouldn't, of course—and they shut down on his supply. You can imagine the result. All they had to do was let him have it in such small quantities that he would never be quite satisfied, vary this some days by refusing to give him any—they said they didn't have it—and wait. You know how a Chinaman can wait."

"I know."

"So finally he told them he would do it. And I know perfectly well he cannot. Not only he has promised to break the law, but he hasn't the brain-power, any longer, to do it successfully. I know how the officers trace back the way the addicts get their supply. He is certain to be caught." She hesitated. "It is an awful thing that he should be willing to do it, but I know it isn't his real self who has promised; it is the slave to the drug. It would be terrible enough to have him working for these Chinamen, doing an illegal thing; but if he were detected, and I know he would be sooner or later, I couldn't bear it. I can't sleep without dreaming of him under arrest. In prison!" She shuddered.

"Had you thought of anything I can do?" Napier asked.

"No, except that you might be able to advise me. He promised to take a lot of opium north and deliver it to various people—mostly Chinese—in several cities. They want us to start soon. He promised, and then he told me; you know, perhaps, that they babble sometimes when they are under the influence. And I waited until he was more himself, and pleaded with him, and he went to them and refused. So they merely cut off his supply again. He had enough on hand for three days—and to-day is the third day. He is sleeping now, and when he wakes, there will be no more. He will struggle—a little while. But in the end it is always the same. I cannot hope that he wont go back to those Chinamen, sooner or later, and beg for opium—and do exactly as they say to pay for it." She sighed; a hopeless, pathetic sigh. "Poor old Daddy!" she breathed.

"A good doctor might—" Napier began; but she interrupted him:

"We have had the best there are. Nobody knows how much he has suffered during some of his treatments. He wont do it again. It has gone too far."

"You say he has no supply? I take it, from that, they have not yet turned over to him the stock they want him to distribute."

"No. They have some plan, when they do that, to protect themselves against his taking it for himself. They know addicts too well to trust them."

SO there was no evidence against himself in Captain Glenn's possession, and he had not yet made himself amenable to any law. Napier tremendously wanted to assure the girl that he hoped, within a day, perhaps within a few hours, to remove this particular danger, but it could not be done. He wondered if she, as well as Madame Frezzi, had learned of his connection with the Government. He put out a suggestion that ought to determine it.

"If you knew anyone who has influence with any Treasury official—" he mused, and left the sentence unfinished. If she knew he was a Treasury agent, she would believe he was intimating that he might be able to exercise some pull to save the situation, and would leap enthusiastically at the idea.

"I don't," she replied. "And if I did, they wouldn't do it. I can't blame them. It is their duty. No, there isn't any hope in that direction."

"It is a tough problem," Napier admitted. "There doesn't seem to be any answer to it, not right off the reel, anyway. Perhaps, if I can sleep on it and think it over, something will come to me that I can advise. It has gone several days without coming to a crisis. Probably a little more delay wont make it any worse."

"I hoped I had it all worked out, a week ago," she said. "I thought I had found a way." There was a trace of bitterness in her next words. "But I hadn't. I had forgotten that 'East is East and West is West.'"

He looked at her inquiringly, and she saw she ought to explain.

"There is a man connected in some way with those Chinamen," she said, "whom I used to know. He is a Turk, and his name is Yusef Kalat—Yusef Kalat Bey. I knew him in China, years ago."

Napier was himself astonished at the delighted relief that came over him at her words. She didn't know that Kalat had been made a pasha, and Kalat hadn't been confidential enough with her to tell her.

"Twice, lately, Father has got away from me at night," she was going on, "and both times, I found him at the place where the Chinamen are. Both times, also, I found Kalat Bey there, and he rode home with us. Father remembered him, of course, and was glad to see him. He has called on us several times, and was very kind and thoughtful. He isn't going by his real name, by the way, because he was afraid, he says, he would be interned if we had gone to war with Turkey. He came to America before we were in the war at all. He is passing as a Spaniard."

She did not seem to think it important to mention Kalat's pseudonym, and Napier did not ask it.

"After a day or two—he was so friendly—I asked him to use his influence with the Chinese to have them release Father from his promise. He said he would." She hesitated, then went on: "But that is over. He wont. I had been living so long in America that I had begun to forget the ways of the East. Kalat Bay helped to remind me that 'never the twain shall meet.' Now he is more likely to harm us than help us." Napier did not ask her why, but she told him. "He became tiresome—and finally insulting. He will not come again, I think."

"I have an idea," Napier told her. He could not be definite. "If it works, and I believe it will— I want you to go home and rest comfortably to-night, Miss Glenn, without bad dreams. Your father isn't going to prison. He isn't even going to be in danger of going. I feel sure of it. I will see you to-morrow."

"But what is the idea? How will it—"

"You will agree it is a practical one when I tell you. Will you trust me if I don't explain it now?"

"I would like to know, but if you think it best—"

"Trust me, please," he urged. Believe that I shall do everything I can—and that I shall succeed."

The confidence in his voice had its effect. "I do," she told him. "Somehow, I do. You don't know what a relief it has been to tell you, and to feel that the worry from now on isn't all mine. You see there hasn't been anybody I could talk with or ask for advice. There never has. For years Father and I have been alone. I couldn't make friends, without their finding out about his failing. Do you know, I haven't one close friend in the world."

"*Didn't* have," Napier corrected her.

"Didn't have," she repeated, smiling a bit tremulously.

CHAPTER XXIII

MADAME FREZZI, waiting in a little reception-room where the entrance to the elevators was under her eye, stepped swiftly out as Napier came hurrying into the Bonham. He turned at the touch of her hand on his arm, and with difficulty refrained from exclaiming at her changed appearance. She looked ten years older than when he had last seen her, a week before.

That art must have much to do with her continued youthful appearance he had vaguely realized, but he had never guessed how much. This night she had neglected all her customary artifices of the toilet, and the result was almost startling.

There was no responding smile on her face at his polite greeting, and her voice was determined and tense:

"I must see you alone. Where can we talk and be undisturbed?"

For reply he motioned toward the elevator, which had descended and was discharging its passengers. She preceded

him into it, and at the first stop he ushered her out into the mezzanine balcony. There were numbers of people there, but most of them were grouped where they could look down on the lobby, and he led her to a distant corner, where they would be out of hearing and not conspicuous.

"You wont think I am discourteous, I hope," he said as he placed a chair for her and took a seat facing it, "but I have to be economical of my time, just at this moment. I have some work to do—"

She interrupted him.

"You *will* have some work to do after you have listened to me. Whatever thing you are working on will not be of great importance compared to what I am going to tell you."

Now he observed that the contrast between this woman and the Madame Frezzi he had talked with in the garden was not merely physical. She was not only altered in outward appearance, but beneath externals he was conscious of some other change — psychological, perhaps spiritual. Her black eyes were somber, and her voice pitched in a deeper key. There was nothing of the fiery passion that she had displayed when the malicious acquaintance had telephoned her that Kalat was playing the squire to a younger and more beautiful woman; but in the repression of her tones, no less than in the set, unsmiling lines of her face, Napier sensed a burning, unrelenting glow of vindictive determination. With his eyes on hers, he bowed and waited.

"Did you ever hear of a Turk named Yusef Kalat Pasha?"

"Yes."

"He is Sastanada."

NAPIER tried to let his face express the right degree of surprise, but did not speak. She was continuing, in a low monotone:

"He is working with a group of Chinese and Mexican smugglers, and they are bringing into this country two diamonds that are called the Gorgeous Lily and the Ray of Light. Kalat looted them from the sultan's sash. One of them is already in; it is here in San Antonio, at a house over in the Chinese quarter. The other is to be brought in very soon. It is at Piedras Negras."

"And Kalat? Why didn't he bring them himself?"

"He came in with a false passport, as a Greek, through Mexico. He knew he would be searched, and he had no familiarity with your border and the ways of your customs officers. So he left the stones at Piedras Negras with Chinamen that he could trust. They belong to a society that he had done business with when he was in China."

"And the place where the stone is? The one that has reached here?"

She described the great house. "There are a number of Chinese interested with Kalat," she added. "I know the name of only one of them: It is Charles Toy. He is the proprietor of a restaurant. The Mexican who was killed was a messenger who came and went between him and Kalat. He had brought word to Kalat, that night, to come to the Chinese house at once, and Kalat had gone there, when I got him to take my message to you."

"How do you come to know all this?"

"Kalat and I,"—she hesitated,—"we have been friends for a number of years. He knew I was in America. He sent for me to join him here." She paused, seemed to be considering whether it was worth while to conceal anything whatever, and then went on in the same toneless voice: "He said, after this matter of the diamonds had been settled and he had found a place to remain in America, that he would be married."

"And something has happened to change the program?"

"To make it impossible."

She did not explain. Her mind was in a single groove—the betrayal of the man she had recently wanted to marry.

"Why did you send Puenta to find me, a week ago Monday night?" he asked.

"I told you the truth about that; at least, I told you part of the truth. I had heard from Kalat that Captain Glenn was concerned with the Chinese smugglers, that he had met him at their house. And I wanted him removed." She replied simply and promptly to Napier's look of inquiry: "Because I wanted his daughter removed. If he was taken away, she would go. When Kalat joined us, that night of the parade, just after I saw you, he came in an automobile with Glenn and the girl. I saw him bid her good night. I saw how he looked at her. I know Yusef Kalat."

SHE smiled, a little bitterly. "And I was right. I have had him followed, since then, and I was right. Well, what of it?

You are thinking that this has something to do with my coming to you to-night and telling you about Kalat and his smuggling, and you are mistaken. I was jealous, but I am not jealous any more. Jealous!" She laughed—a mirthless, dreary laugh. "As if I could hold him, when I am almost old enough to be her mother! But one must care, to be jealous. I do not care for Yusef Kalat." She leaned forward, and her suppressed voice fell still lower. "I want you to get him, and his diamonds. I want him sent to prison. Better still, I would like to have him turned over to the Allies—to those who are going to punish Turks for what they did to the weak peoples during the war. Do you suppose you could do that?"

For the first time Napier sensed that this, indeed, was not a jealous woman, that the motive which had impelled her when she sent for him before was not the urge that was driving her now. It is something more than pathetic, it is something tragic, when a woman of her type suddenly determines not only to confess her increasing years but to look them; but back of her changed manner and appearance, back of her tense, low monotone, he grasped a deeper, more hopeless tragedy than the loss of a lover or the sudden realization of a vanished youth. This was not jealousy; it was cold, remorseless hate.

"What has he done to you?" he asked.

"The news came yesterday," she replied without emotion, "—in a letter in yesterday morning's mail. He does not know I have it. I have tried four times to find you. . . . . My father, my mother, my brother and two sisters—they have been dead more than two years, and Kalat told me, only three weeks ago, that he had seen them just before he left Turkey and that they were all well. Well and happy, he said!

"I am Armenian. My father was a trusted effendi of the sultan. He sent me to be educated in Italy and France. I came back to Constantinople. I met Kalat. . . . . It was some time afterward that he proposed I do secret work. You did not know I represented the Turkish government, of course; you supposed, if you heard anything about me at all, that I was in the Italian service. That was what we wanted everybody to believe. . . . . The war came, then the massacres. . . . . Kalat promised me he himself would see to the safety of my family. He has assured me, all along, that they were all hidden and safe. He even gave me messages, three weeks ago, that he said they sent me just before he left—not in writing, of course; he couldn't bring writing. . . . . Two years my father has been dead, and my mother, and my brother and sisters. But my sisters did not die at once. . . . . And Yusef Kalat was there, in Constantinople, with power, and did not raise his hand to save them. . . . . I thought at first I would kill him, but that would be too quick."

She sat a moment looking at the floor. "Is there anything more I can tell you, to make his punishment more certain?" she asked dully.

"I am very sorry," he said.

She raised her eyes, and they were as hard as her voice. "I do not want sympathy," she replied. "I want Yusef Kalat to suffer."

"I shall do what I can," he promised her.

TUNG SHENG sat in the little office in the corner of Charles Toy's restaurant when Napier entered. It was long after the early evening rush, and not quite time for the arrival of after-theater patrons; few people were at the tables. The proprietor was not in evidence.

Napier felt morally certain that the tint of his face and hands and the coarse stiffness of his black hair were artistic enough to pass muster anywhere by artificial light; and his good ready-made clothes were well in character; but the shading that gave his eyes and cheek-bones as much a Chinese appearance as was necessary for a half-caste was a different matter, and he was glad to observe not only that the office corner was dimly lighted, but that the principal electric lamp, over the cashier's desk where Tung Sheng sat, was green-shaded. He stood with his face as much in the shadow as was possible without emphasizing his dislike for illumination, and addressed Toy's manager in his best Cantonese:

"Is this the honorable Charles Toy?"

"No," Tung replied. "He is here, in back. He will be out in a moment. I am Tung Sheng."

"I am Chu Chang," Napier said, "—formerly of San Francisco, where I was born. Also I am called Charley Chew. I have come from the river, where I met a Mexican named Villabosa." He took pains to

pronounce the Spanish name not as well as an American could, but a little better than would most Chinese, in accordance with his pose as one who was better versed in English than in the language of his fathers.

Tung Sheng's face was expressionless, and he did not reply.

"If you could get Charles Toy at once," Napier went on, "I have a message for him that needs to be acted on quickly, I think. You also are interested in the message—and another: one Joe Fong."

Tung called to a waiter and sent him to summon the pair. A moment later the old restaurant-keeper came through from the direction of the kitchen, followed by the Chinese-Mexican Fong. Tung Sheng made his introduction laconic and without significance, but Napier thought a sign passed between them as he spoke: "This is Chu Chang, once of San Francisco. He comes from the river, he says, with a message." To Napier he said: "This is Ng Choy, who is called Charles Toy."

"I cannot bear it!" Napier exclaimed with his best Chinese etiquette. "Even the sound of your name stuns me."

"I am too greatly honored. I do not deserve it," Ng Choy replied.

"And this Joe Fong," Tung Sheng said. Napier spoke with politeness to him also, but the reply was muttered and most perfunctory. The upbringing of Joe Fong, obviously, had not been well attended to.

NAPIER looked about to see that none of the waiters was within hearing. Then he took from his pocket the note Villabosa had written and passed it to the old Chinaman. He waited without speaking while Ng Choy read it slowly. Some of the words seemed to give him trouble, and he looked up at Napier. "Do you read English well?" he asked.

"My education is public school," Napier replied, with just the touch of pride that he thought an American-born Chinaman might have used, glad of the opportunity again to emphasize the reason for such inaccuracies of Cantonese tone-shading as they all—at least the two older men—must already have observed.

"Read this to us aloud, in our own tongue."

Napier translated it. The faces of both Ng Choy and Tung Sheng remained without expression as he read, but Joe Fong scowled angrily. He did not speak, however, but waited for his elders. Ng Choy took back the note when Napier had finished, and studied it through his big glasses, locating and defining for himself the words that the translation had made clearer. When he had finished, he looked blandly at Napier and asked:

"Did he go to Mexico?"

"I do not know. He was to attempt it after dark. He had no pass. I came away."

"You are to receive, he says, what he was to receive. What is that?"

"It was to be three thousand dollars for him and his friend Flores, when both stones were delivered. He supposed, for one stone, it would be fifteen hundred."

"And your arrangement with him?" It was Joe Fong who asked this question.

Napier gestured toward the note. "Value received," he said. Ng Choy nodded quietly, approving of the answer.

"I do not enjoy this transferring of interest from one to another," Joe Fong said. His look was hostile. It was the dislike of the Mexican half of him for the gringo half of this San Francisco public-school graduate.

"What is past is not of mighty importance," Tung Sheng said. "It is gone. The present is here, and the future approaches."

"Where did you say this stone you speak of is?" Ng Choy asked.

"In the safe with five padlocks," Napier told him promptly. "One key is in the hands of each of you, one key in the hands of Sas'anada, and one"—he produced the flat key that had been taken from Villabosa—"in my hands, as this writing says. And if I may speak in the presence of those so much older and wiser—"

"Go on," Ng Choy said.

"It would be well to use the five keys and complete the bargain that was made with Sas'anada very soon. The officials of the Government may be able to learn where the stone is. It would be better if we had delivered it and received payment before that."

"The words sound wise," Ng Choy replied. "What is your province?"

"I have never been in China. My honorable father was a Saitsiu man."

"And your business?"

"I am an obscure and often unsuccessful speculator," Napier said. He knew the others would take this to mean that he was a fairly well-to-do gambler.

Ng Choy thought a moment. "The words *are* wise," he said. "Go, Joe Fong, and see if you can get Sas'anada on the telephone. Tell him he must be at the place of the safe at twelve o'clock." He turned to Napier. "Whether we find him by telephone, or whether we have to search, we will have him there. Will you wait here and go with us, or shall I describe how to find the place?"

"If the safe has not been moved, I know the place and how to find it," Napier replied. "In the great house, Villabosa said, in the dark wine-closet that opens from the little sitting-room off what once was the dance-hall."

"He has instructed you well," the old man said. "The outer door will open to your ring at twelve o'clock."

NAPIER murmured the proper words called for by politeness, and thankfully passed from the restaurant without once looking back. He had succeeded in deceiving them all in that dim light, and perhaps he could continue to deceive them in the brighter light of the great house, but he did not for a moment believe he would look like anyone but Julian Napier to one who already knew him. He must continue to utilize the disguise to enter the headquarters of the Chinese, but it would be quite valueless the moment he came face to face with Kalat.

Gordon, fifteen minutes later, set out to gather his forces as speedily as possible. There would be two other Treasury agents and four policemen. The great house would be under surveillance from all sides before half-past eleven.

"That will be enough," Napier told him. "According to Villabosa, we will have only four men to deal with. As all the other Chinese ordinarily in the house are members of the society and supposed to have an interest in all smuggling, it is necessary to get them out when the diamonds are being dealt in. When the five gathered to put the first stone in the safe and each lock it with his own key, Villabosa says there was not another Chinaman in the house, not even Wang Ting, who is the confidential top servant. Tung Sheng or Joe Fong tended the door."

They spoke of the details of surrounding the house, and Napier arranged to meet Gordon there at a little before midnight to receive his report and give any further instructions that might become necessary. Then he went to the grocery of Kwong Yet, who came quickly to his tap on the door and low-voiced hail, and old Kwong Li and he almost allowed their eyes to express surprise at the changes in his appearance when he came into the light of the little back room.

"This seems to be foolishness," Napier said. "It would not deceive you. But once to-night it has deceived men who do not know me, and it will be again useful, later."

"It is excellently done," old Kwong conceded. "If your speech did not betray you—" He hesitated to make polite explanation. "You speak our tongue beautifully, but there are fourteen tones in the Cantonese, and it is not to be expected that any—"

"Barbarian," Napier supplied, smiling as the old man hesitated. "I have not claimed to be of China, but only half Chinese."

"The endurance of a horse is determined by how far it can go. If it succeeded—" He dismissed the subject. "We have wondered why you have been so long in coming."

"I have been out of the city. What have you learned?"

"Not much, and yet a thing that seems to me to be a matter for satisfaction. Six men, it will be remembered, were picked to wait for the Mexican messenger as he came toward the great house that night. None of them has said that he did it. Yet this we know, that when the men were being given the places to lie in wait, one of them said that the Mexican was accustomed to bear messages to a certain house and had fallen into the habit of always coming past that house on his way to and from this quarter, and Joe Fong spoke and said that he would wait in that path."

"And it was by that route that he came, and in that path that he was killed."

Kwong Li inclined his head. "So we know what befell, although it is not evidence such as satisfies judges."

"It may be that I can make use of it," Napier said. "I have a thought that I may be able to make use of it to-night. In the meantime, there is another thing: A number of men you have named to me as members of the Society of the Fragrant Lily, and yet there is another whose name you have not given. Who is Wu Tsai?"

To his uncle's inquiring look, the younger Chinaman shook his head in the

negative. "I have never heard the name here," he said.

NAPIER produced the complete orange label that had marked the tin brought in by Sanders. "Here is the address," he said. "The package bearing this label was to have been delivered to the great house. '*To the Honorable Wu Tsai,*' it reads."

Kwong Li took the paper and held it before his eyes under the light. A whimsical smile wrinkled the corners of his lips. "In learning to read our characters, you were being instructed by one who spoke the official tongue, were you not?"

"Yes."

"You think, then, when you read, in Mandarin, not in Cantonese."

Napier agreed that this was undoubtedly so, in so far as he thought in Chinese at all.

"It is explained," the old Chinaman said. "These characters read *Wu Tsai*, in Mandarin, as you thought, but in Cantonese one speaks them *Ng Choy*." He handed back the label. "The number of men you seek is not increased."

With thanks and protestations of regret that he must hasten, Napier moved toward the door. Kwong Yet spoke:

"If it is permissible, one question. You said you might make use of information to-night. And that this masquerade had succeeded once and might again. Might I ask if men—including the enemy of this house, who mocked my uncle—are to be seized to-night? I would like to be near to hear the news early, if so."

Napier hesitated, and old Kwong saved him the necessity of a direct reply by quoting sententiously from the Analects:

"'The superior man acts before he speaks, and afterward speaks according to his actions.'"

"Thank you, Kwong Li," Napier said. "Those are wise words. Nevertheless"—he smiled at Kwong Yet—"it is a warm night, and pleasant, with many stars—a pleasant night to remain awake for a time. News might come to one who sat before his door, in the darkness."

CHAPTER XXIV

UNDER the very mulberry tree where he had stood when he made the violent acquaintance of Villabosa, Napier found Gordon.

"Three Chinamen have gone in," the agent whispered, "—Toy and two others, probably your two; I have seen them at the restaurant. And two others have come out, since Toy went in, and gone away."

"You haven't seen anything of Kalat?"

"Here he comes now."

The Turk turned into the broad beam of light that streamed down the walk from the cluster of incandescents over the door. He went up the steps and rang; there was a slight delay before he was admitted.

"Nobody to tend the door, as we expected," Napier said. "Whoever opened it came from some distance away. I'll wait, now, until they have a chance to get to wherever the meeting is held—in that little room out of which the wine-closet opens, probably—and then I'll go around and come up the walk openly. The instant the door has closed behind me, come as fast as you can. Who is the other man that will be with you?"

"Carver. He is over behind that little house on the next corner. When he sees me start, he'll come."

"Leave him at the door, after you get in, and go with me yourself. Your other man and the police understand what they are to do."

"They will close in immediately. Anybody who gets out of the house can't help being taken."

"All right," Napier agreed, satisfied. "I'll be starting."

AT the door, after ringing, Napier had to wait a moment, as had Kalat. When it opened, he faced Tung Sheng. He stepped inside, and the Chinaman saw to the closing and fastening of the door. Then he took a step or two to precede Napier into a wide, garish room that opened to the right off the front hall; and as he did so, the doorbell rang again.

The Chinaman turned quickly and leaned forward, his back to Napier, to inspect this new arrival through an ingeniously concealed peephole by the side of the door. His eye had not reached it when the hard muzzle of a pistol pressed against the back of his neck, and Napier whispered: "Not a sound! Open the door."

A brief second Tung Sheng hesitated, then obeyed. Gordon came in noiselessly. Beyond him, near the edge of the lawn, another man could be seen running toward the house on the grass.

"Look for weapons and handcuff him,"

Napier commanded under his breath. "Leave him here, then, with Carver. It wont take but a minute or two. Then come on through that big room. I'd better not wait; they may be getting suspicious."

He turned and entered the big over-decorated room which in a past day had been the dancing-apartment of "Harmony Hall." On the farther side, beyond a piano, a door stood open, and voices came from beyond it. Napier crossed the dance-hall and stood in the doorway.

Across from him sat Ng Choy, at ease, calm and impassive. Joe Fong, beside him, was fidgeting. At a little distance Kalat stood with his elbow on a mantel. Napier thought that the older Chinaman had been telling him the story of Villabosa's message, a guess that was proven true by Ng Choy's first words.

Beyond Ng Choy a door stood wide into what looked like another small room, but which Napier knew was the big windowless wine-closet that had served the house in its day of notoriety. A single electric light, hanging from a cord in the center of the closet, illuminated it, and in plain sight from where Napier stood was the safe.

It looked, except for its face, not unlike any other iron safe two feet and a half high. Its door, however, boasted no combination dial. Instead there extended from the left-hand side, lacing across the crack of the door one below the other, five hasps. Each ended at a staple that was firmly imbedded in the door, and at each staple was a padlock. Only when all five keys were present at the same time could the safe be opened.

All this he took in at a glance, while Ng Choy was saying:

"And here he is. Charley Chew, this is Misser Sas'anada."

KALAT looked, looked harder, and froze into astonished but wary immobility.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "This is an American—named Napier."

"Keep your hands away from your pockets," Napier commanded. "It means you are under arrest. I am a Federal officer." He shifted his eyes to the two Chinese and changed to their tongue, so there could be no misunderstanding. "Don't make any move to get a weapon. It would be dangerous."

Over his shoulder they saw the face of Gordon, who had come across the dance-hall noiselessly. Napier stepped into the room, and Gordon took his place in the doorway.

"What is this for?" demanded Joe Fong, his face black with anger. "We have done nothing."

"As to the others, it is for evading duties," Napier told him. "As to you, there are other things to explain. You work about a kitchen too much, Joe Fong, where you are constantly getting grease on your hands, to take a chance with finger-prints. It is too easy to get a picture of your fingers. When you throw anything over a wall, at night, you should be sure the same marks are not on it that you leave on pots and pans and plates and tables."

"It is not mine!" Fong shouted. "I did not throw any knife over a wall. I had no knife."

The countenance of Ng Choy was as bland and expressionless as ever. "So!" he murmured in his own tongue. "It was done well, and thoroughly. I congratulate you. I especially congratulate you"—his voice was mild and amiable, but his eyes, on Napier's face, were flat and opaque—"that no one of us guessed your occupation when you were at the restaurant. If so, some accident might have befallen you before now."

Napier ignored the old Chinaman. "We'll see what kind of firearms or knives they carry—" he began, to Gordon, when there came an interruption. The doorbell rang; a confusion of voices arose at the outer door, and a voice that was strange to Napier shouted angrily, commandingly but nevertheless with a queer note of pleading: "I've got to come in. I've got to see Toy. Damn it, man, don't tell me I can't! Tell him it's Captain Glenn. Tell him I've changed my mind. Don't stand there arguing. Great God, man, I can't wait, and I wont!"

"Let him come in," Napier told Gordon, who went to pass the word to Carver. A moment later Glenn came hurrying into the room, the Treasury agent behind him.

THE Captain had unquestionably been a handsome man in his youth. Now he was thin almost to the point of emaciation; his face was haggard and lined; his eyes burned feverishly; and his tongue continually moistened his lips. He seemed

quite unconscious that the presence of strangers might have any significance, for he began talking to Ng Choy the moment he came within sight and hearing.

"I'll do it," he called. "I've changed my mind. Give me a little dope, Toy. Hurry! We'll talk afterward."

Ng Choy did not take the trouble to answer him.

"Good heavens, man, don't sit there looking at me!" Glenn cried. "Get me a pill! I'm dying for it. I can't wait."

"After a little, we'll see what we can do," Napier said, and Glenn seemed to see him for the first time. "For the moment, you will have to wait. We are Federal officers."

"Federal officers," the Captain repeated dully. He looked blankly from Napier to Gordon. Then, as it drifted into his harrowed consciousness that this was a raid, his only reaction to the fact was despairing disappointment. "You mean he can't give me any? You mean you wont let him give me any? For the love of mercy, my friend, let him get me just a little." He panted, licking his lips. "Just a little," he pleaded. "Please. For God's sake, a little."

It was shameful, and rather horrible. Napier, who had sympathy with all drug-addicts, tried to soothe him. "I think we can manage it, after a while," he said. "I'll have a doctor here, and he will tell us—"

"After a while! A doctor! Don't you understand, Mr. Officer? I can't wait. I've been without it since five o'clock. It's too long! Please, sir."

Again the doorbell rang, and Gordon murmured that this seemed to be an unexpectedly large party. From the front came Agent Carver's voice.

"It's a lady named Frezzi, Billy. She says if we tell Mr. Napier she is here, he will let her come in."

"All right," Napier called. His eyes were on Kalat, whose face displayed surprise, puzzlement and hope. Glenn, for the moment, was forgotten. He stood to one side, muttering. The fullness of the situation seemed to have penetrated his dulled understanding. "After a while," Napier heard him say. "We'll have some after a while."

MADAME FREZZI stood in the doorway. Napier had thought she might have some information that he needed to know, but her eyes swept past him and rested on Kalat.

"I want you to know that I did it, Yusef," she cried harshly. "*I* did it. *I*."

His eyes narrowed, but he did not reply. He seemed stunned by her words and the cold passion behind them.

"You have been followed lately, Yusef," she went on, "and just now the follower came to me and said you were here and that the raid had started. So I had to come and see you under arrest. I wanted to enjoy it." Her set face gave no evidence of enjoyment. "You are under arrest, and you are going back to Turkey to be tried. If the Allies cannot prove you had anything to do with the massacres, the Turks will take care of you for stealing the diamonds. And I did it. You didn't think I would ever turn against you, did you, Yusef? You didn't think I would go to the police and tell them all I knew. But you didn't know that I would ever hear about my father, and my mother, and my brother and sisters. . . . . I hope they torture you, as your filthy friends tortured the Christians. I hope—"

He leaped at her, snarling; and Napier met him with a blow under the ear that sent him reeling against the wall. Then, while Gordon's eyes were also on the Turk, Joe Fong saw his chance, pulled an automatic pistol, and fired.

Napier and Gordon, whirling at the shot and reaching for their own weapons, saw the Chinese-Mexican and Captain Glenn at grips in the middle of the floor; the face of the Captain was slowly whitening, as though a fine powder were being dusted upon it. The pistol was in Fong's hand, and Glenn's fingers were clutched around it. At the instant they looked, Fong fired again, point-blank against Glenn's breast; the Captain staggered, and his knees bent, but he did not release his hold. With a terrific effort he twisted Fong's hand back and upward, and the muzzle swung until it stared fairly into the half-caste's face. Then Glenn's fingers pressed over Fong's and there was a third explosion; and Fong slumped inert to the floor, while the pistol fell between them.

The three shots and all the struggle that intervened had not taken five seconds.

THE Captain was spent, his last ounce of strength and will gone. He collapsed, still breathing, but faintly, as Napier caught him and let him back on a

couch. Gordon, gun in hand, threatening Kalat and Ng Choy, was sputtering excitedly:

"I didn't take my eye off that Fong more than five seconds, and then, out of the tail of it, I saw him with the pistol. He was going to pot you. The old man jumped between you—right into the bullet."

Glenn heard, opened his eyes, and tried to smile. "Couldn't let a fellow like that shoot a white man, of course," he whispered. "Got me twice, didn't he? Then I got him. Didn't quit till I got him. . . . . Didn't quit—I never was a quitter—when I was younger." The eyelids fluttered wearily. "When I was a man!" he said. And then, after another pause: "I was a—man then; and now—" Napier thought the remainder of the sentence would never be spoken, but at last it came, hardly more than a sigh: "And now—I was—a—man—again."

Beneath the pallor of the Captain's face there settled a look of great contentment and peace.

Officers from outside had come racing at the pistol-shots, and they were inside the room now, handcuffing Kalat and Ng Choy, searching them. Kalat had a small pistol. The Chinaman was unarmed. He had not risen from his seat during the shooting; nor had his face expressed emotion. He submitted to the search and the manacles with calm philosophy.

"Telephone for a doctor," Gordon commanded one of the policemen. "Tell him to come on the jump."

"And the coroner," Napier told them gravely as he rose from the still quietly smiling old Captain.

A moment later some one came in through the dance-hall. "There is a young lady at the door," he said. "She says she is Miss Glenn and that she has come to take her father home."

"She mustn't come into this room!" Napier exclaimed. "Bring her into the dance-hall." He went out and met her there, closing the door behind him.

"Why, what are you doing here?" she cried as, after a second look, she recognized him. "And why are you made up to look like a Chinaman? I came after my father. He got away."

"There is something I didn't tell you," he said, at a loss how to approach his sorrowful task. "I am a Federal officer—an agent of the Treasury Department. . . . . When I told you I saw a solution, I meant a raid, and the arrest of the Chinamen. . . . . Wont you sit down?"

She looked at him, only half understanding, but took the chair he indicated. "Didn't Father come here?" she asked. "He always does."

"Yes," he said, and in his look of sympathetic gravity she sensed something ominous held back.

"Where is he?" she demanded. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

"I am very sorry," he told her, "but there has been an accident. It is very serious—very serious indeed."

"To Daddy?" He inclined his head, his eyes on hers. "What kind of an accident? Where is he?"

"Very serious indeed," he repeated. "Please sit down again!"—as she came to her feet. "I would give anything not to have to be the one to tell you."

"You don't mean—" Her voice was a whisper. "He isn't *dead!*"

Slowly he nodded. "Oh!" she cried, and then a crushing explanation came into her mind and she asked, fearfully: "Do you mean he was killed? Was there a fight?"

He nodded again. "Oh, Daddy!" she moaned. "And he sided with them. But you know he wasn't himself."

He saw now what trend her thoughts had taken and hastened to correct it. "He sided with *us*," he said. "He fought for *us*. Your father saved my life."

ALONG with the dazed grief that she had hardly begun to comprehend, she had the feeling of a great load lifted. Perhaps, too, there was the underlying sense of relief that sometimes comes to those bereaved when the one just gone has been a sad and bitter trial, a relief that conscience says is wicked but which nevertheless persists.

"It was quite quick, and painless," he said softly. "A man—one of the Chinese—killed him; and he killed the Chinaman. He realized at the last, that he had come back to be the kind of man he used to be, and he was glad. He smiled."

"Let me see him."

"Not now. You must go home—"

"Home," she echoed bitterly.

"Back to the hotel," he amended, "and I will come very soon. Everything will be done that ought to be done, and I will take you to see him. I wish I could go with

you this minute, but I must wait—and you had best not. I will be at the Edgemont as soon as I can get there—in less than an hour, I hope."

"I can't!" she choked. "I can't go back there alone."

"May I go with you?"

Napier had been unconscious of Madame Frezzi's presence. She came, now, to Ruth Glenn's side. Her face was neither hard nor set; her voice was not cold but soft and warm with sympathy, and there were tears rolling unhindered down her cheeks—the first, Napier thought, that she had shed for more than eight-and-forty hours.

"I would like to go," she said, and her eyes begged Napier not to forbid it. "I understand. I too have lost a father." And Napier felt, although her voice ceased, that her mind continued the sentence: "—and a mother, and a brother, and two sisters."

"Go with her," he told Miss Glenn, "and I will come as soon as I can. This is Madame Frezzi. She will stay with you until I come."

The older woman slipped her hand through the girl's arm, and Miss Glenn leaned gratefully toward her.

"Poor Daddy!" she sighed. "To go like that, here in this—"

Napier spoke gravely: "You can be very glad and proud of what happened at the end. You have it always to remember that he went away like a brave gentleman and soldier."

"Come soon," she said as she followed Madame Frezzi to the door. "I want to hear the story—and to see him. I haven't a friend, you know, except you. I am all alone now."

"No," he said softly, for her ears only. "You are not alone, and you wont be, if I can help it—ever."

The look she gave him before she turned away was not all mere gratitude.

A DOCTOR, unneeded, came soon after, and then the coroner, and an ambulance for the dead; and after that a patrol-wagon, into which policemen pushed Kalat and Tung Sheng and Ng Choy. The old restaurant-keeper, to the last, maintained a perfect calm, surveying all the proceedings with the detached interest of one for whom they possessed no significance. But his shallow, soulless eyes rested on Napier as he passed, and the special agent was honestly thankful that Ng Choy was not free to give commands to slant-eyed man-killers, and that the day was far distant when he would be.

With the five keys they opened the safe, and out of its opium-tin they took the glinting, scintillating Ray of Light. And under the floor of the wine-room, cunningly concealed, they found more than a hundred cans of opium.

When Napier and Gordon, with the two other Treasury agents, leaving policemen to guard the house, finally came out and climbed into Gordon's litttle automobile for the trip to the Federal Building, the neighborhood, notwithstanding the hour, was buzzing with repressed excitement. Chinamen in little groups of two and three were passing and repassing the great house on the opposite side of the street, not seeming to look toward it, clacking steadily and monotonously.

"The Chinese underground is going at full speed," Gordon commented. "Isn't it remarkable how news spreads with them? I'll wager there isn't a Chink in San Antonio, this side of Government Hill, who hasn't heard all the details by now—who is arrested, and who is dead and, roughly, how it all happened."

"The Society of the Fragrant Lily isn't raided often," Napier said. "Its members keep out of trouble—by removing their enemies. Will you go over to police headquarters and attend to registering the prisoners, as soon as we have left this stuff at the office? I want to get these clothes and this stain off, and then I have a number of things to do. I'll be at the office in the morning."

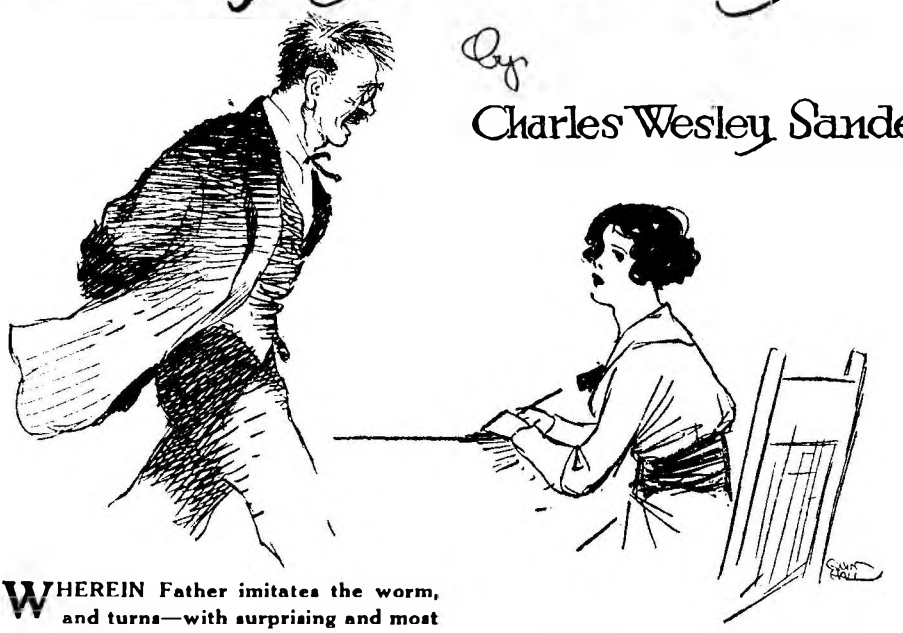
THEY passed, when they had gone three or four blocks, a little Chinese grocery.

The building was dark, but not silent. From under the shadow gallery at the front came weird, discordant sounds. Loudly, screamingly, with a tempo and lilt that Napier well knew was the expression of gladsome triumph, an old man with a Chinese fiddle was joyously telling the whole world the inharmonious story of the Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree.

THE END

"In Reply Would Say—"

By Charles Wesley Sanders



WHEREIN Father imitates the worm, and turns—with surprising and most interesting consequences.

WILLIAM CROTTY sat staring down at the letter which his pink-and-white, blonde, beautiful, shapely and vivacious stenographer, Miss Erma Williams, had just laid on his desk. Bill, as his friends had called him for forty years, ever since he had been a freckled youngster playing on the highways and in the byways of Altonville, was aware that Miss Erma's very big and very brown eyes were watching him at an angle of, say, forty-five degrees.

Now, Bill was president and sole owner of the Crotty Paint and Varnish Company. Not a cent's worth of stock was owned by anyone else. Bill was also vice president of the local bank and a director and heavy stockholder in numerous companies besides the paint company. If all his wealth had been in silver dollars, there would doubtless have been a million of them.

Bill thought, doubtless with good reason, that he ought to be looked up to a little bit. And he was looked up to by a great many men. One who has accumulated a million dollars by his own efforts before he has reached the comfortable age of fifty-five is not to be held in small esteem. Bill appreciated the appreciation of these men; but like most other men, he wanted what he didn't get. At home he had a fine wife, two stalwart sons and three daughters. His wife loved him, but she continually nagged him because he was old-fashioned. His sons secretly admired him and his daughters spoke of him proudly when he was not present. All of them would have resented criticism of him by outsiders.

But the two sons and one of the daughters were college graduates, and the two other daughters would be after a while. They seemed to delight in talking over their father's head. Once in a while one of them would murder a Latin quotation or torture a French phrase for his benefit.

Bill always wore a suit cut after the fashion of twenty years or so ago. His children dressed according to the latest mode. They liked to contrast their gay plumage with Bill's sober one. They thought Bill didn't notice, but he did. For quite a long while he had had a notion that he would make a raid on a tailor-shop and a haberdasher's store and get himself some new duds. If he went to the bank and got a roll, he ought to be able to show the children a few things, for their allowance was limited. It was liberal but not foolishly so. Bill calculated that they ought to figure a little on their clothing, as on everything else. Bill had had to figure pretty close when he was their age,

and he said he didn't know as it had ever done him any harm.

But the seed had only been sown in Bill's brain. It had never germinated. He still wore his clothes of the cut of 1898 or thereabouts. However, Bill's brain was a mighty good place for any seed to sprout in.

AND now this letter, which he was staring at while the beautiful stenographer watched, was like another slap in the face.

This letter was to the head of a firm with which Bill had corresponded for more years than the stenographer was years old. The head of the firm was the kind of letter-writer Bill was. They had never had any trouble in understanding each other. Bill had started his letter in the usual way:

"In reply to yours of the 26th ult., would say—"

He had never started a letter in any other way. He thought it was as good a way to start a letter as any other way. It was a familiar, easy way, and it was as dear to him as his old square-toed shoes and his old-fashioned suit and his low collar and black string tie were dear.

But the perky stenographer seemed to have taken a leaf out of his children's book. She just started that letter off with a bang, omitting the "in reply" and "would say" altogether. Here and there through the letter she omitted words and changed phrases. It was in fact quite a smart letter now, but it didn't seem so to Bill. It struck him as he would have been struck if he had looked on something naked. It was an unadorned letter. It was too direct a letter to send to a man to whom Bill had been writing for so many years.

Now, though Bill was old-fashioned, he wasn't a fool. A fool rarely makes a million dollars by his own efforts. And Bill had a temper. In his youthful days, as he had often told some of his cronies, he had had one hell of a temper. Before he put away the first dollar of his present million, he had got into one or two scrapes because of that temper. In fact, though his children didn't know it, there had been a night when Mrs. Crotty had had to go to a police-station and bail out Bill because he had poked a large-knuckled, hairy, freckled fist into the mug of a man who had doubted that Bill possessed some sterling quality which decent men pride themselves on possessing—honesty, integrity, sincerity, simplicity, or something of that kind.

When Mrs. Crotty had got him out of jail, she had taken him home, and there had followed such a scene as men don't like to have a part in. There were tears and wailings and reproaches and recriminations, and threats and objurgations and pleas and beseechings, and Heaven only knows what all.

In the end, to escape it all, perhaps, Bill had gone on bended knees and sworn by all he held holy that he would be as sweet-tempered as a lamb from then on.

What Bill went through before he got his temper in hand, only he knew. Two incidents are illuminating: Once Mrs. Crotty had inquired solicitously how he had cut his lip. He hadn't cut it; he had bitten it to keep back a stream of angry words. Another time she had wanted to know where he had been walking in such a storm. He was soaking wet. Why, he had even forgotten to put on his raincoat and his rubbers. Good gracious, did he want to catch his death of cold? Bill had rushed out into that storm to keep from repeating the performance which had landed him in jail.

You can hog-tie and otherwise shackle a temper, but you can't really kill it. Often Bill could feel his temper rising, but in the end he would always have it roped and thrown before it got the mastery of him. However, there is a limit, and the stenographer's correction of his time-worn phraseology was, Bill said, the *extreme* limit. It was on his mental capitalization of that word *extreme* that he took his temper by the throat. When he had choked it, it was down and out temporarily. But it left Bill in the clutch of old delusion. It's hard to tell which man is the harder to deal with—one coldly decided or one in a rage.

Bill did not look up from the letter. When he spoke, his voice was husky.

"Miss Williams, I wish to be alone for a while," he said. "Will you kindly step into the outer office?"

Miss Williams stuck her pencil into her blond fluff, took up her notebook and went into the outer office. Out there she pressed her handkerchief to her lips to muffle her laughter.

In his private office Bill took a dusty dictionary from the top of his desk. The dictionary had been a Christmas present from one of his daughters, a suggestive Christmas present, Bill now saw.

Bill thumbed the pages of that virgin lexicon for half an hour, copying words on a pad of paper meanwhile. Then he spent another half-hour writing a letter. It took him a whole hour to commit that letter to memory.

He went to the door and called Miss Williams. She came in with a bright, inquiring look in her brown eyes. Bill sat down without glancing at her.

"Take a letter, please," he said.

Miss Erma sat at attention with her notebook on the ledge of Bill's desk and her pencil poised above it.

"'Mr. Henry D. Quackenboss, New York City,'" quoth Bill.

"What street address, Mr. Crotty?" the lovely Erma asked amiably.

Bill turned slowly in his chair. Miss Erma was looking at him, still amiably, her beautiful dimples showing.

"A street-address for Henry D. Quackenboss?" Bill asked. "Good heavens!"

A wave of color leaped from Miss Erma's throat right up to the roots of her golden locks. Bill continued to look at her frigidly, questioningly, as if he thought he had made a gross mistake in engaging her as his stenographer.

Miss Erma was speechless; so Bill had to say:

"Why, I thought every man, woman, and child in the United States knew Henry. Great guns, his name is a household word. He'd never speak to me as long as he lived if I put a street address on a letter to him." Bill's voice deepened. "Do you mean to tell me that you've never heard of Henry D. Quackenboss?"

"Why, I—I—why, yes, of course, Mr. Crotty," Miss Erma stammered. "I—I didn't remember for a moment."

Bill leaned back in his chair.

"'My dear Henry,'" he went on, "'conditions are now such that I believe we can establish a paint agency at Changchowfu. I—'"

"Er—'Chang—'" said the blonde beauty.

Bill looked into Miss Erma's brown eyes, and there was an expression in his own which said that he was utterly astonished that the world held a civilized person who didn't know how to spell *Changchowfu*. He spelled it slowly, and he just got by. If Miss Erma had waited till the letter was finished, she would have had Bill in a hole. But Miss Erma wasn't trying to put Bill in a hole. She was trying to keep the sides from caving in, in the one in which she was beginning to find her lithe, supple and shapely self. Bill went on:

"'I believe the time is ripe for inordinate activity in a market hitherto quiescent. However, the anomalous and obsolescent—'"

Miss Erma's pencil had been wavering. Now it came to a stop.

"Er—" she said.

If looks really could wither, Bill would have beheld Miss Erma's blond loveliness turn to wrinkled ugliness in an instant. But Miss Erma's lips only trembled, and her eyes got suspiciously bright under Bill's stare. However, Bill was on the warpath, and he was not to be turned into a peaceful byway by threatening tears or unsteady lips.

"Oh, let it go," he said roughly. "I'll write it myself. Take a letter to Moss & Co."

Miss Erma knew Moss & Co.'s address, and her pencil flew. Bill dictated:

"In reply to yours of recent date, would say—"

IT may be stated in passing that Miss Erma took no liberties with that letter. Her mood was humble and contrite, at least outwardly, when she fled from Bill's office to the outer office to transcribe Bill's dictation.

Bill left the office a few minutes later. Miss Erma was so flustered that she did not notice that it was only ten o'clock in the morning. Bill had never left the office before noon so long as Miss Erma or any other employee could remember.

When Bill had gone, Miss Erma rested her shapely head on her exceedingly well-groomed hand and wept silent tears. Arthur Crotty, Bill's oldest son, found her thus when he came in from the factory a few minutes later.

Arthur's arms immediately encircled Miss Erma's shoulders, and he breathed in great distress:

"Darling, darling, what is the matter?"

"He—he ran me up a tree," Miss Erma confessed, drying her eyes.

"Who did?" her lover demanded, drawing himself up to his full height. "Show the man to me. I'll—I'll—"

"Your father," said Miss Erma.

"Oh!" Arthur said, the thunder all gone from his voice. "What'd he do?"

"I wrote one of his dictated letters in the direct, simple way you told me to write

it," Miss Erma said. "He read it, and he didn't say anything. He sent me out of the office, and after a while he called me back and gave me a letter for some man in New York and scolded when I didn't know him and used a lot of words that I don't believe are in the dictionary, or else he didn't know how to pronounce them. And then he got mad when I stumbled and said he'd write the letter himself, and he gave me another letter, dictated just as he always dictates with a 'would say' and everything. And then he flung himself out of the office in a towering passion."

"For the love of Mike!" said Ar hur, who was a Harvard man. "What d'ye make out of that, dear?"

"He's having a brainstorm," Miss Erma declared.

"You don't suppose the old boy has gone bugs, do you?" Arthur asked.

"He certainly acts strangely," Miss Erma said.

"I better look him up," Arthur said.

He kissed Miss Erma and went into the office of his brother and unfolded to the brother the sad story. They went hunting for their father.

THEY found him—at noon when they went home to luncheon. He and Mrs. Crotty and the three daughters were already at table when the sons entered the dining-room.

Arthur was rather angry at his father. He had intended to say something pretty bitter to him about his treatment of Miss Erma Williams, but he took one look at his father's grim and, so to speak, forbidding countenance, and he changed his mind. Besides, Mrs. Crotty was sending warning signals with her eyes to both of her sons.

The sons sat down in silence, and Bill said grace in a peculiarly sonorous voice.

"Missed you at the factory, Dad," the younger son ventured timidly after a while.

"I've been busy for a couple of hours," Bill said frigidly. "Bought a new car—for my own use. Ordered some new clothes—suit, overcoat, ties, shoes, shirts, dress suit—"

"Evening clothes?" said Alice, the youngest daughter.

"I'm going to New York next week," Bill went on without noticing the interruption. "Sam Hillis, the tailor you boys go to, is an old friend of mine. Used to go to school with him. I pinned him down, and he had to confess that he can't quite keep up with New York styles. Now, that suit you are wearing, Arthur—"

By the time Bill got through with Arthur's suit, that son felt that he was a fright sartorially, though he had thought pretty well of the suit hitherto.

"We might go with you, George and I," Arthur said. "I've been thinking for a long time that Hillis—"

"Not any," said Bill positively. "Your mother and I are going, and nobody else from this family. You two boys will run the business. I'm going to begin to take things easy. If you can handle my job between you, well and good. If you can't, Meeker is right there in the office. He knows the business from the ground up. I can elect him president and know that everything will be all right. You'd better get busy.

"As for you girls, two of you will stay in college till your education is completed, of course. But you, Grace, will start in at the office to-morrow morning. Evenings you will go to the business college here and learn stenography and typewriting."

THERE was silence around the table. The children might have had a little fun at their dad's expense, but they held him in respect when he laid down the law.

Bill looked at Arthur. Arthur hadn't supposed that his father had ever seen the sheep's-eyes which Arthur made at Erma Williams, but Bill was an observing person in his own way. Bill had no objection to that romance. Mrs. Crotty had been a clerk in a dry-goods emporium when he married her. Also he recalled that Arthur had once voiced objection to Bill's archaic style of correspondence. There was Bill's two and two, and he put them together for a very easy four.

"Grace ought to make a good stenographer," he said. "She's got an education, and she can use English which the general stenographer don't know nothing about."

Bill got away with his double negative without a murmur of protest from his children. He hadn't been able to do that for a considerable number of moons.

"Er—" Arthur began.

"Miss Williams has that 'er' habit, too," Bill said.

"Were you thinking of discharging her, Dad?" Arthur asked.

"I had a notion that by the time Grace is broken into the harness, Miss Williams will have another job," Bill said, and his eyes bored into his son's from beneath his bushy brows.

Arthur busied himself with his neglected food.

BILL and Mrs. Crotty went to New York. The sons took charge of the business. Before Bill came back, they were in deep water, floundering. They had to call on Meeker for assistance.

Now, Meeker had supposed that some day Bill would retire. Meeker expected that he would be rewarded for a quarter of a century of faithful service by being elected vice president of the company, while Arthur became president. When the sons conveyed to Meeker what their father had said, omitting Bill's reference to Meeker as standing in the offing, Meeker was resentful. But that morning he looked into Grace's eyes, and she smiled at him. At the end of the week, one evening when Grace was about to leave for home, Meeker took her hand, raised it to his lips, and kissed the finger-tips with old-fashioned courtesy. Grace blushed.

"Why, Mr. Meeker!" she said.

When the sons came to Meeker for help, he gave that help gladly. He was thirty-nine, having entered Bill's employ when he was fourteen, and romance was coming to him for the first time.

The sons and daughters awaited the return of Bill with a good deal of apprehension. The new car he had ordered hadn't been delivered before Bill's departure, and the tailor had finished only one suit. That had been a quiet enough suit, but the children were fearful of what Bill would bring back from New York. They were fearful about the car, too, for in response to their questions, Bill had only said that it was a good car. They had visions of a yellow car. And without straining their imaginations, they could mentally behold Bill all dolled up in screaming clothes which some New York tailor, sizing Bill up, would assure him were the very latest thing.

Which shows that children shouldn't sit in judgment on the old man when the old man has had the ability to go out into a rough-and-tumble world and make a million dollars.

Bill had New York connections that were glad to do him a favor. He knew men there who were plain and simple and who saw nothing funny in a middle-aged man's seeking a little friendly advice as to tailors and haberdashers. So when Bill came back from New York, he had a wardrobe which his sons envied. Bill had got together just exactly the collection of clothes that a man of his age should have got together. He had been served so wisely and so well that Adam Miller, meeting him on the street, had stopped to tell him how well he looked. Adam had thought that Bill was simply in unusually good health. He had been talking to Bill five minutes before he noticed Bill's new clothes.

"Well, well," he said, "where'd you get 'em, Bill?"

"N' York," said Bill.

Adam Miller was president of the bank, president of the Chamber of Commerce, and interested in half a dozen businesses. Nevertheless, he said:

"Gimme that fella's address, Bill."

Two nights later Adam and half a dozen other men started for New York to visit Bill's tailor. Adam expressed the sentiment of the crowd when he said:

"Bill looks ten years younger. Us old fellows want to grab off a few years at the other end of the string instead of reaching out for them that's ahead of us."

So the old substantial citizens of the town became the envy of the younger. Arthur hinted to his father that some of the young fellows would like the address of Bill's tailor too.

"Nothing doing," said Bill. "Hillis is good enough for you youngsters."

And he passed the word among the elders, so that not a single son was financed for a trip to New York.

WHEN Bill's car came, the children looked at it in awed envy. It was the best car that money could buy, a far better car than the children had been used to.

"I suppose, Father," Grace hinted, "that you will let us use the new car when you are not using it."

"Nothing doing," said Bill. "The old car is good enough for you. I haven't ridden in that old car half a dozen times. It was never here when *I* wanted to take a little spin. This is *my* car."

And all that emphasis wasn't wasted. Grace murmured something that sounded like a meek apology.

It was Bill's car—his and his wife's.

Bill hired a chauffeur, because he found that one of the delights of motoring was to look about him as he sped up hill and down dale. Mrs. Crotty was never too busy to accompany him. They got into the habit of going out every afternoon to enjoy the pleasant hazy autumn weather. On these rides they drew closer to each other than they had been for years. Often Bill found himself holding his wife's hand as the car purred on its way. He had rather got out of the habit of holding her hand.

IF he thought anything about the affair, he thought it wasn't up to him to analyze it or to study the change which had come over him. He felt younger and he was contented; that sufficed. When he had had what Miss Erma called his brainstorm, he had been plain mad. Now he was beginning to see that money could buy a good many things besides what he had purchased with it in the past. In spite of all palaver to the contrary, it could buy deep and abiding peace. If a man had a sound body, it could buy back a very desirable semblance of youth.

In his first week he had had a notion that when he had taught his children and Miss Erma their lesson, he would return to his old habiliments and possibly sell the car. But at the end of the month he would not have parted with his glad rags and his shining car for a formula for a new and better paint than the world had ever known.

He was much pleased that his wife was looking younger, too. Sometimes when they came in from a ride she was almost rosy. She and Bill talked together more in the way they had talked a quarter of a century before than in the way they had got into the habit of talking in recent years. Bill discovered that his wife, by delving into many books and by association with clever and educated women, had become quite an educated and clever woman herself. She knew a lot of things that were Greek to Bill—who, alas, knew only paint and varnish. So he had a flare of ambition. He'd like to become clever and educated himself. He confided that to his wife, and she didn't laugh. She knew that a bear can be taught to dance after a fashion.

So there was Bill, all dressed up with many places to go to, a victim of motormania, and disturbed by longings toward higher things.

THE change brought alarm to Grace and Meeker, and to Arthur and Miss Erma. Arthur couldn't see the new Bill consenting to a union of his son with a stenographer. Meeker couldn't believe that Bill would give his daughter to an employee. Grace and Arthur, on Grace's initiative, conferred.

"Why," said Arthur, "the old boy can even write a regular letter now. No more 'would say' and 'yours of recent date' in his epistles."

Grace screwed up her eyebrows and enjoyed an inspiration for a moment before she let Arthur share it. Then said she:

"Though you usually talk like a ditch-digger, Arthur, Erma says you can write a beautiful letter. Here are pen and ink and paper. Sit down and write a letter to Papa. Tell him just what the situation is. Call his attention to the fact that our lives will be blighted if he forbids these marriages. Ask his consent, in a delicately persuasive way, to the realization of our fond hopes."

"I would rather talk like a digger of ditches than that way," said Arthur. "But I will write the letter. I will write it exceedingly well. If the old man is ambitious to become an epistolary expert, he can gaze on my product and discontinue any other lessons he may be paying part of our inheritance for. Leave me to solitude and my pen for a space, my dear sister. The digger of ditches prepares to indite a masterpiece. He will make Bill Crotty weep."

He did—almost. Bill received the letter in his office, on his and Mrs. Crotty's return from a ride. They had ridden for miles between rows of giant maples whose leaves had been burned to brown and gold and red by a recent frost. The air had been thin and invigorating. The chauffeur had never driven quite so well, and the car had purred over the roads with the sound of a contented cat.

If, a year ago, a friend of Bill's had been in Bill's present state, Bill would have said he was as soft as mush. Bill didn't say that about himself now. He was full to the neck with contentment.

Bill read the letter and turned to his wife.

"Well, well, my dear," he said, "just listen to this!"

"The idea!" said Mrs. Crotty. "As if we would care whom they married, so long as they were decent people, good people."

Mrs. Crotty must have been agitated, to cast out a couple of "theys" in that careless fashion.

Well, she was agitated, and so was Bill. Mrs. Crotty cried, and Bill blew his nose.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Bill after a while. "I'll just reorganize the company and make Arthur president. Meeker will be vice president, and our other lad can take Meeker's place. I'll have Meeker in."

He had Meeker in and broke the news. He had expected Meeker to fall on his neck, so to speak. But Meeker just stood murmuring, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Aint you satisfied?" Bill asked with some asperity.

The veneer was cracking.

"Oh, I'm grateful, overjoyed," said Meeker. "It's been my dream, the vice presidency. Thank you. Thank you!"

He was still spilling his thanks when he got out of the door.

"Now," said Mrs. Crotty, "call in the children and give them our consent."

"Um, I don't know about that, my dear," said Bill. "I think I'd better write them a letter. You see, they wrote me a letter, and that shows that they are shy about this business. Don't you remember how shy and bashful you and me was when I was courting you—not wanting folks to know and all that kind of thing?"

"It's like old times to hear you talk that way, William," Mrs. Crotty said, and she put her handkerchief to her eyes again.

"Now, I imagine that Miss Erma is just about worried to death over this matter," Bill said. "I s'pose she's been crying her eyes out for fear I'd start a rumpus when Arthur proposed to marry her. I'll just have her in and dictate my reply, giving our consent and also our blessing to all four of them. How'll that be? Miss Erma will be the first to get the glad tidings. That'll make her happy."

"You show a real delicacy of feeling, William," said Mrs. Crotty. "You're a dear. You're not like your old self one single thing. You've changed in *everything.*"

BILL puffed out his chest and rang for his stenographer. Miss Erma came in, gave Mrs. Crotty a shy and appealing glance, as woman to woman, and sat down at Bill's desk, her notebook on the ledge, her pencil poised.

Bill murmured the names of his children as the addressees. Miss Erma's pencil flew across the top line of the notebook page. Her head was bent, and she was blushing furiously.

Bill looked at the bent, golden head and the colorful cheek half turned toward him, and a lump came into his throat. By ginger, she was a raving beauty, this little stenographer! Wonder—wonder, now, if they'd mebbe have a daughter with hair and color like that. His granddaughter! Golden-haired and brown-eyed and rosy-cheeked, sittin' on the old man's lap. Christmas!

Bill tried to go on with the letter, but he found he had to clear his throat. His eyes had a kind of misty feeling. He was flustered.

To cover his confusion, he jumped up and walked over to the door. Arthur, grown anxious, opened the door as Bill reached it. Bill took him firmly by the arm.

"I'm writin' a letter that concerns you and Grace and Meeker," Bill said. "Call them in, and you can all listen while I dictate. To show you that I mean business, I'll make it a letter and sign my name to it."

Grace and Meeker came up behind Arthur. The three entered the room. They stood beside Mrs. Crotty. Bill cleared his throat again. He thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his vest.

"Ready, Miss Erma?" he asked.

The lady nodded. Said Bill:

"In reply to yours of recent date, would say—"

He paused, and his face turned red. He glanced at the others sheepishly. He saw that Miss Erma's pencil had flown across the second line, scattering pothooks as it went. She waited now, tremulously eager for Bill's next words. She seemed to have noticed nothing unusual in the dictation so far.

And then came a murmur from Grace, Arthur and Meeker:

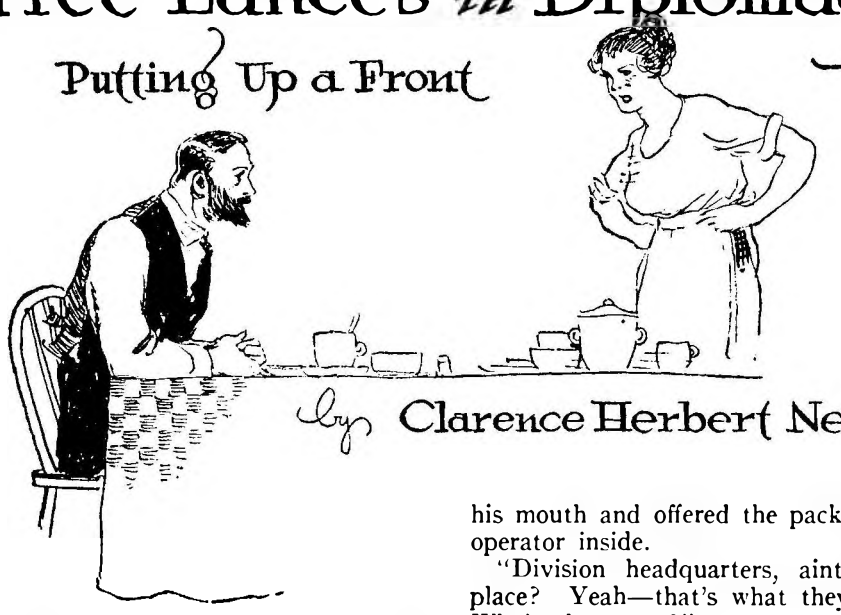
"Go on."

And on the heels of that, like an echo, Mrs. Crotty said:

"Go on, William."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

Putting Up a Front



by Clarence Herbert New

SOME years ago the town of Kappersburg had a population of not over a thousand, and was merely a rural community whose farmers had to haul their produce twenty miles before they reached a shipping-point on any railway. Then—because this condition applied to a long range of fertile valleys in two adjoining States, a single-track road was built in to tap it. The Ironville & Tolgamuck Valley R. R. has a total length of one hundred and twenty miles; because it affords a short connection between spurs of two great systems, it has built up a nice little passenger-traffic—and even handles some through freight in addition to the exclusive pickings in its own range of valleys.

When the "express" came through one afternoon,—there are but two each way, daily,—a well-built man of forty-five or more swung down from the last day-coach, and he hadn't walked the length of the platform before the telegraph-operator in the bay-window of the station knew him for a railroad man. He seemed unable to avoid glancing at the semaphores over the tracks at the end of the yard, and looked estimatingly at the long mixed freight on one of the side-tracks, as if thinking of a mogul engine and three-per-cent grades. Halting by the open bay-window which jutted out on the platform, he stuffed a generous chew of tobacco into his mouth and offered the package to the operator inside.

"Division headquarters, aint it — this place? Yeah—that's what they told me. Who's the super?"

"Barrington. Looking for a run?"

"Yeah—but he wouldn't give me no run until I'd fired long enough to learn the road. An' I aint strong on firin' again. Rather have a good job in the shops where I can go home to meals—an' stick around the town evenings. Who's master mechanic on this division?"

"Jim Brady. He's short of lathe and general-repair men too." The operator looked him over, speculatively. "Say, bo! Mebbe you come down from the Federation to give us the once-over—hey?"

"W-e-l-l—mebbe I did. An' then again—mebbe I didn't. I'm lookin' f'r a shop-job at the top scale, like I told you—an' I can hold her down, all right. If any feller wants to talk with me about Federation or Brotherhood doin's, I'll stay with him on that too. They told me you fellers was pretty well organized on this road, but you aint voted no walk-out since they stood f'r that twenty per cent. That right?"

"That's right. We're talking about fifty per cent all round. The road aint saying a word, but there aint much chance."

"Aw—pikers! Make it seventy-five—an' *get* it! Say, buddy. Know of any house here where I can get a room an' good plain grub? I aint so particular—but I'd rather bunk in with folks that keeps things kinda clean an' know how to cook."

"H-m-m! You don't look like you were running round after chickens. Keep your hands off the kids, an' I reckon the Murphys would let you have a good clean room on the second floor, right handy to the stairs an' front door, so's you could go in an' out any time without botherin' the family. And Maggie Murphy's as fine a cook as there is in this town—knows how to make coffee that *is* coffee. Joe's running the new hundred an' twelve—out with the five-sixteen, and back in the morning with the ten-thirty-eight from Ironville. The oldest girl's down in New York, taking singing lessons, and I know they been kinda thinkin' about a boarder to bring in a little extra cash."

"Sounds like what I want. An' who'll I say was sendin' me there?"

"Tom Miller—day operator. But you wont have any trouble—they'll take you in on your looks. And if you get gay about anything, Joe'll knock your block off—that's all! Treat 'em right, and they'll do the same by you. Stop for a chin whenever you're passing."

MILLER'S assurance proved to be well founded. When Jack Barnes rang the front-door bell, Mrs. Murphy came out from the kitchen—wiping her hands on a gingham apron and smiling good-naturedly when she heard what the man wanted. He was evidently near fifty, if not a bit over, though in such fine condition that she afterward thought forty-three or four might be nearer the mark. In spite of a five-day beard, she decided that he was "easy to look at," if not positively handsome—and his manner, in spite of careless language, conveyed a strong impression of respectability. Three minutes' talk was enough to satisfy her that she was in luck to get such a boarder, and she took him up to look at the room—a little tumbled from its occupancy by the two younger boys, but unquestionably clean and conveniently situated for a man who would be coming and going at all hours. He was a little in doubt about turning the boys out, but she said they spent a good deal of time in the attic on rainy days and could easily put a couple of army cots up there for their own use.

Next evening Joe Murphy was home from his run in time for dinner—and liked the new boarder at first sight. When they lighted their pipes and remained sitting at the table while Maggie and the two youngest girls washed the dishes, he began to draw Barnes out as to where he had been running and what he knew of Brotherhood affairs. Their boarder gave the impression of being a quiet man who would rather listen than talk—but inside of half an hour the whole family were convinced that he had been pretty much everywhere—seen a lot more than they ever hoped to see—and had picked up an amount of varied experience which gave his mere opinion a good deal of weight. He wouldn't admit that he had official connection with the Brotherhood or any of the central unions. They gathered a vague impression, however, that he *had* some such connection but was on the conservative side, belonging to the class of union leaders who have a good foundation of common sense and steadily oppose too radical measures.

APPARENTLY Barnes had no trouble in getting a job at general repair-work in the railway shops. His hands were not as rough as a mechanic's usually are, and his way of going at a repair looked slow and finicky to the foremen at first—but inside of forty-eight hours they decided that he used his head first and his hands afterward. When he finished a job, it required no further examination to be sure that it was thoroughly done.

It may as well be admitted—confidentially, you understand—that Barnes purposely hung about the house a little while after his meals, to overhear some of the women's gossip while they supposed that he was reading the newspapers and railway periodicals which they noticed lying about his room. He had been with them a fortnight or more when one of the neighbors rang the front doorbell for a conventional call upon Maggie Murphy, who had just finished cleaning up after lunch. Most of her acquaintances, when they were "just running in," came by the kitchen door, which was always open during the day. When any woman rang the bell, it meant that the caller was togged out in her full war-paint, with the emphasizing of her present social status first in mind. Upon such occasions one of the smaller children shyly took the caller into the parlor and pulled up the shades, while their mother slipped into her room and hustled into her most expensive gown. After that she came in to greet her visitor

—and hostilities ensued. (The flues of the Baltimore heater were better than a speaking-tube because they were larger —and conveyed a whisper to the room above, if one listened intently.)

AS conversation, the talk lacked breadth of vocabulary and imagination. It dealt, in disjointed sentences, with material facts, but the inference and application never missed their mark. They stuck there, to root and sprout in many ways. The workers in the big shoe-factory had been "out" for two weeks during the previous month, and the cotton-mills even longer—the companies finally granting, in both cases, a fifty-per-cent raise in the regular scale, with double pay for overtime, and a forty-four-hour week. Mrs. Hennessy's three older girls were loom-tenders, and Hennessy himself a foreman, in the shoe-factory.

"Yis," Mrs. Hennessy was saying, "my Delia's complainin' these foor months that the ould player-piano was no good—an' ut soundin' loike a tin pan when tha yoong felleys came in to sing wid her of an avenin'. So 'tis a grrand new mahogginny wan'll be comin' into tha house this day week. Yis—an' 'tis a new phony-graft too, we do be havin'—all tha latest songs in ut. An' ye well know tha ould rags we did be wearin'! Sure, 'tis not rayspictable we was! Well—praise be! We'll take no more shame to oursilves for tha like of that, I'm thinkin'! This suit ye see on me back was made be wan of thim high-class tailors in Ironville. I'll not be tellin' ye what he charged—prices is somethin' fierce, as ye know. Yis—an' 'tis my Bridgit ye should see, this day! The same as your Katie in size—in tha same parochial school wid her. An' Bridgit now wearin' her two-dollar silk stockin's of a Sunda'.

"Yis—'tis puttin' ut up to Joe Murphy ye should be, an' askin' him when will he be walkin' out on the road! Sure 'tis a crime, tha way thim railroads is payin' tha min. They might as well be shovelin' coal undher tha ground, f'r all tha pay they do be gettin'! Lookut, Maggie Murphy! 'Tis a foine-lookin' woman ye are this day—though beginnin' to go at tha waist, the way they all does at your age. Ye should have foine clo'es f'r to kape yoong-lookin'—an' a car that'll take tha wear off yer fate, instid av thrampin' tha strates wid thim. Sure, 'tis but a matther av two hoondred dollars, av ye buy wan sicondhand. We blew oursilves to a new wan, paying installmints, because 'twas better-lookin' f'r tha gurrls, ye moind. An' it's a bigger house we'll be in, nixt month, around on Maple Strate—so Delia'll not be turnin' out tha yoong felleys at twelve f'r tha rayson that she's slapin' in tha parlor an' has to make up tha sofy into a bed afther they go."

THAT evening Barnes and Joe Murphy noticed that Maggie was very much preoccupied while she was serving the dinner. There was the usual chatter from the children; yet both men sensed the fact that she had something on her mind which made her household duties purely mechanical. The usual boy or two appeared on the front piazza after dinner to swing in the hammock with Katie—or rather to perch stiffly on the garden-bench if there was more than one, and let her do the most of the talking from the hammock. Then Terence got home in time for the movies with the two younger girls —while Micky and Patsy went off to some neighbor's house with a couple of their pals. This left their mother starting in on the evening's darning, with the two men for company—smoking, in their chairs, at the dinner-table, which they had not left.

As a rule Maggie was closemouthed about family affairs in the presence of any outsider. But Jack Barnes might be a bit older than her Joe—though he looked younger—and had won the affections of the whole family. A few minutes' figuring now and then, to set the girls straight with their lessons—a little expert treatment for the bike which Mike and Patsy rode by turns—a hint of caution to Katie, on the quiet, after he had seen her out walking with a young fellow who was bad medicine for any girl. In fact, he had slipped into the family life so completely that they thought of him as one of themselves. It was not Joe's way to question his wife about anything—experience having taught him that sooner or later he was due to hear whatever might be on her mind. But the new member of the family was more direct in his methods—and cut straight to the point when the three of them were alone in the house.

"What's on your mind, Mrs. Murphy? If you go on thinkin' so hard, it'll give ye a headache. Mebbe it's somethin' I've,

done that aint to your likin'—hey? Let's have it, till I square myself!"

A FAINT smile curled around the corners of her mouth—and was gone.

"Go awn with ye, Jack Barnes. 'Tis the joke ye must always be havin'! Well ye knew it's nawthin' ye've done—praise be, f'r the dacint man ye are! But I do be thinkin'—thinkin'—till me head is all wore out. When ev'ryone in this town was all poor together, ye mind, things was not so bad. We lived on what we had, an' made it go—because we *had* to, d'ye see. What with the shoe-min an' the weavers goin' out, an' gettin' the big raise from the companies—'tis more money we have to be spendin' that we'll not take shame to oursilves for bein' less rayspictable than the neighbors. 'Twas only this day Flora Hennessy comes drivin' up to me house so grrand in her new autymobble—an' sits down in me parlor with sixty- or sivinty-dollar clo'es on the back of her—an' tells me about her Bridgit, that's poundin' a typewriter in the comp'ny's office, goin' out of a Sunda' with silk stockin's on tha legs of her, while Katie does be wearin' cotton ones that'll not hold the dye!"

"She'll not be doin' that so long, Mrs. Murphy," commented Barnes, "—for the reason that she can't afford it, in spite of the raise! I'm tellin' the boys an' girls, everywhere, to put the extra money by, instead of blowin' themselves to all the gewgaws at once! Suppose the comp'ny goes broke an' shuts down? Where'll they be then? Hey? Them an' their new pianos an' automobiles! I'm for gettin' the highest scale the comp'nies can pay — ev'ry time! Betcher life! But I had a little business of my own for one while—and when your labor costs too much, you lose money on everything you sell, whether it's shoes, ginghams or transportation. No comp'ny can keep goin' that way for long! They gotta shut down an' let the plant go to pieces. Then their workers have to hunt other jobs—at less pay—with all the cost of movin' to some other place."

"Aye—an' how if the workers takes over the plants an' runs 'em thimselves—dividin' all the profits? 'Tis bein' done!"

" 'Tis bein' *tried*—aye! An' a lot of people have been killed tryin' it. Because, d'ye see—that's robbin' other folks of their property just the same as if some one broke into this place an' took the gold watch an' clothes off ye—then turned ye out in the street an' said they was goin' to live here and run this house for themselves! You can't get away with robbin' other folks of their property without some one else tryin' the same trick on you, if you happen to have anything they want! Besides, suppose the workers does take over the plants? If the comp'nies can't make any profits out of 'em, how is the workers goin' to do it—knowin' nothin' whatever about the managin' of the business? Tell me that!"

"Huh! It's a foine talker ye are, Jack—an' it sounds raysonable when ye say it. But well ye know, like all us laborin' folk, that the comp'nies an' the cap'talists has plenty of money! Sure, what harm if they lost a little, now an' thin, runnin' tha plants? They got it, aint they? An' 'twould do thim no harm to lose the half o' what they got, would it? They'd have plenty left for to live on, wouldn't they? Look ye, Jack! 'Tis this that sticks in me crop—an' iv'ry other laborin' woman's too. If Flora Hennessy's Bridget gets enough to wear silk stockin's on tha thin legs of her, an silk gowns on her back, an' has a fine pianny an' phonygraft in tha parlor, an' a car for to take the b'ys out f'r a spin of a Sunda', ye'll not be denyin' that same skinny Bridget do be havin' a betther chance to get her a man that's pullin' down good pay an' has eddication than my Katie—who's wearing cotton on tha limbs of her an' eighteen-dollar ready-mades that turn rusty in two months' wearin'. I hear they do be sendin' Tom Hennessy to a grrand school where he'll l'arn scientific stuff that'll get him an office job with tha road—at big pay. Now, if my Terence was—"

"Wait a minute, Mrs. Murphy. Just wait right where ye are till I tell you somethin'. Ye need no more money than what Terence could save now, out of his pay, to give him the same eddication—but he'd have to work nights at it. Have to give up some of his holidays an' goin' about with the girls! It's just that way that all the bosses got their first start. They worked for it—an' had the patience to wait until bigger money came in the reg'lar way—just like it comes to everyone who'll work, an' save, an' wait!"

"Sure, Flora Hennessy's not waitin'—or savin'—or studyin' nights for hers, is she? 'Tis be tha strikin' an' walkin' out of tha shoe-min an' weavers she's gettin' tha money, aint it? Sure! An' if tha

men that's worrkin' f'r tha road goes out ag'in, 'tis the same they'll be gettin'—or more! Whin ev'rybody was poor an' grubbin' along, with prices what they used to be, 'twas no shame to anny woman to have no betther than a chape melojun in her parlor or mebbe a fiddle for her ould man—an' 'twas no shame that a dacint young girl would make her bed outa the sofy in the parlor afther comp'ny was gone—if there was nine in the fam'ly an' but three rooms to bunk thim in. But no woman's goin' for to see the bould thing nixt door in silks an' pitcher-hats, movin' to a grrand house in a betther street, whin her own ould man's as good as the other wan's, anny day, if he but got a move on him an' walked out whin they wouldn' raise his pay like the rest. An' 'tis me own Joe—sittin' there so quiet-like, with never a peep outa him—that'll be the last to see me an' the childer shamed by the like o' thim riffraff that's throwin' their money in me face!"

MAGGIE'S voice had risen to a shrill pitch as she recalled every incident of the Hennessy visit that afternoon—until she was in more of a passion than Barnes had ever seen her before. Joe busied himself refilling his pipe—and wisely said nothing. The immediate storm would blow over; but whatever his own convictions in the matter might be, he knew what he was up against. The continual dropping of a word here, a word there, the sharpening of a woman's tongue so it was unbearable—until there was more money in his pay-envelope each week. Barnes also recognized the absolute futility of further argument, and threw up his hands in a comical gesture of resignation. Presently he said he thought he'd stretch his legs a bit before turning in, and asked Joe if he felt like going down to the roundhouse for a word or two with some of the runners. When they were down near the tracks, he suggested walking along the creek-road a little way—and began expressing his ideas.

"No use arguing with your wife, Joe—she'll not see it. That's all! But them ideas in her head is all bunk—an' the rest of the women is worse! Trouble with everybody in this country is, they think they gotta put up a better front than the feller next door—an' they either kill themselves or go plumb crooked doin' it! Now, you an' I, Joe, has sense enough to see this game's comin' to a show-down—pretty quick, if things go on a little further as they are! When their present orders are filled an' they got no more reserve stock that they bought at the old prices, them hat- an' cotton-factories are goin' to cut down expenses or shut down altogether! Where'll that fool Hennessy woman an' her fam'ly be then, I'd like to know? Hey? With bigger rent, an' installments on car an' pianny an' phonograph comin' due? Not a cent in the bank! As f'r us fellers on the road—you got a twenty-per-cent raise before I came—gettin' more'n most college professors right now—enough to live on with some luxuries over the necessities, if ye handle it careful-like. But the men are thinkin' of goin' out ag'in—"

"Aye, there's a deal o' talk goin' up an' down tha road. 'Tis said we'll be goin' back into tha stockholders' hands ag'in this month—an' tha ould bosses'll be back in tha offices. They'll be cuttin' down iv'rywhere; 'tis said they has to, if tha road is kept runnin' a-tall. Whiles tha Goovernmint had us, 'twas no matther did it pay or no'—an' they stood tha raises we asked—"

"Yes, but—hang it all, Joe—*some one* has had to pay the losses while the Government had us, or we couldn't have went on runnin' trains! You got sense enough to see that, aint ye? What the Government had to do was soak it on to the taxpayers. We already soaked 'em f'r double passenger- an' freight-rates, didn't we? An' then turns round an' soaks 'em f'r runnin' tha road at a loss besides! How long d'ye think the country'll stand f'r that? Hey?"

"Aw—thim taxpayers is all capitalists! L'ave us soak a little off'm 'em! What harrm? Sure, they'll not be missin' ut!"

"The devil they wont. You're gettin' a blamin' sight more'n the two-thousand-dollar exemption f'r married men. Didn't I hear ye beefin' about the way ye was soaked on your income tax? It'll be more next year—to make up f'r losses on the railroads an' other departments of the Government! Then ag'in, the landlord doubled yer rent, didn't he? For why, d'ye think? Because he was soaked more taxes on his real estate an' other property—that's all! On ev'ry pound of grub ye buy, Joe,—on the clothes ye wear an' the rent ye pay,—you're just as much a taxpayer as any man in the whole country!

An' ev'ry time the men on the road gets a raise, ye pay a good part of it yourself in the risin' cost of grub, provisions an' raw material ye haul over this same road! Get that into yer head an' keep it there! An' there'll be worse to come, mind ye! The road can only pay expenses, with a small int'rest to the stockholders, if the operatin' cost doesn't go above a certain point. Ye own five shares of the common stock yourself, Maggie tells me—an' she's had a dress or so out of the int'rest. Now, if we goes out ag'in, f'r a raise the road can't pay, it'll stop runnin'. That's all! Then how about it—hey?"

"Sure, we'll be makin' tha Goovernmint take over that road altogither—an' pay us tha raise!"

"Will ye so? An' what'll the people of the United States be doin' then, I'm askin' ye—the taxpayers, the farmers an' all the folk in business? Four or five times as many of 'em as the laborers! What'll they be doin', when ye steal the stockholders' property just the same as puttin' a hand in your pocket an' stealin' the pay-envelope ye just got? They'll be findin' a way to do without the railroads altogether, buddy! An' it's not so far away as ye might think!"

DURING the next week it became apparent that various influences were at work under the surface in Kappersburg to arouse discontent among the railroad men. Three emissaries of the I. W. W. were spotted by Barnes,—talking pure bolshevism to little groups here and there,—but they didn't last long. Through some mysterious channel evidence strong enough to warrant their arrest reached the Secret-Service headquarters in Washington, and twenty-four hours later they were taken away on the nine-twenty-five, handcuffed. If they really believed they had a sufficient following in the railroad yards to stir up a mob strong enough to rescue them by force, they were a disappointed trio.

Other influences, however, were more insidious and less possible to handle. In spite of a fair-sized conservative element made up of men like Jack Barnes, who had some comprehension of railroad finance, the movement toward another walk-out gathered momentum when the road was finally turned back to its owners. There were psychological conditions which made it inevitable, anyhow—and when Barnes was convinced of this, he took Joe Murphy up the road one evening for what he knew to be the last talk they were likely to have in some years, if ever.

"Joe, I reckon it's coming, an' nothing we can do'll stop it. You been gettin' a heap more sense lately—since you got to figgerin' on the condition of the road a little; but you aint convinced yet that the men can't get away with another walk-out. All right; you fellers are from Missouri—gotta be shown! An' you're goin' to *be* shown, too! The thing that's worryin' me is what'll happen to Maggie an' the kids. I been gettin' kinda well acquainted with you folks since I been living in the same house, an' I'd not see any one of ye come to harm if I could stall it off. There's but one thing I can do, Joe. I've nobody dependin' on me, as ye know—an' I've put by somethin' ev'ry year. Not such a lot, but enough so's I don't give a hang f'r any job 'less'n I want to keep it.

"I've figgered that the savin's-bank int'rest on a thousand dollars wont make much diff'rence to me one way or the other—an' I'm goin' to lend ye that much to be put in a bank in your own name, so's nobody else can touch it. Tell Maggie if ye like—but she's to have no handlin' of it. The money's to stand between ye an' want if things goes wrong on the road—as they will. When the country's settled down ag'in, ye can pay me back through a bank in New York that'll keep track of wherever I go. It's where I've a little money drawin' int'rest, an' I think they're honest because the same folks has been runnin' it f'r nearly a hundred years—Green Brothers."

AT first Joe objected very strongly to accepting such a loan. Borrowing a hundred dollars was one thing—but ten times that seemed rather a staggering sum if anything should go wrong with the bank where he put it. After a while, however,—considering how close Jack Barnes had been to all of them, down to Micky and Pat,—he consented. Two days later a wiry, active man with keen, deep-set eyes dropped off the afternoon express and inquired for Barnes until he located him in one of the big machine-shops. Jack introduced him to several of his mates and foremen as Harry Archer, an old pal of his, and took his friend around to inspect

some of the improved appliances for the latest type of the company's locomotives. Somewhat to the surprise of the foremen, Archer seemed to be an expert mechanic who had gone into both theory and practice of his craft to an extent away beyond them—Barnes afterward explained that his friend was really one of the most expert aviators then living. As they were passing behind a building where nobody could see them, on the way back to the station, Archer handed him a package tied up in brown paper.

"I thought I'd better fetch it along in twenty-dollar notes, sir, in order to prevent anyone's tracing you through the money."

"Just what I thought you'd do, Harry—that gets around the question of identification nicely. Had any word from home lately?"

"Her Ladyship arrived in New York last week, sir. She had been following your Ironville experiment very closely in the press, and thought you were not likely to stop with that—considering that nearly half your investments are over this side of the Atlantic. Aside from that, she has been following the labor situation here a deal more closely than even she did in England, and I've an impression that she must have spent a fortnight or more in the slums of two or three Western cities, studying sociological questions while supposed to be a settlement worker. Sabub Ali accompanied her—says they crossed more than three weeks ago on the *Mauretania*. Which reminds me—how long will it take you to clean up here, sir?"

"When my friend has banked this money to-morrow morning, I'm through. I've gone into this situation from the bottom—up. Know what there is of importance to know, and if I stay longer, some one is likely to stray in from Ironville with a sufficiently good memory for faces to be suspicious—which I'd rather avoid. That's why I'm wearing this beard. It's not likely that I shall have much further interest in this proposition, though it has certain features which could be handled, I fancy, in a test case. If I do return, it must be with a sufficient change of appearance to prevent recognition—but I can think of nothing just now which might bring me back here. I've learned what I came to learn—with the expectation of applying the information in other localities."

"Then, sir, Her Ladyship will make a dinner engagement for you in New York for the twenty-fifth—Friday evening. She has reason to believe your presence will be most opportune—I fancy it has something to do with the railway situation in this country."

WHEN Friday evening came, five men —prominent in American politics and business affairs—arrived, with their wives or daughters, at the New York residence of James K. Wedderburn in time for dinner—having been invited to meet two very distinguished personages, the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, whose presence in the States at that moment had not been discovered by the newspapers. When dinner was announced, Countess Nan was proving herself a delightful conversationalist in the drawing-room, but Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint had not, as yet, put in an appearance. At the Countess' suggestion, Miss Wedderburn decided not to wait any longer, and proceeded to the dining-room with her guests; but the soup had scarcely been served when a man of striking appearance — smoothly shaven, and wearing a monocle as if it had grown into the flesh around his right eye—quietly entered the room, paying his respects to Miss Wedderburn and bowing courteously to the others as he slipped into the seat at her right.

Less than two hours before, a bearded man in a cheap ready-made suit had climbed the stairs from the train-platform in the Pennsylvania Station, walked through the underground passage into the great terminal hotel across Seventh Avenue, taken an elevator to a room on the tenth floor, which he entered as if he had been occupying it for some time. Inside, a stately Afghan—in American clothes, to avoid being conspicuous—proceeded with smooth efficiency to shave off the beard and assist him into a suit of better material, which he wore as far as the Turkish bath on the first sleeping-floor. After roasting for a while and swimming in the big plunge, he again went up to the tenth-floor room, where the Afghan had laid out immaculate evening clothes, changed with the rapidity of long practice, and was racing uptown in a handsome landaulet within twenty minutes. Had photographs been taken when he left the train in the station, and as he sat at Miss Wedderburn's table, no jury of twelve men

would have admitted the possibility of their portraying the same man.

NOW, it had been Miss Wedderburn's idea that an after-dinner discussion between a man interested in as many American enterprises as His Lordship, and some of the leaders in American business affairs, would be not only of interest to the rest of her guests but welcomed by the men themselves as an opportunity for the exchange of ideas upon many vital points. As far as she knew, there were but her father and one of the other men who had ever met the Earl or Countess Nan, and it never occurred to her that she had been skillfully led to suggest name after name to the Countess until the guests selected had been cut down to individuals that charming woman had planned in her own mind to have present, with an eye to certain business decisions as an outcome. As a mater of fact, but one of the men had not previously talked with Lord Trevor upon different occasions, and he was quite well posted upon many of the peer's American interests. It was the wife of Senator Blantyre who presently switched the table-talk from general topics to politics with a direct question to the peer himself.

"Has Your Lordship had the time or inclination to investigate sociological conditions in the United States?"

"I know of nothing else which is quite so vitally important just now, Mrs. Blantyre—and I've recently had exceptional opportunities for getting at some of the opinions from the under side. Frankly, I fear the social conditions here are even worse than with us in England—owing to the vast difference in habit and temperament."

"Why—that is most surprising! We know, of course, from the newspapers, that there is a great deal of unrest in America—but I had supposed England to be almost upon the verge of revolution, or something horrid of that sort."

"That supposition is not so far out—but you're much nearer the actual fact here than we are. Do you know, for example, that one of your leading department-shops has just taken out insurance with Lloyds to the amount of five million dollars against losses caused by riot and revolution? That's the cold fact! I could name the concern, if I thought it advisable. Do you also know that some twenty large retail establishments on Fifth Avenue and neighboring streets are laying in stocks of two-inch hardwood planking for the purpose of barricading their windows if necessary? That's another cold fact—as a result of advice given by one of your leading commercial organizations."

"But—but—such a condition seems incredible! Why—why should the danger from that sort of thing be more acute in the United States than in England?"

"Well, there are a number of contributing causes, but I'd place the chief one as the universal worship of money and position in America—and the perfectly insensate squandering of money when it is obtained. Our laboring classes in England, for example, are wasteful enough in their reckless spending when a bit of unexpected fortune comes their way; but the habit of thrift—of putting by a little something for the rainy day, of making the penny or the pound go as far as it will stretch—has become so ingrained in them through centuries of forced economies, that for some years it will be quite impossible for them to fling money in the American way. Again—there is our class system to be considered. With us, the class system has been established for so long a time that we have little of your constant strain to 'put up a front'—to bluff one's neighbors into the belief that one is wealthier, has better social position than they."

"But Your Lordship,—admitting all you say to be more or less true,—why should that necessarily plunge us into the horrors of revolution? Americans have too much common sense for that!"

"Not when contagion has reached the point where it spreads and acts like panic, Mrs. Blantyre! In this country the craze for obtaining money far beyond one's actual needs—obtaining it *anyhow* — has reached a degree very close to insanity! Unless it is dealt with mercilessly, here, at once, there's little hope for the rest of the world. The Dark Ages will repeat themselves."

WHILE he was speaking, Earl Trevor had been conscious that one of the younger women at the table—daughter of a railroad vice president—had been controlling with difficulty some kind of indignant protest at one or another of his statements. He had casually glanced across

the table once or twice, to form some estimate of her type and what it was that she had found offensive. Instinctively he sensed opposition of a rather virulent sort —and upon impulse decided to bring it out by an unexpected question:

"You think I have formed a wrong impression, Miss Caxton?"

The girl was thrown off her balance somewhat by this sudden direction of attention to herself, but saw her opportunity to air some recently acquired theories.

"I think, if Your Lordship will pardon my putting it that way, that it is something more unforgivable than smug consciousness of one's own superior knowledge which leads a person to make a quick trip across the United States and back in a Pullman, look at a few of us through the car-windows, and then make sweeping assertions that our laboring classes are getting more money than they actually need —throwing it away on senseless trifles! Let me tell you that our laborers by the hundred thousand are actually starving to-day, in spite of the raises in pay they have literally forced from the capitalists who are always grinding them down!"

Miss Wedderburn was horrified. Such a scene at a dinner-party among well-bred people was unheard-of—inexcusable! She was turning—pink with mortification—to Countess Nan, with a whispered apology, when an expression of amusement upon that celebrated lady's face made her pause. After a full minute of most uncomfortable silence at the table, His Lordship smilingly replied in the lazy drawl which those who knew him best had learned to associate with his most dangerous mood:

"Er—would you mind telling us, Miss Caxton, just where so many thousands of the laboring classes are now starving—at the wage-scale they are now getting?"

"Why—why—Your Lordship's question is positively absurd! All around us! In this very city—in practically every manufacturing or railway town throughout the entire country!"

"Er—pardon me again, Miss Caxton. Would you mind telling us from whom you obtained those statements—and—er—just upon what grounds you thought them worthy of belief?"

"Why! Why, everyone knows they are true! I—I've been a settlement-worker myself! Have heard them talk—"

"In Greenwich Village—possibly? Eh? Now—pardon me if I venture to state a few entirely opposite facts, Miss Caxton. Had I written a book on America after a ten-day trip to the Pacific Coast and back, what you imply as to the value of my opinion would be well founded. As it happens, however, I was born in Boston, made a part of my fortune out West, lived in this country until I was past thirty before inheriting my family estates in Devon—and have always been closely identified with American commercial int'rests. Aside from that, I've just spent a month in a town of six thousand people, a third of whom are employees of the railway upon which it is situated—another third being employees of half a dozen big factories. I've talked with them all day long, watched them at work, know what it costs them to live—and have seen practically every family in that town buying player-pianos, automobiles, phonographs, moving into more pretentious houses, where they pay double their former rent —wearing clothes very nearly as expensive as a good many of yours, I fancy. I didn't hear of one case where any of them were starving, or anywhere near it—"

MISS CAXTON'S cheeks were flushed; she interrupted him furiously:

"Why shouldn't they have automobiles, pianos and good clothes—as well as the capitalists who grind them down!"

"They *should*—by all means, if they can afford it, on a wage which they are actually worth. The point is, they simply can't afford it, because they have too little put by to tide them over if they suddenly lose their jobs—if they're idle for several months, moving to other places in search of employment. And labor, to-day, is not worth, proportionally, what it is being paid. No business can go on much longer under such a cost for labor, because it cuts out all the profit and means actual loss to the employer. It's not exactly fair, you know, to expect that any employer is going to lose all the money he has saved or made in the last quarter-century merely to provide employment for men and women who knife him at every turn. As to the proportionate values, most railway mechanics and runners are being paid, to-day, two thirds the average salary their division-superintendents are getting, a thousand dollars a year more than the average college professor, at least half as much as the sales-manager of many a

prosperous business. Will you or anyone else who has the slightest knowledge of relative business values make the assertion that those mechanics are worth any such proportion of the vastly more experienced managers' income? Utterly ridiculous on the face of it—not? Now, returning to your 'starvation' statement, again:

"The average skilled laborer, here, is getting from two to three and four thousand dollars a year—you can easily get the figures. Well, I have a friend in one of the less expensive boroughs of this city whose income is something under two thousand this year—a man of cultivation, whose apartment is decidedly attractive of an evening and who frequently has delightful people in for dinner. He and his wife are not expensively dressed, but well enough to go anywhere they may happen to be invited, except possibly some of the more snobbish country-houses. They buy the best quality of food in the market, but not more than they actually need, and they waste little or nothing. The man admits that it takes careful figuring to be comfortable on that income at present—but he's not complaining, and not within a thousand miles of starving or eating unsanitary food. When it becomes necessary for him to get more money, he'll work a little harder—a few more hours per week—and make himself worth more money.

"Now, Miss Caxton—permit me to offer a word of caution—most seriously. One of the most unfortunate features of the conditions here in America is the position taken by so many of you young women and men without the practical experience in business conditions which would give you a vastly different viewpoint. You can't possibly see the employer's position until you've worked your way up through several years to becoming an employer yourself. And for that reason—in present conditions, here—the stand you are taking is exactly that of a person who insists that an open tub of gasoline needs only to be humored, and lights matches over it to prove her contention."

MISS CAXTON subsided—not because she was convinced, or disliked the Earl's hated class any the less, but from the fact that her supply of ammunition had proved unexpectedly damp and unreliable. She had sense enough to see that he would not make statements before intelligent people which could be easily disproved. Her own charges had been passionate generalities—borrowed largely, as she admitted to herself, from soap-box orators in the slums. His answers had been specific—incontrovertible. And while she was trying to think of a flaw in them, her hostess—conforming to the home-customs of her English guests—took the ladies off to the drawing-room while the men remained for their coffee and cigars. When they had gone, Wedderburn told his butler that the servants would not be needed again—quietly locking the door against possible intrusion after the man had left the room. Before resuming his own chair at the head of the table, he said with businesslike abruptness:

"Gentlemen, my daughter arranged this dinner-party as a purely social affair, but I think it's too good an opportunity to be lost. Lord Trevor, as you know, has recently had an experience—in that so-called 'Ironville Experiment'—which makes his opinion on present conditions exceedingly valuable. And it just occurs to me that he is actually on the board of the Ironville & Tolgamuck Valley—a road in which all of us but the Senator are closely interested and which is becoming an increasingly serious problem. In fact, with his suggestions, it seems to me that we might reach a decision right here and now as to the course we'll pursue during the next few months. With the proxies we hold, of four other directors, we have a majority vote without leaving this table. You agree with me—eh? Thought you would. To begin with, Trevor—I'd like to know what you really think of the situation. Were you in earnest when you spoke of living for a month in a railroad community? *Working* there?"

"Aye—an' the joke of it is, in the circumst'nces, the place was Kappersburg—division headquarters of the I. & T. V. I'd already picked out the place as being a representative one for my investigations before remembering that I was on the board. As to what I think of the situation—well, frankly, we are up against a worse proposition than it looks on the surface. It's one thing to counteract the influence of bolshevists an' the I. W. W. There's been enough basic common sense in American labor, as a class, to help us in handling that. But when the trouble strikes in deep enough to get the women completely off their heads, we're in a vastly worse mess! That's why I was in deadly

earnest when I said what I did against the craze for money way beyond the people's needs, and the way it is being thrown about. When a woman suddenly gets more cash than she ever had in her life and immediately flaunts her prosperity in the faces of neighboring women who have less to do with,—and the proposition appears to be simply that of striking, striking, keeping at it until the money just pours in,—you've got a situation that will get entirely beyond control unless it is dealt with as cold-bloodedly as a surgeon who knows that nothing but cutting will save the patient's life! You're going to have another walk-out inside of a month—for seventy-five or a hundred per cent, I fancy. More than half the men were against it—an exceptionally intelligent lot who read the daily papers and the trade-journals. But their wives and daughters will literally force them into it! And that condition of things is spreading all over the country!"

THERE was silence for a moment or so as the force of these statements gradually sank in.

"By godfrey! That's not a very cheerful outlook, Trevor! Say! We've been expecting that walk-out when we began cutting expenses on the I. & T. V.—but I'd no idea that the men dreamed of asking so much! It's simply prohibitory, of course! We're losing money at the present scale—and have simply got to cut it down or go out of business! Suppose the active management of the road were in your charge? Would you care to make a suggestion as to how you might handle it?"

"There's but one way—as you say. Go out of business!"

"And lose our franchise?"

"No. You'd still own the trackage, the rolling-stock and all but the right-of-way, if it came to that—but I fancy it wont. I say, gentlemen—just as a sporting proposition, I'll undertake to handle that situation for you when it comes—if you like, and care to give me absolute charge, with privilege of putting out another bond issue."

"You will! By Jove! Er—how would you do it? Mind giving us some idea?"

"I'd start in using the telephone from some private room—to-night. Buy four Diesel motors—or any good petrol-burning motor powerful enough to haul two day-coaches each. Ship 'em at once to Kappersburg on flat-cars—under tarpaulins, so that nobody can tell exactly what they are—and issue instructions to hold them there in the yard for unpaid freight until further orders. Have them laid up on one of the spurs which run back of the big car-repair shop. Then—there's a Government auction of army motor-transports, this week. Hundreds of 'em going to be disposed of to the highest bidder, an' they're said to be in excellent condition—mostly Q. M. D. lorries ordered just before the end of the war an' practically unused. I'd have a dozen different buyers at that auction—get two or three hundred of 'em. And I know where I can pick up, through agents, another hundred or so within a fortnight."

"What's the idea? Use them in place of our trains?"

"Aye—but not openly. I can float a bond-issue in Wall St. for a motor-express an' transportation comp'ny—which will lease out motor-lorries or twenty-passenger busses for whatever service they may be required. I'd establish a bus-service along the line of our road with passenger-rates ten per cent under those of the road itself—so it will look like bona-fide competition. An' I'd lease enough lorries to each manufacturing-plant along the line to handle their output as far as destination or the nearest trunk-line railway. As it happens, there are fine macadam highways paralleling our tracks."

"How about the franchise?"

"Two mail-trains each way, per day, will hold that. Equip four day-coaches as dummies, with these motors. Let each one haul another coach. You can run a couple of two-car trains each way—and you'll need but chauffeurs' licenses. No locomotive engineers at all. The point is that seventy or eighty per cent of your heaviest traffic can be handled by the lorries and busses—without public knowledge that the road is behind them. I'll guarantee to find three or four hundred chauffeurs whom there is no excuse to intimidate. If you doubt that the scheme is practical, just get figures on the amount of freight being shipped to-day—direct from Ohio towns to Atlantic ports—in five-ton motor-trucks!"

THE walk-out on the Ironville & Tolgamuck Valley R. R. occurred in due time, according to the ultimatum which

had been delivered to the managing officials; and to the amazement of the strikers there was no talk whatever of settlement or compromise. Two motor-trains were run each way to hold the franchise—and because there was no further attempt to maintain adequate service, these mail-cars were not molested. Knowing that all income from the road had stopped, the men felt certain that it could not remain for more than a week or two on such a basis. But weeks passed—and no attempt was made to resume service. A motor-transport enterprise had sprung up to accommodate the people along the line, becoming so efficient as to threaten formidable competition when the railroad tried to resume business again.

This seemed a most excellent joke to the strikers! They thought the railroad was being steadily ruined beyond redemption—and it took them some time to realize that if this actually happened, their jobs were gone too. Before long their reserve cash dwindled to a point where they were desperate. They would have wrecked the road—but there seemed no object in doing so. The road was apparently bankrupt anyhow. If they destroyed the property, that definitely settled all possibility of their being reëmployed.

Finally a committee of former employees waited upon the only managing official of the road who had remained in Kappersburg—to ask if there was any chance of traffic being resumed. He seemed entirely indifferent—but finally admitted that the directors might consider resuming if they could obtain labor at a scale which would permit the earning of something over bare expenses. Two weeks later the men returned at the 1918 scale, and trains were running over the entire line.

ON the second day after the reopening of the traffic, Mildred Caxton—who had been in Kappersburg during the strike as a settlement-worker, assisting the more needy families from a fund which had been raised by an organization of wealthy New York women—walked up the creek-road with a Boston "Tech" man who had been one of the I. & T. V. constructing engineers for three years or more. There had been almost an understanding between them while each was in college; then Mildred had become hypnotized by a Russian socialist, and through him had become associated with some of the more extreme radical agitators in the slums of the metropolis.

King had tried to reason her out of the distorted views she began to acquire, but the poison had gotten into her blood—and her self-assurance had been impregnable until Earl Trevor had courteously shown how untenable her chief arguments were and how little she really knew. Since that evening she had been acquiring information at first hand—but in a sufficiently critical way to realize the fallacies in what the strikers said. Then she had run across Dave King again—had begun to consider him from a new point of view. When they finally stopped under a big tree on the bank of the creek, he stood looking down at her speculatively.

"Well? Do you still think that labor can exist without capital? Are you still convinced that capital is grinding down the laboring classes?"

"It's been pretty hard for them in this town for the last few months, Dave! They had no money left—owed for what they ate!"

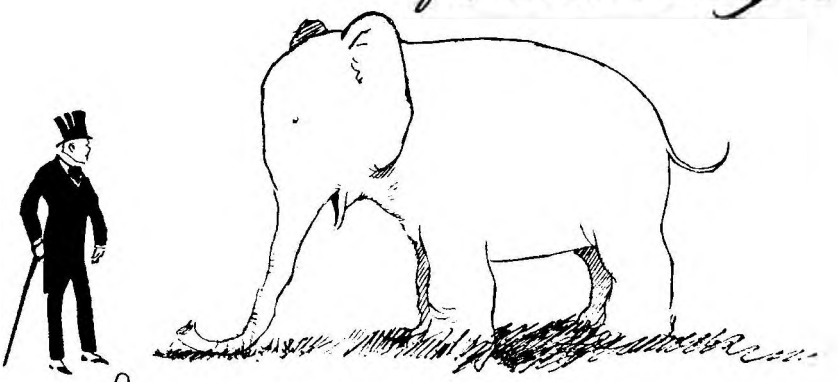
"Because they threw away good jobs when they had them! Because they had taken on loads of foolish expenditures when there was no certainty that their jobs would last! The road would have kept them at a five-per-cent cut in the high scale—it could have paid expenses on that basis. But they crowded it over the line—and the road went out of business. The cotton-factories here will shut down indefinitely next week—they simply can't run at the present scale! Milly—with your education and breeding, can't you see the inevitable ruin which all this radical rot must lead to? For the last time, will you marry me—and help to fight this cursed thing which is robbing people of their reason and driving us to chaos?"

She looked up at him—into the clear, sane eyes which saw things as they were, at the man who would give his life and everything he held dear to maintain law and order, protection for life and property and the fundamentals of civilization in this great country of theirs. Then—tremblingly—she got upon her feet and crept into his arms.

There will be another story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy in the next, the January, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Exploits of an Honest Grafter

The Pink Pachyderm



By William O. Grenolds

IN the annex and museum of collective wonders which formed the side-show of the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus, a lone sucker dug into his pocket for the last time, made one more ineffectual guess regarding the whereabout of the tiny bit of printer's-roll rubber which Cleveland Charley, the three-shell man, had carefully concealed between the second and third fingers of his right hand. Then he turned disgustedly away.

"Knowed I ought've waited!" he exclaimed somewhat heatedly as he swerved a glance in the direction of the Fire-eating Lady, scowled at her efforts to force upon him her latest photograph for one dime, ten cents, and thumped his way out of the museum of wonders, marvels, and astonishing atrocities. Cleveland Charley, rolling the little pea from shell to shell, merely by way of exercise, watched him carefully from beneath the brim of his four-dented Stetson, then turned to eye the approaching form of Honest John Barker, the fixer.

"I'm all worn out," he announced caustically, still fingering the three shells, "just plumb worn out from trimmin' suckers. Hey, there, stand aside and let the gentleman have a chancet. No crowdin', no pushin'—everybody in their turn. Say, listen, John, what's the idea o' all this maddin' throng? I've been gaspin' for air all this mornin'. Oncet they was actually five natives in here at one time—it was stiffin', the tent was so full. I s'pose, when the parade gets back, it'll bring as many as eight people with it. What's the big hunch? Is this here show just rotten, or can't we get 'em out to the lot or—or what is it?"

Out of breath, Cleveland Charley ceased his sarcastic assault, and poking his four-dented hat a bit farther over his eyes, returned to the shuffling of the three little shells. Honest John Barker, immaculate as usual, fumbled the lion's claw on his watch-chain thoughtfully, and watched the manipulation of the little sphere of rubber as it traveled about the table. But he said nothing. Cleveland Charley regained his voice.

" 'Twouldn't be so bad if we wasn't in sure-fire territory. I've seen the time in these towns when we could come in at eleven o'clock in the mornin' and trim the suckers for a roll that a horse couldn't swallow by three P. X. Now look at it. Know what I've pulled down over this board to-day? I've done everything but draw a gun on 'em, and

HONEST JOHN, the astute circus "fixer," does battle in his own fashion with a rival show which broke a "gentleman's agreement."

know what I've got? A measly sawbuck. Twenty dirty dollars, and—"

"Oh, shut up!"

THERE was a trace of irritability in the tone of Honest John Barker as he turned from the three-shell man and walked toward the rear of the tent. His objective was the rear side-wall, but before he had covered half the distance, a plaintive wail from one of the high platforms had caused him to veer and to halt, sorrowfully expectant. The Human Cigarette-fiend, Marvel of Physical Weakness and Object Lesson to all Mankind, was leaning forward, with his beady eyes doing an avaricious sentry-duty on the Everglades Giant two platforms away.

"Mr. Barker," he whispered hoarsely, "do you s'pose you could do me the favor o' lettin' me have about fifty meg till payday? I'm all out o' makin's, an'—"

"Where do you get that bunk? The show furnishes your makin's."

"Course they do. Yes sir. Course they do—only it's awful bum stuff they've been handin' me lately, an' I've been buyin' my own, an' business is rotten, an' I'm broke. Two bits'd do if y' aint got the fifty meg. I know how ever'thin' is, bum business an' all that sort o' thing—"

"Cut the rest of it." Honest John handed him a fifty-cent piece. "I've got troubles of my own."

Again he started toward that side-wall, but the Everglades Giant had come out of his trance—long enough to complain that picture-selling was distinctly on the bum—and did Honest John Barker have a loose dollar he could part with until payday? It wasn't a usual thing for the Everglades Giant to borrow money; he wanted that distinctly understood, and in all the time that he had been on the circus,—if Honest John would take the trouble to recollect,—he would remember that never before had the Everglades Giant ever boned him for a cent. But things were just plain downright rotten, and if Honest John really didn't need that dollar, it'd come in awful handy until the photograph business picked up again and—But at that point Honest John stabbed forth a hand with a dollar in it, then dived straight for the side-wall.

OUTSIDE, he recovered from the crouching position which he had assumed in ducking under the canvas, and blinked for a second in the bright sun. Then he lurched forward and headed straight across the lot toward the bulbous figure of the Old Man, just fading in the shadow of the marquee. A moment more and they faced each other. The Old Man grunted.

"What's the good word?"

"There isn't any. What've you got?"

"Nothing. I've just been over the parade-route. Plenty of natives out on the curbing getting their eyes full, but there's darned few of 'em that are coming to the lot. The Van Ralston Shows have got everything plastered with that Pink Pachyderm."

Honest John Barker shrugged.

"That's the answer," he said mournfully. "I suppose every bill is spotted with 'Wait for the Big Show and Pansy, the Pink Pachyderm.'"

"You know it."

Honest John turned his attention to his lion's claw. Then he reached slowly forward and lifted a recalcitrant bit of straw from the crease of his trousers. Quite carefully he broke it to bits.

"I thought you framed up with that bunch last winter not to do any opposition," he said at last. The Old Man grunted more forcibly than ever.

"That was before they got Pinkie. The minute they laid their hands on that elephant, the bets were off. Out went an opposition squad, and—well, you know the rest. We haven't done a day's business in three weeks. Say, listen!" The Old Man slid forward with a sudden idea. "Aint you got some friend that could edge in on that thing? Join out with the show, an' stall 'em that he's a good bull man? What's the matter with Shorty Harris? He's the best man around an elephant they is in this country, and they've been tryin' to get hold o' him—but he wont join out. Don't you think you could persuade him?"

Honest John stared into the distance, where the parade was just coming into sight.

"Yeh. I can get him. Shorty'd do most anything for me."

"Well, for the love of Mike, write him a letter. If they's any faking going on, Shorty can get next to it darned quick. That's what we want to know—just what kind of fake this flesh-colored elephant is, and show it up. They're going to be playing day and date opposition with us in less than a month now, and—if we don't

get the goods on 'em—flooie! That's all. We wont take in a sad dime!"

HONEST JOHN hurried away. That evening he reported to the Old Man that the letter had gone forth, special delivery. They settled down to waiting.

Waiting in more senses than one! For recently the progress of the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus had been simply one grand, frittering and inglorious succession of waiting—for money that refused to arrive. What availed it that it announced itself to be the biggest circus in the world? All circuses admitted the same thing. What availed it that the parade sailed forth each morning, its bands roaring with a blaring noise that could be heard from one end of town to another, its clowns grimacing, its announcers squawking themselves hoarse? Nothing!

For plastered side by side with their billing were the blatant announcements of the coming of the Van Ralston Shows, ranging, according to the town, from three days to three weeks later. The Van Ralston Shows were not spending much money on depicting the wonders of their performance, the beauty of their equestriennes, or the glorious Phunniness of their Phorty Phuriously Phunny Phools. The Van Ralston Shows were specializing—and it was that specialization which hurt. They claimed, announced, and hawked the fact that they had Something New, Something Startling, Something Rare, the Only Naturally Pink-complexioned Elephant Ever Born to Be Exhibited in Captivity, the Marvel of the Age, the Astounding Phenomenon of a Century, Pansy, the Pink Pachyderm—to be seen together with all the assembled wonders, curious and strange sights of the menagerie and main tent for the one price of admission!

That was the deadly blow. It was only an elephant, when the whole thing was said and done. It looked like an elephant, acted like an elephant, ate like an elephant, drank like an elephant. But it was pink! To quote the advertisements:

THREE TONS OF PINK PACHYDERM!
SEE THE MILLION-DOLLAR BEAUTY—
PANSY, THE PONDEROUS.
HER SKIN IS AS PINK AND SOFT AS
A BABY'S!

That last line was the barb of the stinging arrow. That was the one which cut into the profits of the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus, and made its show-lot vacant. Where is the mother who does not love the touch of a baby's skin—and who would not be lured by the fact that an elephant, a three-ton elephant, could possess a skin as soft? It got the women—and for that matter, it got the men, too. The whole thing was poison—to the Mighty Maxwell; and as the Mighty Maxwell went from town to town, it realized it the more. What was worse, the time was approaching when for a solid week the two shows would exhibit "day and date," both in the same town at the same time.

MORE galling than ever was the knowledge that the whole thing was unfair. During the months when the snow had swirled and the doors of the winter quarters were tightly closed, the Old Man, and Harvey Briggs of the Van Ralston Shows had gotten together in a gentleman's agreement. Carefully they had figured out the routes for the coming season, dividing the territory so that each should have an equal number of "good" towns, and so that each would be forced to bear the brunt of the various cities which showed an insistent lack of interest.

The Van Ralston had not possessed the Pink Pachyderm then, and the agreement had been a profound one. Then, two months after the opening date, the surprise had come. News-dispatches, cable-tolls paid in advance, told of the purchase of a marvelous elephant, the skin of which was pink and almost transparent, and which had been worshiped as a fetish by various African tribes. Then from mid-ocean there came the wireless messages containing more information about this marvel, about how it was pining for its African shores. And then, on its arrival, there had come stories and more stories. The Pink Pachyderm had become a household word—and what was worse, the Van Ralston Shows had immediately forgotten that gentleman's agreement and started to cut in on a straight line of good territory, slashing the throat of the Mighty Maxwell here, there and in between. The world was decidedly dark for the Mighty Maxwell—and growing darker.

In fact, it was glowering when at last Honest John Barker sought out the Old Man, and taking him far to one side in the menagerie tent, pulled forth an envelope.

"It's from Shorty Harris," he announced out of a corner of his mouth.

"Good!"

"No. Bad."

"Huh?" The Old Man's eyes popped. "Didn't he go over to the Van Ralston trick?"

"That's just it. He did."

"And they turned him down?"

"No. Hired him in a second and gave him full charge of Pinkie."

"Then what's bad about that?"

"Simply the fact"—Honest John was thumbing the pages of the letter—"that—well, listen to this:

" 'I thought just like you when I first came over here that there must be some bunk about this pink bull, but since I've had a chance to look things over, I've come to the conclusion that she must be on the square. About the only way I can figure it out is that the thing must be some sort of an albino—just a sort of happenstance, as it were. They've left me alone with the bull a lot—we keep it surrounded by a side-wall in the menagerie tent until time to show it, and never take it out on parade, and so I've had plenty of time for inspection.

" 'Its skin is tough, of course, and looks like an elephant might look if its outer hide was sandpapered off, leaving just enough skin to keep it from becoming raw, a sort of salmon pink, you know, with freckles in it and that sort of thing. For a while I thought they might have pulled that stunt, but I've given it up. Even the tenderest parts of the bull, behind its ears and so forth, are the same color—and sandpapering would bring blood there in a minute. So I guess we're up against it as far as proving that it's a fake. It's the real article, all right, all right.' "

THE Old Man chewed at his cigar.

"We're whipped!"

Honest John cocked his head and looked down at him.

"Admit it?"

"Admit nothing!" The Old Man pulled his cigar from between his teeth and slammed it halfway across the tent. "I've got this territory laid out, and I'm going to play it if it takes the last nickel I've got in the world. I'm not going to let Harry Briggs say that he gypped me and got away with it—not by a jugful! And I'll tell you something more: that Briggs bird may prosper for a while by pulling this crooked stuff and trying to bunk his friends, but I'll tell the world that the time'll come when he'll want help and want it bad. Well, he wont get it from me."

"All of which goes to show your temperamental nature," announced Honest John Barker calmly as he twirled the lion's claw on his watch-chain. "Now, I'm just the opposite. All my life I've been consumed with a desire to learn things—and if a man can beat me on a deal, I figure he can teach me something. So, if you haven't any real objections, I'll just visit around at the Van Ralston trick when we start this day and date thing. You never can tell when you're going to pick up something of value."

"The only thing you could pick around that trick would be a pocket!" growled the Old Man. "But have your own way."

Honest John had it. Grinning genially, he made his way under the marquee of the Van Ralston shows on the first morning of active opposition, and jabbed forth a hand as he saw Harry Briggs.

"Pretty near got fired for doing it," he began, "but I had to come over here to take a look at that Pink Peach!"

Harry Briggs squinted his eyes.

"Yeh, and you've probably got an elephant-gun stuck around you somewhere, to bump it off."

"Nope. Not even rat-poison. But I wouldn't promise as much for the Old Man. He's raving—says you crooked him."

Harry Briggs laughed long and happily.

"Was a kind of raw deal, wasn't it? But business is business."

"Now you've got it!" Honest John Barker jabbed him in the ribs. "That's my motto. Crook the other guy before he crooks you. But of course, I've got my own little system. I always tell a guy first."

Harry Briggs chuckled.

"Well, I'd have done the same thing—only I didn't think about it. You see, all this happened awful sudden. I got a message one day from an old bird I used to buy elephants from asking me what I'd give for this thing. I didn't lose any time hashing over words. I just cabled him to send it on, start the press-stuff and hand in his bill later. Want to see it?"

"Does a fish swim?"

A MOMENT later they stood in the menagerie before a great, high-heaped side-wall. Briggs poked his head through

the flap of the opening and called. A short, overbusy man, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, bobbed out and stood waiting expectantly. Briggs flourished a hand.

"Shorty," he began, "you know Barker here—of the Mighty Maxwell?"

Shorty bobbed his head and rubbed a hand on his trouser-leg before proffering it to Honest John.

"Yes sir. Some. I used to work on his show—don't know whether he remembers me or not."

Honest John Barker squinted his eyes, looked hard, then pursed his lips.

"Why, of course! Shorty Harris, isn't it? Certainly! How are you, Shorty—just thought I'd come over here and take a look at that elephant you've got. Let me see the blamed thing, wont you?"

They parted the side-wall and stood before the Pink Pachyderm. And it was enough to make even Honest John Barker gasp. For it *was* pink!

There was a long moment of silence, while Honest John stood and stared at the great salmon-colored creature. Then, as he began to talk, he edged close to Shorty Harris for the slightest part of a second, and coughed, to conceal a faint crinkling noise as their hands met momentarily. Following which he stared and talked, talked and stared, while Harry Briggs told again the story of the Pink Pachyderm, and Shorty Harris, the bull-tender, went methodically back to his work. And at last, with a deep sigh, Barker turned.

"Guess I've done all the damage I can do around this joint," he laughed sorrowfully. "I'd like to blow that bird up with a bomb or give it sleeping-powders or most anything to put it out of the way, but I don't guess there's much chance."

"About as much chance as there is of you ever getting to heaven," joked Briggs. "Just about as much—"

"That's a bad one. Because I *might* get past St. Peter. But listen! You've got my goat on this thing. Is it really getting much business?"

"Is it? Come over this afternoon and take a look?"

Honest John pulled forth his heavy watch.

"Don't know whether I can make it—but I'll try. Don't mind if I show up looking kind of simplified? I've got to go down and stall the chief of police, and I thought I'd wear my Prince Albert."

"I should worry!"

"All right." Honest John looked at his watch again. "Guess I'd better be moving if I'm going to make it."

EVIDENTLY Honest John moved fast. It was just as the main gates were opened and the crowd beginning to flood in that he appeared, hurrying across the lot, the tails of his black Prince Albert flying, his patent-leather shoes unnoticed in their dustiness.

"Had to rush to make it," he gasped as he jabbed forth a hand to Harry Briggs. "Is the big display on yet?"

"Pansy? No, we'll wait until the menagerie fills up a bit. Better come on, though, so you can get in at the front of the crowd when we drop the side-wall."

They went within the menagerie tent and made their way through the rapidly thickening crowd toward the high side-wall which draped about Her Majesty the Pink Pachyderm. Here and there about the big tent the announcers, striving to keep the crowd from becoming too compact, squawked forth the various accomplishments and marvelous attributes of the various caged beasts. But it was of little avail. The crowd knew what was behind that high-stretched side-wall.

In the very fore of all of them stood Harry Briggs and Honest John Barker, patiently watching the milling natives, and conjecturing on the size of the crowd—for it was growing bigger every moment. Out in the close-packed throng some one shouted impatiently. Honest John turned to his combined friend and enemy.

"Better start the grand exhibit, hadn't you?"

Harry Briggs squinted appraisingly.

"Not yet. Not more'n three fourths of a crowd now. We'll wait."

Some one began to grumble. Honest John reached for his watch-chain and his lion's claw.

"Course," he said quietly, "it's your show. But there are crowds and crowds. This one seems kind of pettish."

"It is, at that—but we'll wait a minute."

Far out in the throng, the jostling began. The crowd began to surge, like the workings of bread-dough under the influence of yeast. A voice rose, high and cracked.

"Hey, Mister, when we goin' to see this here ellyphant?"

Harry Briggs looked at his watch.

"We'll give 'em three minutes more and then drop the curtain. —Hey, Shorty!"

Out from the flap of the side-wall Shorty Harris stuck an inquiring head. Briggs turned his watch in the palm of his hand. "Get ready for the lecture. We'll drop the curtain in three minutes."

"Yes sir."

It all had been said very quietly—but nevertheless some one out in the crowd had caught it. From mouth to mouth the word passed. The throng began to churn; those in the rear began to push their way forward, while those at the fore, like balky horses, braced their legs and prepared to resist any effort to take their vantage-places from them. Outside, at the marquee, the final crush began, and through the entrances came scores and droves of townspeople, making their last grand rush before the exhibition-time of the Pink Pachyderm. Stronger and stronger became the pushing and milling. Briggs turned to his companion.

"Help me hold 'em back, will you?"

"Surest thing you know."

The Prince Alberted figure of Honest John turned and his arms went into the air.

"Give 'em room, everybodie-e-e-e," he shouted. "No crowding, no pushing. We're about to drop the curtain now, and everybodie-e-e-e must retain their positions. Hey, quit crowding there!"

BUT the jamming continued. Honest John was pushed backward a foot or two, only to fight his way forward again. Briggs called again to Shorty, and the stubby figure of the animal-man appeared at the opening. High above all Honest John was roaring again:

"No pushing! No crowding! Cut out that milling around out there—what do you think this is—a cattle yard? Stop that pushing—stop that pushing!"

"All right!" Briggs had cut in. "Drop her!"

"Cut out that pushing, I tell you—cut it out—cut it—"

The curtain dropped. The baby-hued Pink Pachyderm was revealed in all its salmon-colored glory. Honest John's hands waved wildly. His voice rose to a roar. Then, with the first surge of the crowd as it instinctively swept forward, he weaved backward, stumbled, half straightened, attempted to regain his balance, failed, and then, half falling, stumbled straight into the surprised trunk of Pansy, the Pink Pachyderm!

A squeal came from the surprised elephant as it backed up suddenly and once more allowed Honest John to lose his balance. More wildly than ever the arms of the fixer waved and fumbled; his hands clawed, and reaching upward, clutched tightly at the long, flapping ear of the elephant.

It stayed him—just enough to swing him about and half roll him against the hulking body of the beast. He gained his feet and straightened. Then he waved a fist at the crowd.

"Cut that out, will you?" he roared. "Cut out that crowding—cut out—"

But only gaping faces were before him, faces that were blank and astounded, eyes that were round and staring, mouths that were hanging wide open. A white-visaged being rocked before him—it was Harry Briggs. A quick motion of the side-wall and some one went under it. That was Shorty Harris. Honest John, staring, his brows close, looked curiously from one to another, then allowed his gaze to drop to his clothing. His eyes widened in astonishment.

"Where'd that come from?" he mumbled uncertainly, brushing hurriedly at his coat. It was new color, a glorious salmon pink!

"Look at him!" Some one out in the surprised mob of spectators had recovered his voice. "He's brushin' that stuff off his coat. Gosh, all hemlock! That elephant's sheddin'."

Another voice had joined.

"Sheddin' nothin'. It's calcimined!"

"Ladies and gentlemen,"—Harry Briggs had regained a mental balance and was bawling excitedly,—"this elephant was brought to this country from the wildest jungles of Africa and here was—"

"Treated to a coat of paint!" sounded an uncomplimentary and exceedingly sarcastic voice. "Fake—*fake—f-a-k-e!*"

IT was the one word for which the crowd had been waiting. Wildly they took it up and echoed it. Some one crawled past the ropes and rubbed a sleeve on the elephant's hide, then held it high to the sight of the crowd. It too was pink, a beautiful, chalky, salmon pink, while beneath, the skin of the elephant showed dull and drab by comparison. Again that call echoed, wilder than ever:

"Fake—*fake—f-a-k-e!*"

Vainly did Harry Briggs and the more than sorrowful Honest John Barker shout their denials. Vainly did they roar themselves hoarse. Their words were beyond hearing. Here, there, everywhere, the crowd was surging with a new curiosity. Some one started forward with a broom which he had dragged from beneath one of the cages. "I'll fix your tarnation fake!" he squealed. "Dern ye, I'll fix him! I'll—"

Harry Briggs asked no questions. He saw a man headed toward his pet elephant with a broom in his hands and blood in his eyes. Instinctively the fist of Harry Briggs doubled. It swung through the air. A broom went high over the heads of the crowd; an irate person's feet twinkled in the air, and then, with a *plop*, the irate person himself hit the ground. It was enough. Some one gently but firmly raised a suit-case he had been carrying, and whanged it through the air toward the head of Harry Briggs. The aim was almost perfect. The circus owner wabbled a moment, took one more look at the jostling, angry crowd, then put his hands to his mouth, to megaphone the fighting signal of the circus.

"H-e-y-y-y-y-y-y Ru-u-u-u-u-b-e!"

Somehow Honest John Barker managed to back behind Pinkie the Polluted Pachyderm. Somehow he managed to slide down the long side-wall of the menagerie-tent and escape the hurtling forms of the canvasmen, razorbacks and roughnecks as they surged into the tent, their heads set hard between their shoulders, their fists setting harder against the chins of any who happened to bob up in their path. High above the roaring and shouting, Pansy the Pink Pachyderm squealed and trumpeted as a flying tent-stake caught her full in the snout. One swirl of her trunk, and she had knocked flat the nearest of the rioters, circusmen and townspeople alike, then settled back on her haunches, challenging all comers. Quickly the fight moved to the other side of the menagerie-tent—and just as quickly Honest John Barker moved out under the side-wall.

The word, as usual, had reached the outside grounds. Here and there, merrily whacking away indiscriminately, circusmen and natives were busily mussing up the lot with each other, while in the distance the blue coat and brass buttons of the first of three policemen was just making its appearance. Very quietly Honest John Barker took his course in a slanting direction, under the protection of circus-wagons and side-show canvas—quietly, but with much haste. A hundred feet farther, and he paused for just an instant. From far down the street had come the incessant clanging of many bells. One of them John knew to indicate a police-patrol and a riot-squad. The other might be a hose-cart—and water from a fire-hose is a bad thing for immaculate clothing, especially if covered with elephant hide. Honest John's feet moved faster—and reached a two-twenty gait. Five minutes more, and he was far down an alley, pausing behind a woodshed, and carefully wiping from his Prince Albert, the salmon-pink smears that had brought trouble for Pansy the Pachyderm and the Van Ralston shows.

AN hour later Honest John Barker stood on the main corner, watching the police-patrol making its last trip. Complacently he fingered the lion's claw on his watch-chain, then turned to look down into the wizened face of the Mighty Maxwell's press-agent.

"Well," he asked, "what's the dope?"

"Fine!" The press-agent rubbed his hands. "I've slipped the story to all the press associations and put out a few special yarns over the wire myself. Say, listen! That Van Ralston show wont get a plugged penny from now on! Bee-lieve me! I guess they'll try making a gentleman's agreement sometime again, huh—and then cutting in with a bum fake of a calcimined elephant. Anybody could have told that was a fake. Why, it had to be a fake! Where'd—"

Honest John grinned genially.

"That's just the queer part about it," came quietly. "Pansy was as straight and nice a proposition as I ever saw in my life. No fake about her—a real honest-to-goodness pink elephant! But"—and his eyes twinkled the slightest bit—"Shorty Harris and I just figured it out that if her pink complexion looked good in its wild or native state, a couple of pounds of pink talcum powder would sure bring out all its natural beauty. But it worked out bad, awful bad," concluded Honest John innocently, "—for the other fellow!"

Another of the "Exploits of an Honest Grafter" will be described in our next issue.

After the Manner of Asia

THE brilliant author of "Official Business," "The Cruise of the Pelican" and "Never Run from a Sikh" is at his best in this vividly dramatic and colorful novelette. You will find it wholly absorbing and distinctly unusual.

CHAPTER I

Mr. Li Receives Callers

MINNA CAREWE made a distinct, even startling, picture in the low little shop whence old Li Far spun his gossamer webs across the Oriental world. Her beauty in itself was startling, and here in Singapore her costume was distinct.

Against the bronzes and sweetly rich silken brocades that ranged the shop, Minna Carewe moved in sedate gray from head to foot—gray that was picked out by a touch of white at throat and wrists and hat. In her eyes lay a lingering shadow, the shadow which had fallen across half the women of the earth from the uplifted cross of the Flanders fields.

To her, rather than to the two men who accompanied her, came wise Li Far with his silent questionings, his deftly wordless inquiries. She met the sweep of his eyes, so strangely brilliant and black against the smiling wrinkles of his old face; her gaze held as though to a magnet.

"You are Mr. Li, of course? I am Miss Carewe. My brother has said he was greatly honored by your friendship."

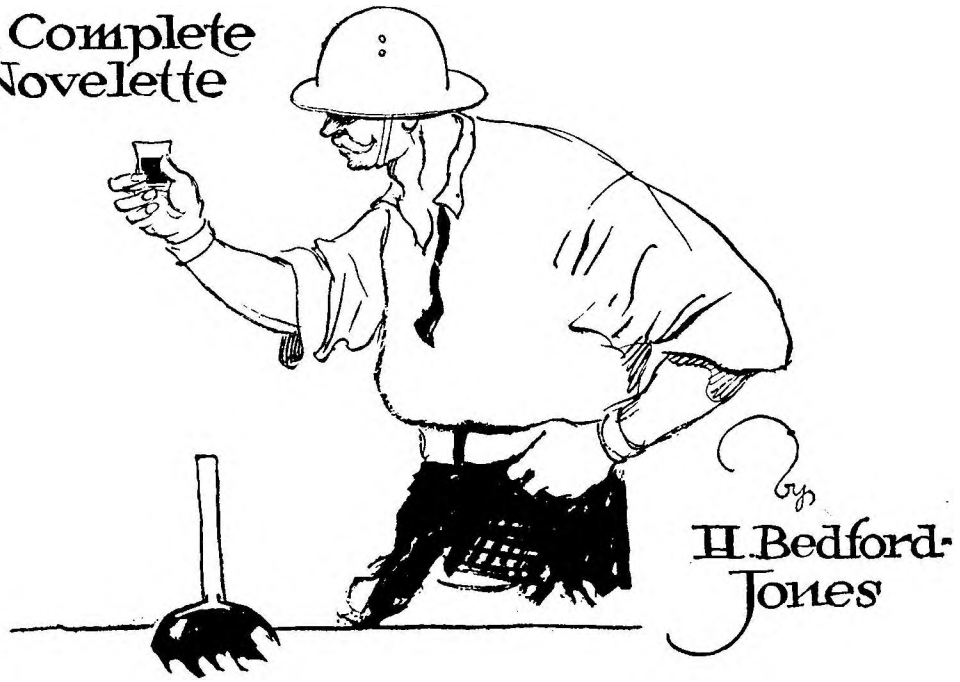
One of the two men behind her frowned slightly, as though displeased by her words to this Chinese merchant. But Li Far bowed over her hand in a very courtly fashion for one so aged.

"Ah!" he responded in that queerly metallic voice of his. "Ah! Yes, your brother was my good friend. I heard that in the land of France he passed to his ancestors with much honor. It is very kind of you to come and see me, Miss Carewe. You will remain in Singapore?"

"No," she said. "I am going up-country to Tembeling, to take charge of a hospital that Rajah Pangor is building there. My brother was located near Tembeling, you know; he left me his small rubber plantation, and I have little else. The hospital work fitted in nicely.

"You do not know my friends, I think. This is Captain Fitzgerald, Mr. Li Far; he is out of the army now, and is to be the temporary Resident of Tembeling—he

A Complete Novelette



By H. Bedford-Jones

is interested in the rubber industry, too! And this is Doctor Leland, who is to command my hospital; at least, I call it mine."

Fitzgerald bowed in his stiff British fashion, while Leland awkwardly took the hand of Li Far, less formally.

"And now," went on Minna Carewe eagerly, "may I see some of your wonderful things? My brother—"

LI FAR silently bowed and turned, leading the way. One would have gathered that he was indifferent, which was far from the fact. Only when he began to draw forth his hidden treasures of Ming and T'ang, his rose crystals and rock ambers, his brocades and porcelains, did his metallic voice soften into music. His English was quite perfect.

Behind followed the two men in their immaculate flannels. Fitzgerald was a strapping soldier, with that cold gray eye, that square-set jaw, that firm cast of neck and shoulder, which have gone to make up empire. One would sense that his forty years had been years of cold, pitiless strength.

Leland, entirely the opposite, was inconspicuous to a degree—not at all the self-assured type of American, but quiet and hesitant. When he moved before the windows, however, the light falling athwart his delicately lined features made one look twice at him, wondering what it was about him that seemed so impressive.

To these two men the indifference of Li Far was supreme. If they asked questions, he made answer. But to Minna Carewe he talked. To her he told in half an hour what the Orient dealers would have bought dearly—little high-lights of the trade, secrets of lost arts, hints of fascinating stories unknown to men.

Presently Li Far excused himself and slipped away into the rear darkness. Minna Carewe turned to her escort, a flash of enthusiasm lightening her eyes.

"Isn't he adorable? And he has the stately courtesy of a prince!"

"Quite so!" Fitzgerald nodded. "A most extraordinary man, they say."

Leland glanced up from a bronze.

"I like your Mr. Li," he observed. "And on the other hand, I don't like him! He was giving us some quiet attention while talking with you, Miss Carewe—I'll wager he has us mentally ticketed, down to the dot!" He chuckled.

Li Far reappeared, carrying in his hand a box—a small box, a box of cracked lacquer and broken things. He wrapped it up, then brought it to Minna Carewe.

"With us," he said, "a gift is not the consummation of friendship; it is the earnest of friendship. Your brother and I were friends. You have much of him, in

your unhurt eyes, your soul and character! If you will let me, I shall be proud to be known as your friend."

"Let you, Mr. Li?" Her hand went out to him swiftly. "Ah, I know things you did for Jack; I know how your friendship was a living and vital thing to him! If I might come to know you as he did—"

SHE broke off suddenly. Some hidden gong dinned through the place; Li Far, a flash of agitation on his wrinkled features, turned to meet a man who walked slowly toward him from the shop-front—a yellow man, a coolie. His features were quite blank as Li Far addressed this man in Mandarin, but his words were like acid.

"Accursed fool, how dare you come where my visitors are? Why did you not use the other entrance—"

The coolie quietly sat down on a pile of jute rugs. He seemed trying to speak, but no sound issued forth. He took a letter from his blouse, his saffron fingers oddly stiff.

Li Far went to him and took the letter. For a moment his eyes met those of the coolie, exchanging a mute message. The coolie smiled faintly, then leaned back against the wall, his eyes closed.

Opening the letter, Li Far read it, glanced once at the coolie, then turned away. He spoke to Minna Carewe of a jade tablet at the other end of the shop, and she followed. After them strolled Fitzgerald.

Leland, however, did not follow. He was struck by something in the attitude of that coolie. He went quietly to the languid figure, stooped, touched the man's shoulder. The touch evoked no response; but startled by what he divined, Leland unbottoned the blouse to feel for the man's heart. Then he slowly straightened up, thunderstruck.

Across the man's breast ran a fresh, jagged cut—a frightful slash laying bare the very life itself, a stroke that had ripped out the quivering soul of the man! As he walked down the shop, the coolie had been dying; as he sat here and leaned against the wall, he had died. Wordless, smiling faintly, he had died—thus! Murdered!

Leland turned at a touch to find Li Far, alone, at his elbow. Their eyes countered. "This man—"

"I know." Li Far interrupted blandly. "He was one of my messengers, and met peril. But Doctor Leland, you saw that he delivered his letter? Ah, yes! I am glad that you are not the sort of a man to grow excited over this matter. May I ask you to take Miss Carewe away quickly? She must not see this. If you please."

"It seems to be the usual sort of thing with you," said Leland dryly. Inwardly he shivered a little at what he read in the brilliant black eyes.

"By delivering his letter, this man saved one of my friends." The voice of Li Far was quite metallic, feelingless. "I and my servants do not hesitate in such matters. Please do not speak of this to Captain Fitzgerald! By the way,"—and for an instant the yellow hand touched Leland's sleeve, as though to impress the words upon him,—"I may see you soon in Tembeling, or you may hear from me."

Leland looked quickly at him. "What do you mean by that?"

"Merely that Miss Carewe is my friend." Li Far turned away, smiling thinly.

WHEN she was alone that night in her room at the Raffles Hotel, Minna Carewe opened the little old box of cracked lacquer. Inside she found two flat tablets, handsomely carved and incised with gold-filled ideographs. One tablet was of ebony, the other of jade—not the green jade of commerce, but the white jade so highly prized in ancient days. Beside each tablet lay a slip of paper bearing translations of the inscriptions.

"I am strong," said that of ebony, *"and strength is my virtue."* The other, that of jade, proclaimed: *"I resist all things save the hand of the artist; one may see into my heart and not find my strength."*

Minna Carewe gazed long at the two tablets.

"Old Mr. Li is a symbolist," she murmured, smiling a little. "I wonder what he means."

CHAPTER II

Guests of the Rajah

CAPTAIN FITZGERALD and Doctor Leland were playing auction on the comfortable veranda of the Rajah's palace. The Rajah himself was settling some local dispute in town, and Minna Carewe was asleep. Leland had invented a double-dummy game which was wild and

reckless, and the two men were wagering a guinea a rubber. Even of this, however, they wearied.

"Let's chuck it," volunteered Fitzgerald, yawning.

"Agreed." Leland threw down the cards and selected a fresh cheroot.

The two smoked in silence. The afternoon was listless and somnolent as the wide leaves of the wild rubber-tree outside the veranda.

"Think I'll walk over and see how the work's coming," said Leland, rising. "Will you stroll along?"

"Thanks, no." Fitzgerald gave the American a slow glance that was faintly indicative of contempt. "I'm quite comfortable."

Cigar between his teeth, Leland walked down the graveled drive toward the entrance to the palace grounds. Once he glanced back at the palace—a large, rambling building fitted with all the comforts money could procure; then he smiled slightly. The curve of his lips changed his face, indefinably but surely—stole away all its wooden aspect, gave it a sudden warmth of expression one would not have expected to find in the man.

He continued his way. Leaving the palace gateway, which stood open as usual, he crossed the road to a large building of concrete blocks, newly erected. This was the hospital, the latest plaything of Tuan Pangor, and as yet unfinished.

Entering the building, Leland strolled around, watching the workmen. Most of these were Chinese, imported for the event from Singapore, whither they would return when they had finished the plumbing on which they were now engaged. It was a very decent hospital that had been erected, at staggering cost, and the packing-cases beneath a separate thatched roof were filled with remarkably complete equipment. One could not call the Rajah parsimonious.

But Leland was not thinking of the work proceeding before his eyes; he was thinking of Fitzgerald, who had returned here from France to take up anew his rubber plantation outside the town. Temporarily, Fitzgerald was acting as British Resident here, and it struck Leland that the administrative duties of the post were being very lightly taken by the incumbent.

Called from his thoughts by the purr of a motor, Leland turned to the entrance and met the Rajah himself, who had stopped at the hospital upon returning from town. Rajah Pangor was unlike the average Malay state ruler in that he was largely and well built, due doubtless to his Cambridge education and athletics; he was inclining toward obesity, and his brownish countenance was adorned with a tremendous pair of mustachios. He looked more the Afghan than the Malay, and his features were extremely vigorous.

"Ah, my dear Doctor!" he exclaimed in his hearty fashion. "I rather thought that you might be about. Energetic Americans, eh, what? Does the work suit you?"

"Entirely, Your Highness," said Leland. "I think that to-morrow I'll begin unpacking the crated things and get to work upon the interior of the place."

"Good!" The Rajah tugged at his mustache, his keen, virile eyes darting about. "I'll have a dozen men up to receive your orders, eh? These Chinese will have finished soon."

"By to-morrow night, they say," assented Leland. "Then we'll fall to work in earnest, eh? Miss Carewe is rather anxious to get things into shape at once."

"By the way, Doctor, those graduate nurses of mine will be up at the palace in a few moments. I suppose you'd like to meet them, with Miss Carewe?"

"Certainly!"

"Then come along." Tuan Pangor, as the Rajah was universally termed, hooked his arm in that of Leland and dragged the American out to his car. "Four remarkably bright girls, Leland. Upon my word, we'll have the whole city hanging around the hospital!"

THERE were no other Europeans in Tembeling, with the exception of a pair of outcast and half-caste Frenchmen in the city. Leland, like Fitzgerald, had been assigned permanent rooms in the palace. Miss Carewe was to live in the hospital building, with the four native nurses who had received their training in Singapore and Rangoon. Tuan Pangor had set out to found a hospital, and was doing the thing up brown.

"Are you at all interested in objects of art?" inquired the Rajah affably as his chauffeur directed the car into the palace grounds. "Chinese porcelains, for example?"

"Not in the least." Leland smiled. "I've had little time to get up on such subjects, Tuan."

The other nodded comprehendingly.

"I've just found a vase, a very wonderful vase. It's a typical Ming, with the loop-handles and all—ah! By Jove, the girls are there now! Beat us here, eh? And Miss Carewe's receivin' them.'"

The Rajah jumped from the car as it halted, and Leland followed him to the palace veranda. Here he was introduced to the nursing staff of the hospital—four shy, pretty Tamil girls, who promised to be efficient and intelligent aids to Minna Carewe.

Tea was served here on the veranda. Before the visitors departed, Tuan Pangor presented each of them with a nurse's outfit, complete from cap to shoes. While the Rajah made his speech of presentation, Leland watched and wondered at the man.

Tuan Pangor was a strangely complex person—to Leland's mind, at least, dangerously so. He conducted himself and his outward establishment in the English fashion; yet five times a day he prayed to Allah. Of the harem buildings in the lower gardens his guests saw little, but the seraglio was there. He had been polished by the cold culture of Eton and Cambridge, but upon occasion could curse a native with Oriental fluency. And below his silk hat, his darkling eyes shone like the eyes of a tiger watching the hunters from some canebrake; yet he was remarkably generous and open of heart.

The nurses departed. Minna Carewe was discussing with Fitzgerald a visit to the small rubber plantation left by her brother, when Leland observed two riders coming up the drive. One was a very tall, broadly built white man, even in the saddle a veritable giant. The other was a boy of about eight, who flung himself from his horse and came rushing up the steps, heedless of his companion's angry shout.

"Papa!" he shouted exuberantly. "Papa! Oh, I'm so glad you're here again!"

"Paul!" Fitzgerald caught up the boy in his arms, then quickly set him down. "Your manners, my lad—"

The boy turned with outstretched hand to the laughing Rajah, and was then introduced to Leland and Miss Carewe by the name of Paul Riel. His dusky skin and luminous eye told a plain story, to which Fitzgerald quietly added:

"I did not think Paul would remember me—he was such a little chap when I left to get into the war. His father, a French merchant in town, was killed, and I adopted the boy. Ah, here's my manager, St. George—the best rubber man in the country!"

NEVER were man and name more poorly suited, was Leland's thought as he met the giant. At close view the features of St. George showed up like the wreckage of a once noble structure; dissipation had stamped itself in his face, a living seal of destruction. He was briefly introduced, bowed all around, and followed Fitzgerald into the building, evidently for a private conference.

The boy Paul, who had taken complete possession of Minna Carewe, dragged her off to inspect his horse. The Rajah gave Leland a quizzical glance.

"There you are, Doctor! How are we to rule against that sort of thing? Paul Riel will grow up an outcast from both races—yet look at his brow, his eyes! He will make a man of rare intelligence, eh?"

"He ought to," said Leland dryly. Tuan Pangor's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Eh? How mean you?"

"That chap St. George stands *in loco parentis* just at present, doesn't he?" Leland smiled. "And that man has brains, despite his weakness."

The Rajah nodded as though slightly puzzled by Leland's manner.

A little later, when the boy and St. George had gone, Minna Carewe sought her rooms to dress for dinner, and Leland departed on a similar errand. Inside the palace doorway he turned into the library for a cigarette. Instead of interior doors the house had only thick silk curtains of Trengganu weave. Obtaining one of the Rajah's imported Egyptians, Leland lighted it and turned back to the doorway. Then he glanced sharply at the curtain.

Outside that silken hanging sounded the voice of the Rajah.

"I say, Fitz! I'm a bit of a blackguard at times, eh? But not in your rank, old chap—not at all! You are the most admirable liar I ever heard. Why did that fool St. George bring the boy here?"

"He'll not do it again," came Fitzgerald's drawl. "But kindly oblige me, Tuan, and keep your mouth shut until we're in private. I've nearly decided that we made a frightful mistake in bringing out Leland as surgeon here—"

The voices died away. Leland lifted his cigarette, a slow smile on his lips, and drew at the tube. He exhaled slowly.

"Ah!" he murmured. "Fitz, old top, I entirely agree with you—for once!"

CHAPTER III

A Message for Doctor Leland

AFTER three days of unremittent energy Leland had the unpacking done, and the new building looking much like a hospital. He worked from morning until night, and was entirely oblivious of other things. In fact, he was rather glad to get away from Fitzgerald. Not that he disliked the Briton—there was merely a lack of sympathy between the two men. Besides, Leland could not forget those words he had heard from behind the curtain. They suggested to him that Fitzgerald *and* the Rajah had brought him here; whereas he had thought the appointment had emanated entirely from the governor at Singapore.

With the cots in place and his surgical equipment going into the operating-room, Leland was summoned from his work on the third afternoon to attend a patient. Already many of the natives had come to him for minor treatment; but now, as he came to the veranda of the still unpainted hospital, Leland saw a white man awaiting him.

It was one of the two outcast Frenchmen who dwelt in the town—a small man, dangerous about the eyes, very intelligent and gay. Lemoigne exhibited a slashed arm, and the surgeon at once brought him in for first-aid treatment.

Nothing would have come of all this, perhaps, except that the name of Fitzgerald was mentioned. Lemoigne had known the Briton in earlier years, and fell to chatting about him.

"A strong man, a man of iron!" he said admiringly. "I remember the day his father came and struck him across the face—"

"Eh?" ejaculated Leland, wondering if he had heard aright. The other smiled.

"*Mais, oui!* His father, a tall, white-haired man, very erect—he came here seeking our friend. I do not know what it was about, for I heard nothing. But *mon Dieu,* I saw! The old man lifted his riding-crop—so—and struck the younger man across the face."

"Yes!" prompted Leland. "And what did Captain Fitzgerald do?"

"Nothing—nothing! That was the marvel of it. He stood very straight, a man of iron, and he bowed slightly, then turned away. *Dieu!* What strength!"

Leland could not forget this picture that had come to him thus, by chance—the picture of father and son standing there, and the blow across the face. Strength, indeed! There was no doubting Fitzgerald's mastery, and particularly his self-mastery. It was one of those abnormal things that crop up in a man's character, and Leland did not like abnormal things.

"They made a mistake in getting me here, eh?" Unconsciously Leland found himself coupling the Briton with Tuan Pangor. "Thought I was a harmless, inconspicuous little runt, eh? I wonder what their game is! They're not in particular need of money, for Fitz has a whacking good plantation, and the Rajah has millions. Hm!"

THE following morning Minna Carewe and her four brown nurses moved in and began the final tasks. The hospital was to be opened formally on the ensuing Monday, and there was plenty to do before the event. Friday, however, Minna Carewe was hastily summoned to the harem, and called in Leland; one of the Rajah's wives was seriously injured.

Leland, who thus obtained his first glimpse of an Oriental seraglio, paid little heed to the details. Tuan Pangor himself accompanied him, and Leland was immersed in the work of his profession. As he left the place, however, he chanced to observe a number of men at a side entrance. They were carrying into the building several pieces of very fine European furniture; a second glance showed that it was a boudoir-suite.

Leland went his way, thoughtfully. The native favorites of Tuan Pangor were not addicted to European furniture; they could not use it, in fact. Why, then, this considerable expense?

A multitude of details, so very slight that few men would have noted them, crowded upon Leland's remembrance. He felt uneasy, perturbed. A glance here, a word there, recurred to him and gained in significance. He had nothing upon which to base suspicions; he had no definite suspicions, even—yet he was decidedly not at his ease. He had the feeling that something was in the air; something vaguely unclean and terrible, something Asian, filled with all the infinite evil of Asia.

With this mood upon him, Leland left his bag at the hospital, filled his pipe, and strolled toward town. Until this afternoon he had not visited the town except for a brief ride through its streets, and now he gave himself up to a momentary relaxation with keen relish.

The town was half a mile from the palace. It was not a large enough place to come under trade influences, being removed from the coast, and was a conglomeration of brick and wooden dwellings and shops. Its commerce was in Chinese hands, like much commerce of the East, and its Chinese quarter was dominated by the usual joss-house. The shops were quaint, and although the afternoon was late, Leland found himself lingering.

Then, as he turned a corner, he almost collided with the gigantic St. George.

The plantation-manager was very drunk, but not so far gone that he did not recognize Leland at once and give him greeting. Then, planting his great form athwart the sidewalk, St. George stared a moment at the American.

"Don't reproach me," he said with maudlin self-pity. "D'ye know why I took a drink to-day, eh? It's him that laid me in the gutter in the old days; yes, and now he's going to take the boy away and make him into a bleedin' rajah! Who wouldn't drink, what?"

Muttering to himself, St. George swung aside and went rocking down the narrow street. Leland turned his steps toward home, wondering at the man's drunken words. Had those words referred to Fitzgerald? Impossible. Yet—

"Hang it! Fitz is a gentleman!" Leland angrily checked his own roving thought. "This climate and country must have gotten on my nerves."

"Doctor Leland!"

Turning at the soft English words, Leland was surprised to find at his elbow a yellow man dressed in coolie's blue cloth and wide straw hat. The Celestial presented an envelope.

"Will you kindly hand this to Miss Carewe? Thank you."

The coolie vanished into a near-by shop-entrance while Leland stared after him, amazed by the man's language, and puzzled by something vaguely familiar in the metallic voice. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he shoved the note into his pocket and set out for the palace.

Reaching home, Leland sent the envelope by a house-servant to Miss Carewe, who would not take up quarters in the hospital until the formal opening. When he saw her at dinner-time, she thanked him briefly for the note, but made no further reference to it. Leland dismissed the incident and gave himself up to his usual abstracted study of Fitzgerald, conscious that his scrutiny irritated the other man.

DURING their acquaintance Leland had never been able to fathom what lay beneath that chilled-steel exterior. At first he had liked Fitzgerald amazingly; now he disliked him with equal vigor, and guessed that the feeling was reciprocated. Yet there was no particular reason for it, at least in Leland's mind.

With a childish vanity the Rajah during dinner displayed the antique Chinese vase which he had recently secured. Leland paid little heed, beyond polite comments. He could not understand the learned talk of patina and sweat-glaze, and the large, plain white vase aroused little interest in him. Yet he observed the keen delight which Tuan Pangor took in passing his brown hands over the porcelain—the unashamed caressings of a connoisseur!

Dinner over, the Rajah summoned one of his dancing girls to give an exhibition before his guests. Coffee was served in the elaborate music-room, where might be found every sort of instrument from harp to viola. While they awaited the nautch girl's flutists, Minna Carewe went to the piano, idly playing snatches of old airs. And suddenly Leland, who was sleepily chatting with Fitzgerald and the Rajah, saw the big Briton wince.

At what? He could not tell. Miss Carewe had been silent, touching the keys with careless fingers; the air which she was playing at the moment was an Irish melody. Leland groped for some connection, but in vain. Fitzgerald rose to obtain a cheroot, and paused beside Leland.

"I say!" he drawled, low-voiced. "You don't miss much, eh?"

Surprised, the American glanced up. "What's that?"

Fitzgerald's eyes were frosty. His voice took on a steely edge.

"I'm getting cursed tired of being watched like an insect, if you want to know!" he said—then suddenly smiled as though to take the bite from the words. "Do you always sit about studying people,

Leland? Cold-blooded, I call it—deuced cold-blooded."

"People are usually interesting," returned the surgeon, "—outside and inside, Fitz. But I'm sorry if I seemed to be—"

"Bah! It's my dashed nerves—need a tonic or somethin'. Hello! Here comes the entertainment!"

Again Leland found himself baffled; at first Fitzgerald had been deliberately inviting trouble, then had passed off the affair as nothing at all. However, Leland was not particularly concerned about his companion, and now gave his attention to the dancer.

When the entertainment was over, Miss Carewe refused a bridge-game.

"To-morrow is Saturday," she said gayly, "and we shall have to put in a long day at the hospital, if it is to be ready for the grand opening on Monday! All the bedding and linen has to be arranged, and I simply will *not* work on Sunday until the need arises. So I shall need all my beauty-sleep to-night.

"By the way, Dr. Leland,"—she turned to the surgeon,—"I should be greatly obliged if you would give me a few moments before breakfast in the morning. There are one or two matters which I want to settle before leaving for the hospital."

Her manner was one of strict business. Leland bowed assent.

"If you would care to attend to the affair now, and have it off your mind, I am at your service."

"Oh, I would not dream of interfering with your game—"

The Rajah made instant declaim of any interference, showing his white teeth in a smile.

"By all means, Miss Carewe," he added, "settle your affairs and seek rest with a care-free mind! It is excellent advice, I assure you. See you in the card-room, Leland; Fitz and I will be getting the game in shape. Pray do not hurry."

THE Rajah and Fitzgerald departed, Minna Carewe gazing after them with a strange darkening of her gold-bronze eyes. Then she turned to Leland, and he read in her gaze a swift excitement.

"This letter!" She drew from her bosom the envelope which he had sent to her room. "Read it! Did Mr. Li Far give it to you?"

Leland started slightly at the name. "Ah! I thought I recognized his voice."

He described how the note had been given him. Then he fell silent as he opened the folded missive and the neatly written words met his eyes. There was no signature, but none was needed:

> Confidential. Ebony is bitterly strong, but can be broken—if the weak place be found.
>
> Tell Doctor Leland to be extremely careful of his actions next Thursday. Tuan Pangor has a bet of five thousand pounds with his friend Mohammed, Sultan of Perak, that before June first he will have a white woman in his harem—legally and without trouble from the government.

Leland looked up to the girl's eyes with a quiet smile.

"Very interesting," he observed coolly. "This is the twenty-fifth of May, eh? I think our royal friend has planned to use my services; but he will be disappointed. Don't let this thing concern you, Miss Carewe; the warning, of course, was intended for me. Thank you for giving me the message."

He bowed and left her gazing after him from bewildered, storm-troubled eyes.

CHAPTER IV

Li Far Circulates

LI FAR, who was a member of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and a director of two banks, was quite at home wherever he happened to find himself. He had lodge-brethren and *tong*-brethren in every town of the Malay Peninsula, and besides these he had his own agents, or rather attachés; only Li Far knew how deep or how wide were his business ramifications.

In Tembeling, for example, he was located in a private apartment in the rear of a silk and cotton-goods shop, and his apartment had six exits of varied publicity. Thus, no one would remark the coming and going of a coolie. He had servants to wait upon him, and two scandalous but artistic Ming paintings on the wall, and one or two very wise friends with whom to chat when the spirit moved. What more could he get at home?

One evening Li Far sat sipping his hot rice-wine and gazing contemplatively at one of the two paintings. They were meant to be thus gazed upon, meant to be studied and appreciated in every chaste line; wrinkled old Li Far never tired of giving art its due in the fashion of his

fathers. He sighed when a gong softly called outside his door, and tapped an answering gong.

There entered a bland young Straits Chinaman, the proprietor of the shop, who bowed and seated himself. Li Far poured him a thimble-cup of wine, but as etiquette demanded, the other did not touch it. He would not touch it until he was ready to depart. He knew that Li Far appreciated these old-fashioned customs.

"I have the record desired, venerable sir," said the younger man respectfully. "To obtain the facts, which are nine years old, was slightly difficult; but all is done."

"It is written," said the metallic voice of Li Far, "that the only task worth the effort is the difficult task." He seldom wasted words, this wrinkled old wise man; but neither did he consider it waste to repeat the words of sages. "Begin!"

"The woman," returned the other, "came from one of the mountain villages; her origin has been lost in obscurity. There was no marriage. She died when the boy was born. Under the circumstances it is strange that the father should so love the boy."

Li Far smiled wisely. "It is written in the third book of the sage Lao T'zu that only pride comes between child and father, and often pride cannot do this. Continue."

"The attachment," pursued the younger man, "between this child and father was very remarkable. When the boy had four years, there arrived the father's father—a very lordly man from England. The name I could not obtain."

"I have the name," said Li Far, blinking, "—the name of a nobleman. Proceed."

"The boy's father was summoned home, and wished to take the child. The grandfather became very angry, even striking the father across the face. But this father was remarkable for his filial piety, and made no answer. Being refused permission to take the boy home, he refused to go home. There the matter ended. Sometime afterward he went away to take part in the great war. Two days ago he visited the plantation and spent long hours with the boy, seeming much affected. That is all I have to report."

Li Far blinked a moment, then opened his eyes of black jade very wide.

"Ah!" he said quietly, reflectively. "This man knows that his son, a Eurasian, can never go to England; there is a barrier of blood which holds him here. Yet the father loves him with the passionate, terrible love of a father—with the untold love of a cobra for its young, let us say. For the sake of that son he will sting as a cobra stings, striking at all in sight!"

"For his paternal solicitude," pattered the younger man, "he is to be keenly honored—"

"Or dealt with as a cobra is dealt with," struck in Li Far with harsh rebuke. "Come! For what is he working and aiming? Not for money; he has that in plenty. Not for women, white or brown; they have no share in his life, and he is strong, above that weakness. Not for power; he has refused this, for love of the boy."

The younger man smiled in his turn. "Venerable sir, you will find the answer to your query in the apartment overhead."

Li Far gave him a quick, keen glance. "But that is where you live—"

"That," responded the other significantly, "is where my six-year-old son lives!"

"Oh!" Li Far caught his breath. "Fool that I am! Of course. Of course! For the sake of his son and his son's future, he would commit even the greatest of sins and go smiling into the tenth pit of hell! Thank you."

He picked up his tiny cup of wine. His guest followed suit, drank and departed, bowing.

FOR a long time old Li Far sat gazing at the blank wall, his eyelids never winking, merely flickering slightly with the trick of the hypnotist. His clockwork brain was moving, working hard and fast, unerring as a machine. At length he rose, a bit stiffly, went to a closet, and exchanged his blue clothes for padded silk jacket, silk trousers, and a skull-cap adorned with a button of imitation coral. Then he sought one of his six exits.

The evening was early. Li Far shuffled along with his hands in his sleeves, exchanging no greetings, seeming to see no one. Near the joss-house he came to the building occupied by the Lodge of Fraternal Piety, and outside the doorway halted to meet an approaching man.

"I desire," said Li Far very abruptly to this other, "to be given a private audience with the Rajah to-morrow morning.

Will you arrange all details? Under my own name, of course."

The other vanished. Li Far entered the lodge and devoted himself to an evening of social pleasure. On the morrow he would interview the tiger, and he loved to sharpen his wits before undertaking such work as was ahead of him, just as a man loves to whet a knife whose steel is assured.

At eleven the following morning Li Far, wearing his silk hat, frock coat and other garments of commercial activity, was driven to the palace. He did not approach the main building, but directed his driver to a small summer-house in which the Rajah gave private and unceremonious audiences. One of the constabulary guards took in his card, and a moment afterward he was bowing to Tuan Pangor.

"Your Highness," he said, "I am a director in the Tan Yuan Tock syndicate, which has leased the tin mines from Your Highness for a term of years."

This was true, and the Rajah immediately conceived some respect for this yellow man who swelled his income very appreciably.

"My business in Tembeling was to buy a certain white porcelain vase of which I had heard—a vase of late T'ang or early Ming, made in the imperial kilns. I now know,"—and Li Far smiled thinly,—"that a more famous collector than I possesses the vase; yet if Your Highness would vouchsafe to let me see it, I would go home contented."

The Rajah lowered his great bulk into a chair, laughing merrily. To best a Chinaman at the collecting-game was a relish to him. He touched a gong and instructed an attendant to bring the vase in question from the main palace.

For a space the two men sat chatting, their conversation ranging from antique art to open-cast tin mines. And gradually the merriment died out of the Rajah's face, his alert eyes became cloudy with thought; he began to perceive a deep mind in this wrinkled old man. Oriental to his finger-tips, his Asian senses gripped at the intangible and guessed that in the air there was more than mere vases.

PRESENTLY the vase arrived and was laid on the table. As Li Far touched it with caressing fingers, the Rajah suddenly leaned forward.

"Be careful!" he said warningly. "There is a tiny projection somewhere in the fullness of the body—it scratched my hand the other night. Perhaps you can suggest the best means of removing it, without making a break in the patina? Ah, here is the place."

Li Far seemed not to hear. His eyes, suddenly very bright and brilliant, sought the face of the Rajah.

"Your Highness does not know me," he said, his metallic voice quite cold, "but this is not the first time I have been here. I have transacted much business with Your Highness' father. Also, I was here shortly after you left for school in England—at the time your elder brother died. You may remember that he was unfortunately killed while hunting, not long after you had departed for England."

Tuan Pangor's eyes sparkled. His powerful features contracted suddenly as he met the glittering gaze of the old man. He understood the allusion perfectly.

It was true that his elder brother had died; it was equally true that he himself had been far away at the time—all nicely arranged. Until this moment there had been no suspicion whatever; he could not even be sure that this old Chinaman suspected anything. Yet the words had been pregnant with unuttered meanings.

"Yes?" he said, his eyes narrowed. Now he was the tiger indeed, bearded in his very lair; like the tiger he seemed to crouch and await the proper moment for his spring. But once more Li Far seemed to switch the talk to an entirely divergent tack.

"I am an old man and avaricious of beautiful things," he said, shifting his gaze to the plain white vase. "I would do much to obtain this bit of porcelain, Your Highness. I might even give you some very secret information—concerning the boy who is called Paul Riel."

Tuan Pangor started suddenly. His eyes, savage now, searched the wrinkled features of the old man; black suspicion filled their depths.

"What mean you?" he rasped, his big hands clenching.

"I could supply proof that he is the son of your elder brother—who died."

The Rajah leaned back in his chair, thunderstruck, staring at his visitor with amazement and chagrin struggling in his face. He knew that this statement regarding Paul Riel was entirely and utterly false; but not of that fact was he thinking. He was concerned with the under-

lying matter—the matter which this old Chinaman had brought out of nowhere to hurl at him. How could the man know? Or did he know at all? Was it not a mere coincidence?

"I think you had better explain yourself, Mr. Li Far," he said thickly.

The old Chinaman smiled. It was a superb smile, a magnificent smile, for in his heart he was not smiling at all.

LI FAR knew that at this instant he was gambling hugely and terribly, wagering everything upon his own deductions and nothing else. He was not talking with a fool, either. Yet in his wrinkled, impassive features lurked no trace of inquietude. He was a very wise old man, and when he gambled, he did it with all his heart and soul.

"It is supposed that your brother left no children," he began smoothly, "and it is known, Your Highness, that you have no son to inherit your name. I have heard, whether rightly or wrongly I cannot say, that it is your purpose to adopt a son and to give him your name.

"So I say to you again, I can supply proof that the boy called Paul Riel is in reality the posthumous son of your elder brother. The British governor in Singapore would be very glad if you adopted this boy, I think."

Tuan Pangor wiped a drop of sweat from his heavy cheek. At the action, Li Far knew that he had won the game!

For a space the Rajah made no response; he was thinking quickly, desperately. Somehow this old Chinaman had penetrated his secret, and had proposed a scheme that was amazingly plausible.

The Rajah knew that Paul Riel was actually the son of Fitzgerald, but he also knew that this Chinaman would present no botched job. The offered proof would be forged, but it would be well forged. Tuan Pangor had dealt with Chinamen before this, and held them in respect.

If he adopted Paul Riel, an unknown boy, the government might possibly object, even though Fitzgerald as temporary Resident gave the affair his official seal of approval. But if Paul Riel were shown to be the Rajah's nephew, illegitimate or not, then all difficulty would vanish. The Rajah cursed himself for not having thought of the scheme on his own account. But what the devil did Li Far expect to get out of it all?

Here was Asia pitted against Asia; old Li Far, who could boast unbroken ancestry through two thousand years, pitted against this Malay prince whose fathers had come out of the sea-isles and jungles a scant four hundred years back. The silence grew ominous, oppressive. The Rajah wondered if this yellow devil of an infidel knew or guessed what dreadful bargain might lie behind the adoption affair.

As though reading the thought and answering it, Li Far spoke slowly.

"Your Highness knows that the honor of my name is inviolate," he said. "I give you my word, Tuan Pangor, that once this affair is settled, I shall forget it utterly and say no more of it. My sole interest is to obtain this beautiful vase. From a man of my position you need not suspect blackmail; I am richer than you, I think. If you deem the proof is worth the price, I shall furnish it and forget the matter. Between us lies the honor of men."

THIS was no light talk. Tuan Pangor knew that the integrity of such a man as Li Far was a thing above blemish. These words diverted his thoughts; this wrinkled old man was just a collector of porcelain, willing to indulge in a bit of intrigue in order to get possession of a vase! That was all. It was folly to dream that this old man from Singapore could guess at the bargain which had been made with Fitzgerald—the bargain of which only three men on earth could know!

Tuan Pangor drew a deep breath.

"I accept," he said slowly and steadily. "Tell me where to send the vase, and it shall reach you before noon. You may send me the papers whenever convenient—as soon as possible. I would like to perform the adoption at once."

Li Far rose and bowed to conceal the tremble that seized upon his limbs. It is not easy for an old man to win a great stake and show nothing.

"To-morrow night the proof shall be in your hands," he said respectfully. "Full proof, that will more than satisfy the government at Singapore."

With another bow he gathered his energies and returned to his carriage. In it, however, he collapsed. From his pocket he took a tiny box, and from the box a pellet of opium which he placed between his lips.

"I am an old man," he murmured. "I am too old to gamble—and win!"

The opium revived him and brought him home with a glow in his cheeks. Once in his own apartment he took pen and ink and wrote a letter. This letter he sealed with a seal of carven jade—not in the customary red ink, but in red sealing-wax. He sealed the envelope in three places, so that three huge gobs of red wax stood out heavily upon the paper. Then he addressed the envelope to Doctor Leland, and touched his gong with one knuckle. A servant entered.

"Let this be given to Doctor Leland at the new hospital the day after to-morrow, immediately after the formal opening ceremony," he directed. "When a large white vase arrives here for me, have it placed in this room—and be very careful of it. I shall retire to rest, and I do not wish to be disturbed."

And Li Far sighed, as one who has accomplished a large day's work.

CHAPTER V

The Hospital Is Opened

THE fifty men of the constabulary who composed the Rajah's palace guard and police-force were drawn up before the hospital in full array. Outside, upon the road, was gathered a majority of the Tembeling population. The country-folk had come in for the hospital-opening from miles around; in the afternoon there was to be a public audience in the rarely used audience hall of the palace; rumor had it that sensational things were to be enacted, and there was a general holiday in consequence.

Representatives of the neighboring sultans had arrived at the palace, together with the most important men of the various mountain villages comprised within the limited domains of the state. With these the Rajah was kept busy, as was Fitzgerald in his official capacity of Resident, so that Leland was left to his own devices at the hospital.

Half an hour before the guests were to arrive at the hospital for the opening, which was to be followed by a luncheon to the Rajah and his company, a palace attendant was admitted, bearing a parcel for Miss Carewe. Leland sent it to her by one of the nurses, who was helping him put the finishing touches to his laboratory; five minutes later he glanced up to see Minna Carewe in the doorway, flushed and bearing the bundle.

At her gesture he dismissed the nurse and closed the door.

She stepped forward and in silence laid the open parcel upon his work-table, disclosing a nurse's costume of thick silk; and atop the shimmering folds, contrasting vividly with their deep blue, was a necklace of old twisted gold bearing a single flaming ruby pendant.

"A note—asks me to wear this to do him honor!" flashed the girl, storm in her gold-bronze eyes. "What does it mean, Doctor Leland? He is too much of a gentleman not to know that such things—"

Under the quizzical gaze of Leland's deep eyes she fell silent.

"I think, if I were you, I would accept it," he said reflectively. "Remember that you are dealing with an Oriental, not with a gentleman as we understand the term. Such presents must be expected. Tuan Pangor wants you to shine in a gorgeous and glittering light before his guests. He wants them to be awed by you. And they will be!"

"But—after that letter from Li Far—"

Leland's brows lifted in seeming surprise.

"My dear Miss Carewe, that letter was very obscure in content. I presume that His Highness has arranged to obtain some woman of the ports to grace his dusky beauties, and that he expects to make use of me in some fashion. Well, Li Far has warned me, and that ends it. I shall be on my guard when Thursday comes, that is all! Your antique-dealer probably ran across the information and sent me word for my own protection."

Miss Carewe watched him, plainly torn betwixt doubt and credence.

"Oh! I have been worried—it seemed that perhaps the warning was meant for me in some way—" She hesitated, color creeping into her cheeks.

"Nonsense!" Leland smiled, and beneath his smile the doubt vanished from her eyes. "Our gentle Rajah could not well help admiring you, Miss Carewe, but you need not distrust him in the least. He never lets his right hand know what his left hand does; to us he will be a gentleman, and to his own people a native Rajah. He plays the game excellently, don't you think? It might be very bad policy not to meet him halfway."

"You think that note was—"

"My position," said Leland, "is more or less official, and I may be called upon to witness that a wedding, *more Malayo*, has taken place. I think your old Chinese friend has simply been a bit officious in order to keep himself and his vaunted friendship in your mind. As for the jewel, my advice is to wear it; return it to him later, if you like."

"Thank you, Doctor Leland."

With a bright smile and a hasty nod Minna Carewe gathered up her bundle and departed to her own domain. Leland closed the door, stared at it a moment, and then swore under his breath.

HIS laboratory was at the front of the hospital. He went to the screened and open windows and glanced at the road outside. It was a brilliantly hued throng that met his gaze, for the Malays and Tamils wore their brightest sarongs, the gay silks iridescent in the sunlight, and even the Chinese were in gala costume, with much black silk and many glittering headdresses.

"And in all the gang, not a white man!" mused Leland, turning from the sight. "Well, I certainly eased *her* troubled spirit —whether rightly or not is another question! She'll have to be warned unless I can stall things off myself. We'll wait and see what happens on Wednesday, eh?"

Meantime, in her own room, Minna Carewe had donned the dress of blue silk. Then, not without a shiver of repugnance, and—because she was a woman—a thrill of wonder at the sheer beauty of the thing, she slipped the ruby's chain about her throat. For an instant she stared at her image in the mirror, then took from her dressing-table drawer a small box of old, cracked lacquer, and laid it down before her. Opening it, she laid bare the tablets of jade and ebony.

"Li Far mentioned ebony again in that note," she reflected. "What does he mean by it? Symbolism, of course—ebony and jade, and those two queer little poems! His talk about ebony mystifies me, but I like that verse about the jade."

She smoothed out the slip of paper that lay with the jade tablet, and again read the firm, neat chirography of Li Far:

I resist all things save the hand of the artist; one may see into my heart and find not my strength.

A smile crept to her lips as she mused, and looked upon the white jade with its golden ideographs, microscopic yet perfect. Jade, she reflected, was supposed to be immune to aught save poison—only the cunning, patient steel of the artist could cut into it or carve it. What meant this talk of strength?

"It almost reminds me of George Leland," she murmured, flushing slightly at the thought. "One may see into his heart too, for he is very simple; yet he is also very, very strong and clean. . . . . Oh!"

Her eyes widened suddenly in amazed and incredulous comprehension. She remembered now how she had called upon Li Far, with Leland and Fitzgerald accompanying her. Could that wise old man have instilled any significance into this gift of his? She recalled what her dead brother had said of his friend in the Orient —that at a glance he could penetrate into the very soul of a man!

"Oh!" she breathed. "Then the ebony must stand for Captain Fitzgerald! He is strong too; strength is his great virtue! Does that mean *only* virtue? Nonsense! Not even Li Far could expect this gift of his to fit anyone accurately. But the other —the jade tablet—might have been made to represent—"

Came an excited knock at her door, and a flushed and eager nurse broke in.

"They are coming, miss!" she cried in her queerly clipped school-English. "Quick!" Then her native Malay burst its bounds: *"Pergila kita! Brapa lamaña—"*

Minna Carewe hastily put away the little lacquer box, and with a last glance in the mirror, departed to the scene of action.

THE Rajah had gotten out his two automobiles and all his old gilded state coaches for the occasion, and was obviously enjoying himself hugely; with him, in the first car, rode Captain Fitzgerald, medals and all. And also in the same car rode the great bulk of St. George and the slender figure of Paul Riel. Behind them came the coaches and native guests.

Leland stood on the veranda steps to receive the company, Minna Carewe and the four pretty nurses with him. Amid the admiring plaudits of the crowd the Rajah and his party approached, introducing each of the following brown men as they came into the shade of the veranda awnings.

"I sent for the Methodist missionary at Ulu Klang," said Tuan Pangor, standing between Leland and Miss Carewe with a delighted grin on his vigorous features. "He was unable to come, unfortunately; I wanted some Christian prayers and so forth. May I congratulate you, Miss Carewe? You are looking exquisite; and those four young ladies of yours—my word! This hospital is a regular palace of beauty, eh?"

Fitzgerald allowed his cold eyes to dwell for an instant on the ruby at Minna Carewe's throat, but ventured no comment. His smile was unnatural, and he was very silent. St. George stood at one side with Paul Riel under his arm; the boy was splendidly handsome in white silk—heavy sarong silk as thick as velvet. But St. George wore a troubled frown.

The speeches began at once; the crowd was now immense, held back only by the constabulary, and under the noonday sun there could be little waiting. Half an hour sufficed for the ceremonies, Leland making a short speech in the halting Malay he had been studying, and Miss Carewe following him.

With no little relief the Rajah's party sought the coolness of the building, and the tiffin which had been prepared on the wide rear veranda. It was an excellent luncheon, and there was much talk and merriment; but Leland felt a sudden wave of rebellion at it all. The monkeylike Malays around him, sycophants applauding the tigerish Rajah's every word, sickened him. The dissolute weakness of St. George, the prim stiffness of Fitzgerald, repelled him. The sight of Minna Carewe in the midst of all this Asian environment, sent here to serve such men in her youth and beauty and sweet freshness, suddenly appalled him. He felt the swift and terrible homesickness of a man far from his own people and land. Then he remembered that he too was here to serve. The remembrance steadied him.

JUST before the guests left, one of the nurses came to Leland with an envelope. At the moment Tuan Pangor was strenuously urging Leland's attendance at the public audience which was to be given at four o'clock, and the nurse dared not interrupt. She laid the envelope on the table by Leland's hand, and he nodded acceptance; then he turned again to the Rajah, and was ultimately forced to accept the invitation. What with this, and the leave-taking that followed immediately, all thought of the note was driven from his mind for the present.

Nor did he think of it again until, after the siesta that was necessary even in this hill-country, he had donned fresh flannels and was awaiting Minna Carewe and their bevy of nurses. Then, when he looked for the note, it was not to be found.

The nurse who had brought it stated that it had been left at the door, and that it had three large red seals on the envelope. Search failed to produce it.

"Do you suppose Li Far—" Minna Carewe glanced significantly at the American.

"There's no telling," he answered carelessly. "I ordered some pongee pajama-suits in town the other day, and ordered the bill sent up here; it was doubtless that. Let it go! We must not be late for the audience."

Inwardly, however, he was more worried than he cared to let Minna Carewe know, and he cursed his own heedlessness that had lost the note. What had become of it, he could not imagine; if anyone else had appropriated it, and it had come from Li Far—

Worry would not help matters; so he threw off his evil humor and resigned himself to the situation, giving Miss Carewe no hint that aught was amiss. Upon reaching the palace they were ushered to the great audience-hall, which was already jammed to the doors. The guards led them to the upper end of the hall, where, around the Rajah, stood his chief men, St. George and the boy Paul among them. Fitzgerald, as became the Resident, was seated; another chair was ready for Miss Carewe.

There was less to the audience than Leland had anticipated. A number of tribal cases were disposed of after the Mohammedan law, and Tuan Pangor settled some outstanding suits. Then his clerk of court arose and began to read rapidly from a document. The sense of the reading was entirely lost upon Leland, but provoked gasps of amazement from the crowd.

"Can you make out the general idea?" Leland leaned to the ear of Miss Carewe. "It's worse than Greek to me."

She shook her head slightly in negation.

When the reading came to its end, the Rajah rose and faced his people, a broad smile upon his face. He put out his hand to the shoulder of the boy Paul, and spoke

in rapid Malay, then repeated his words in English.

"I have to-day legally adopted this boy, known as Paul Riel, who is in reality the son of my defunct elder brother. He is to become my son, and the heir of my dominions. Proofs of these matters have been laid before the representative of the British *raj,* and he has found them to be correct."

LELAND, amazed, looked at Fitzgerald; he had more than suspected the truth of Paul's parentage, and now his suspicions were confirmed.

The Briton was deathly pale, and was nodding approval of the Rajah's speech with a stiff jerkiness that was unnatural. His eyes blazed like hard agates; they were fastened upon the boy Paul with an expression that shocked and startled Leland; in them lay a stern and fierce gust of agony. The look was swiftly gone, but in that instant Leland felt a twist of deep emotion for Fitzgerald.

Tuan Pangor's announcement ended the audience, which was abruptly dismissed. Miss Carewe had already shifted her effects to the hospital, and Leland was glad to accompany her back thither to escape the crowd.

"Please tell me," said Minna Carewe thoughtfully, "why the Rajah has adopted a boy who has already been adopted by Captain Fitzgerald; and why the boy, who was presumed to be the son of a Frenchman and who certainly has white blood, should now be discovered to be the nephew of Tuan Pangor?"

Leland chuckled. "That's Oriental intrigue, I suppose! We may take for granted that Fitz was glad to consent for the sake of the boy's future." He paused, remembering the look that had lain in Fitzgerald's eyes. Then he added lightly:

"By the way, would you mind if I were to go into residence at the hospital for a day or so? We could put a cot in the laboratory, you know. I'm very anxious to do a bit of work, and night is my best time; experiments are almost impossible during the heat of the day, and—"

They were now outside the palace gates, with the hospital just ahead of them. Minna Carewe swung around and gazed for a moment at Leland. A slight smile curved her lips.

"I had intended to ask you to come there permanently," she said, meeting his eyes and wondering to herself at their clarity. "I should feel much safer, really, and we would be silly prigs to talk about conventions, wouldn't we?"

Leland bowed.

"I knew that you had not been a nurse so very long, Miss Carewe, and I felt that you might think the suggestion ill-advised—"

"Then at least give me credit for common sense!" She flashed him a merry smile. "So make yourself at home with us, sir—and I hope that the lost letter turns up!"

"So do I," returned Leland thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VI

Matters Come Clear

THE letter turned up that very evening; rather, Leland turned it up in the pocket of the coat he had worn at tiffin. While talking with the Rajah, he must have quite unconsciously pocketed the note, and forgotten it.

He was glad, when he read it, that he had not located it in Minna Carewe's presence; but it brought a grave wonder to his eyes—a wonder whether he could longer conceal the very real danger from her. The note, like the previous one, was unaddressed and unsigned, but Leland was convinced that it came from Li Far. It seemed merely to present a statement of facts from which Leland was to draw his own conclusions:

> The father of Paul Riel is Captain Fitzgerald. The latter is in reality son to the Earl of Desmond, but refuses to go home without the boy. His love for the boy is fierce and terrible—but the boy is a Eurasian. His future must lie here.
>
> Hence, Fitzgerald has now given up the boy, knowing that he will find wealth and rank. It was a bargain, and not easily driven. For the boy Fitzgerald gets an assured future—and what does he give Tuan Pangor in exchange? The Rajah is no philanthropist.
>
> Fitzgerald represents the government here. He, and he alone, could cover up the tracks left by crime. He alone could cover up the entrance of a white woman into the Rajah's harem—and could satisfy the authorities regarding the matter.
>
> You think he would not do these things? It is written that in defense of her young, the humble cow will become as a tiger!
>
> And another head nurse could easily be procured.

Leland read and reread these paragraphs; the final words seemed imprinted

on his brain. There was now no doubt whatever that Minna Carewe was the intended victim—or bride. How Li Far had found it out, granted that the unknown writer were the old Chinaman, Leland could not imagine. However, the scheme as outlined here seemed supported by the intangible evidences which he himself had observed.

"It's devilish plausible," thought the American as he slowly tore the note into tiny fragments. "Fitz running the local end of the government and all that—damn him! Son of the Earl of Desmond, eh? Remittance man out here, who went back when the war came on, and made good at it; that must be the way of things. His son, eh? And Fitz is willing to go to hell for the sake of the boy, is he? If I were sure of it, I'd send him there in short order."

THERE was nothing of which to be sure, however. Maddened by his very impotence, Leland dared not act upon the evidence of anonymous letters. In any case, how was he to act? The government was represented by Tuan Pangor; there was no higher law save that of the British *raj,* which was represented by Fitzgerald. Well, then!

"Not a matter of force," reflected the American as he sought his bed that night, "except in a very extreme case. I'd better bide low and wait. If I can get into touch with Li Far in the morning, granted that he's here, it'll help a good deal."

On the following day, which was Tuesday, Leland went to town and endeavored to get into touch with Li Far, but in vain. None of the Chinese had ever heard of the name or knew of such a man. Puzzled and baffled, Leland returned home. For the remainder of the day he had no further leisure; ill and diseased folk were already flooding into the new hospital.

The strain began to tell upon him. The following Friday would be the first of June, and here it was already Wednesday! The morrow would be Thursday—the day against which he had been warned. Why the warning? Again no answer. He cursed his kindly adviser, whose warnings were so undeniably vague. If old Li Far knew so much, why could he not be more explicit?

Tuan Pangor had supplied the hospital with servants and all things needful. Leland felt these silent brown folk getting on his nerves, and he began to resent the generous bounty of the Rajah. He was now almost afraid to leave the hospital, not knowing what might happen; upon the morrow, he determined, he would watch during each moment. With the morrow would come the danger-time, according to the first note.

With these thoughts running chaotically through his brain, Leland was making ready for breakfast on Wednesday morning when a commotion at the veranda-entrance drew him to the doorway. A half-naked Chinaman, a plantation coolie, was gasping on the steps.

"You docto'?" cried the man at sight of Leland. "Makee run likee hell! Tuan Sinjarge velly sick—him dead now, mebbeso! Him dlink all day, all night; him catchum snake, velly big cockloach; him fall down allee same big tlee; lie flat—"

"What is it?" came the cool voice of Minna Carewe.

Leland turned to greet her.

"St. George seems to have the tremens. Will you send one of the boys to the palace for a horse? I'll get a bite to eat before he returns."

As she hastened away, Leland suddenly regarded the coolie with sharper scrutiny, a keen flash of suspicion leaping across his mind. Almost at once, however, he dismissed the doubt; he had been warned against the morrow, not against to-day. The coolie was hard spent, utterly exhausted. Obviously he had run the whole three miles from Fitzgerald's plantation.

"Where is Captain Fitzgerald?" demanded Leland.

The weary coolie looked up.

"No savvy. Palace, mebbeso; him stop along Tuan Pangol."

"Where is the boy, Paul? Captain Fitzgerald's son?"

"Him stop along palace too; him one piecee topside man now."

Minna Carewe reappeared, summoning Leland to a hasty breakfast. Taking a cup of coffee out to the coolie, he snatched a bite, and by the time a groom appeared with a saddled horse from the palace stables, was ready for his trip.

"I think you'll be all right," he said to Minna Carewe in farewell. "Otherwise, I'd not go. But if anything comes up, send for me."

"You are afraid of something turning up?" She looked at him, half smiling, half anxious.

"No—and I'll be back in an hour or so. All our d. t. friend will need will be a shot in the arm to send him off to sleep. If he's in bad shape, I'll have him brought back here. You will not be afraid?"

"Afraid? Why? Do you think I'm so silly?" She laughed gayly, but in the depths of her gold-bronze eyes he read a troubled shadow. "Tell me, Doctor Leland—what has been worrying you?"

"Not a thing, Miss Carewe." And he forced a smile. "Good-by! I'll be back soon."

LELAND had not seen Fitzgerald's plantation previously. With the coolie trotting ahead to indicate the road, he pricked his horse forward.

Once past the town and heading into the hill-valley where lay the rubber-ranch, Leland endeavored to fling off all lingering shadows and enjoy the bright morning. Yet it seemed that even the brilliant sunlight was poisoned by Asian evil. As he rode past the groves of graceful bamboo or palm, with the thatched native huts clustering at the roadside, the exotic richness of the scene cloyed upon him. The mountains stretched into the blue sky; great spires reared into heaven—yet to Leland it seemed that those spires were surmounted by intangible symbols of ancient iniquities and Asian subtlety.

He passed a great grove of wild rubber trees that adjoined Fitzgerald's plantation. The breeze, fragrant with jungle scents, was stirring the wide leaves, turning up the golden under-surfaces until the whole mass resembled a waving sea of iridescent bronze. To Leland, however, it seemed that the rasping leaves wove a queer message to his brain—the stark and frosted eyes of Fitzgerald seemed to be peering at him.

As though this had been a premonition, a moment later he saw Fitzgerald in person approaching him, riding. The coolie, in advance, dived off the path and was lost to sight amid the wild rubber trees. Fitzgerald drew rein, awaiting the coming of Leland with his cold stare; the two riders halted knee to knee.

"Well?" demanded Fitzgerald. The tone, more than the word, rasped across Leland's nerves like a file. His deep blue eyes hardened into a sudden stony glint.

"Damn your cool deviltry!" he said evenly. "Is St. George down with the snakes, or was that some coolie's yarn?"

The icy eyes of the other man contracted, narrowed; in them Leland read hatred and a bitter devil barely in leash.

"Oh, he's drinking himself to death, right enough," drawled the Briton. "By the way, you haven't seen anything of the boy at the hospital, have you?"

"What boy?" snapped Leland. "You mean—your son?"

Fitzgerald went livid. His lips drew into a thin line. Like the swift-flickering tongue of a snake, his riding-crop flew out and flashed across Leland's cheek.

The American had sensed the twitch of muscles, and took the blow—even went forward to meet it. As he went forward, his hand snapped up and the palm-edge slashed at the Adam's apple bobbing in Fitzgerald's throat. It was a fanged caress, that blow!

Leland straightened in the saddle, a queer smile playing about his lips. Forgetful of the sting in his face, he watched Fitzgerald clutching at his throat and swaying in his seat, making horrible choked sounds.

"I don't want to kill you, Fitz," he said, a sharp edge of excitement to his voice, "but I'll pull a gun and perforate you very quickly if you try any more nonsense. Yes, you did make a bad mistake when you got *me* into this job. Thought I was a poor little boob of an ambulance-chaser who'd come over to France to get a decent war-job, didn't you? Thought that because I was a quiet little cuss, I would take a kick quietly if it was accompanied by a dollar, didn't you?

"A bad mistake, Fitz! You'd better call off your bargain with the Rajah; if he wants a white wife, let him get her where the other native rulers get theirs—and don't damn your living soul for the sake of your boy. That's all."

Gathering up his reins, Leland urged his horse forward on the trail.

BEHIND him was a shaken and broken man. All but knocked out by that lightning-stroke across the throat, for the moment paralyzed in body and voice, Fitzgerald could only stare after the American from terrible eyes. When at last, however, he picked up his reins, he made no move to return to the plantation; instead he touched in his spurs and set forth anew for the town, unhurriedly. Once he glanced backward the way that Leland

had gone, and his lips curved in a cruel line, as though he were well satisfied with affairs.

That encounter rather cleared the air for Leland, sent him on his way with a firmer grip on himself. The die was now cast, and he was glad; he imagined that his warning would show Fitzgerald that the game had been exposed, and that there would now be no further trouble. With the *impasse* cleared away, facing an open enemy, Leland felt much more content.

The plantation-house proved to be a low, comfortable bungalow, and the messenger coolie was already waiting by the entrance. Leland swung out of the saddle, took his surgical case in his hand, and surrendered the reins to the boy.

"Where is Tuan St. George?"

"Him inside, velly sick." The coolie pointed at the doorway.

Leland ascended to the veranda and passed on to the doorway of the house. He found himself in a large room; the sudden transition from glaring sunlight to the cool interior for a moment blinded him. He became aware of a man sitting at a table—a huge, ungainly figure with a wrecked face that leered at him.

"Hello, Leland!" said the voice of St. George. "So you came, eh? Sit down and take a drink before we talk, old chap. You'll need it!"

Leland advanced, slowly staring at the man. St. George had a bottle on the table before him, but was obviously not in any drunken condition.

"You're not sick?" said Leland in his slow, awkward fashion.

St. George threw back his head and emitted a roar of laughter.

"Sick o' soul, Leland—damned sick o' soul! But not otherwise, thanks. Glad you brought along your surgeon's case. I'll need it presently. Sit down, man!"

CHAPTER VII

Pitfalls and Gins

ST. GEORGE had been drinking, but he was far from drunk. Leland doubted now that the man ever could be really drunk; his staring eyes were stark sane and sober. They were not nice eyes. From them looked forth a broken and flame-seared soul, seared beyond all fear of hell. There was good in them too —very far hidden, yet there.

"Sit down!" Not rising, St. George kicked at a chair. "Set your case on the table and sit down. Look at the door, and you'll see why you'd best be a good boy and obey me."

Leland glanced over his shoulder. In the doorway through which he had just entered, he saw two naked Malays squatting, their brown skins glistening with oil; across each pair of bony knees lay a flame-bladed kris. They grinned pleasantly at him.

"What do you mean?" he said quietly. "I came here thinking—"

"Don't try to think," broke in the other. "Take my advice and stop thinking; it only pays one back in hell-coin. Have a drink?"

"No, thanks." Leland put his case on the table and seated himself, wondering whether he faced a madman. Yet the eyes that met his were sane—horribly sane.

"Met Fitz, I see," jeered the other. "Got that welt across the face from him, eh? Of course. Do you usually take things like that?"

"If you saw Fitz now, you'd know," said Leland, smiling.

"Good!" The giant gazed curiously at him. "Hope you gave him what-for! The dirty dog, that's what he is. Did you know that he's an earl's son? Well, it's true."

Leland shook his head. He felt himself at the edge of vague things, profound things; he dimly felt that he had come into touch with deep and somber pools. Somehow this feeling emanated from the man facing him. He suddenly revolutionized his whole bearing toward St. George, reversed in a moment his notion of the man's unimportance.

"Fitz thinks he loves that boy. Bah!" St. George spat disgustedly. "I'm the one who's fathered the lad these years; it's me the boy loves! But what do you know about all this business, eh?"

"Everything," responded Leland quietly.

"Everything!" The giant jeered. "Know why you were fetched here, do you?"

"Certainly." Leland relaxed in his chair, forced a smile to his lips. "More than you yourself know, perhaps. But don't let me interrupt."

St. George gripped at the table edge, stared for a long moment at Leland, then flung an oath.

"Damme, but you can bluff! You know

something, right enough. About the woman part of it?"

Leland nodded, and put his hand to his pocket. The hand of St. George fell beneath the table, but Leland merely produced a pipe and tobacco, and proceeded to smoke.

"Cool plucked, aint you?" sneered St. George, leaning back and regarding him. "What d'you think of this rotten business, anyhow? Pass me that case."

LELAND shoved his surgeon's case across the table. St. George opened it unhesitatingly and brought forth a small hypodermic outfit. He opened this and seemed to know what he was about. *"Ayer!"* he barked at the doorway, and one of the Malays brought him water. He knew what he was doing, obviously.

"Used to have medical aspirations myself," he said. "Well? I asked what you thought about the rotten mess."

"In what way?" inquired Leland, probing for some solid footing but without result.

"Every way. Listen! Who has been the real father to that boy Fitz begot? I have, by the lord Harry! And now Fitz barters him off to that rotten rajah. Hell, man! That boy deserves a better fate. *You* know what he'll get up there in the palace—champagne and women, vice and that damned religion of theirs; and at twenty the boy will be what I am now. And look at me! A rotten deal for him, eh?"

"I imagine so," said Leland, meeting the man's inflamed gaze with level eyes. "You look as though you'd run up against all the deviltry in the devil's end of the earth, St. George. I assume that Fitz has a pretty good hold over you, hasn't he?"

St. George, while speaking, had been melting a morphine tablet, and now he filed the hydormic tube and adjusted a needle. Then he laid the syringe down.

"You've hit it, Mister American," he said, reaching for his glass and tossing down a gulp of liquor.

"And that's why you're in this dirty plot?"

"You can't hit *my* conscience." St. George guffawed. "I haven't any—lost it long ago! Don't try and come that stuff over me; it wont work. Have a drink before I fix you?"

Through his pipe-smoke, Leland calmly studied the giant. If it came to a physical struggle, he knew that he was helpless; even if he downed this man, there were the two Malays to cope with.

"See here," he said thoughtfully, "if you'll consider a bribe—"

"No," said the giant with a flat chuckle. "I'm in to stick. Anything else to propose?"

"I might have. The nub of this whole business is the boy Paul, eh? It's for his sake that Fitzgerald is engineering the affair. With the boy out of it, the thing would be quite impossible, for only Fitzgerald's aid makes it possible for Tuan Pangor to get his white wife—eh? Look here, St. George! Is that why Fitzgerald is resident? Could this thing have been planned out months ago?"

The bulky giant grinned amiably.

"You're gettin' bright by degrees! What are you aiming at?"

"I was just thinking," observed Leland reflectively, "that Fitz is ruled by a monomania for the boy; the center of the whole affair is Paul. By the way, did Fitzgerald tell you the news about Paul, when he was here just now?"

St. George glared in suspicion.

"The news? What are you drivin' at?"

"Oh!" Leland's brows lifted. "Then he didn't tell you! That's queer. Probably he did not want you to know. He's living at the palace, so he'd come first, naturally—"

"What is it?" exploded St. George, with a savage frown. He was plainly distrustful of his captive; yet his smoky eyes seemed cool on Leland's perfectly poised features, and the drink fled out of his ruined countenance until for a brief instant the shadow of an old beauty lingered there.

"You're no liar, Leland," he said in a new voice. "That much shows in your eye. Come! What news have you about Paul? I'll buy it. Has anything happened to him?"

Leland bit at his pipestem. He was on the trail at last.

"Yes and no," he answered deliberately. "First, however, I want information. I came over here because I thought that you did not intend getting me out of the way until to-morrow. How about it?"

ST. GEORGE swore impatiently, but forced himself to accept Leland's deliberation.

"That's why Fitz dropped in this morn-

ing, or so he said. He sobered me up a bit, Fitz did; the devil was in him this morning! Something had broken loose, to make him spring the action a day ahead of time. What the devil has happened to Paul?"

"I'm not sure myself—but Fitz was well worked up," drawled Leland. "Go slow, now. What's the cold, bare fact about all this? In other words, exactly what is your program? I know it in a general way, but not the details."

St. George produced a cigarette and lighted it, grinning nastily.

"Cool plucked, aint you? But don't 'ave no 'opes, my dear chap! Even if you argued me into the quality of mercy, which you can't, those two beggars over there are the Rajah's men—and they'd do me in if I didn't do *you* in. Savvy? Still, you want the naked details, what? Very well. You're to be doped and laid on the shelf for a few days. After that, the Rajah will have a new wife."

"Oh! You don't anticipate any aftermath?" queried Leland. "As, for instance, when I take the matter up with Singapore? I might have a few proofs up my sleeve."

St. George waved his cigarette.

"Tut-tut! My dear fellow, you will be laid up here for a few days; in that time a great deal will be done—around you. If you could 'go out,' as the theosophist chaps say, you would have great visions. You would see yourself utterly discredited at Singapore—photographed as a dope-fiend and so forth; it might even be hinted that your use of drugs at the hospital had something to do with Miss Carewe's loss of identity. Good phrase, that, eh? Loss of identity—right!"

Leland surveyed the other with a slight narrowing of his lids. St. George baffled him. In behind the bulk of this man he sensed crowding figures and stories, a multitude of good and bad years. The giant appeared entirely calloused; yet it was an exterior growth—it was not the steely fiber which made up Fitzgerald.

BUT now St. George put out his great paw to the syringe, and Leland knew the time had come for action.

"I'll play square with you." He laid down his pipe, tipped back his chair, and thrust both hands into his jacket pockets, gazing level-eyed at St. George. "You have a pistol slung under the table—and I have one in my fist. No, keep your hands right where they are! I'm talking now, my man, and I'll smash your kneecap if you drop a hand to that gun!

"First, about Paul. Something *has* happened; Fitzgerald spilled it when I met him. He was looking for Paul, and it was the boy's absence which precipitated your little plot a day ahead of time. You get the idea? Fitzgerald had expected to find Paul—here!"

St. George sat silent, unmoving, staring at Leland from bloodshot eyes.

"Let me imagine a few things," pursued the American calmly, sure now of his ground. "You've been sitting here, drinking like a dog, because the boy had been taken from you and given over to the Rajah and damnation. Don't deny it! You're a husky brute, but you have a soft spot, and the boy found it. But what about Paul all this time? How did he take to the new life? How long would the Rajah let him live if a son were born in the harem?"

At this the giant started slightly. Leland continued with quiet force.

"Here's what happened, I imagine. Paul was taken from you, and couldn't stand it, for he probably loved you a little—why, I can't imagine! He simply cut his stick, as you English say. In other words, he's trying to get back to you—and you sitting here drinking yourself to death! That's the way I figure it. Probably he's being hunted down right now."

The huge bulk of St. George quivered and rippled, as though to some undercurrent of emotion. Conflict sat in his eyes.

"I said you were no liar," he uttered huskily, "but I forgot you were a gentleman. You are fighting for a woman. Maybe you're lying now—damme if I can tell! But here's a bargain: I'll not use the drug. I'll tie you up and then investigate things. If your yarn is true, if Paul has run away, if he shows up—"

"Then what?" demanded Leland quickly.

"Then—I might remember that I used to be a gentleman too, for the boy's sake! But I don't want to remember it, damn you!"

Rising, his hands still on the table, St. George leaned forward and glared at Leland with intent scrutiny. It did not occur to the American that there might be method in this staring regard. . . . .

Over his head slipped a loop; his chair

was jerked backward, and he crashed to the floor; that stare had made him forget the two Malays behind him. As he fell, he pulled trigger, but the bullet went into the ceiling. Then he was crushed to the floor and bound.

"I'll play the game," said St. George, standing over him. "Meantime, this is the safest place for you. Think that over, Leland, and you'll realize it's true! And I'll tell you something else: it was Fitzgerald who made me what I am, and I've waited a good many years to settle up with him! I might not be afraid to do it—if the boy's fate depended on me. Think that over too. You'll have plenty of time!"

And St. George left the room hastily.

CHAPTER VIII

The Net Tightens

MINNA CAREWE was not worried over the nonreturn of Leland, because she had no time for worry. She was forced to handle a flood of clinic-cases herself, and consequently was busily engaged. Toward noon Fitzgerald arrived at the hospital, and Miss Carewe closed the clinic for the day.

"Have you seen Doctor Leland?" she asked. "He was called to your plantation."

"I know." Fitzgerald nodded. "St. George is in a bad way, I fancy. I was there, and met Leland; he has remained to take care of my manager, and will be back this afternoon. To counter the question, have you seen anything of the Rajah's adopted son?"

"Oh! You mean—the boy Paul?"

Fitzgerald nodded again, his features quite impassive. Minna Carewe sensed now, as she had always sensed, that he was absolutely impervious to any touch of softness; it was as though she were reaching out only to encounter a flinty wall, and it vaguely piqued her. Not that she particularly wanted to impress Captain Fitzgerald, but she was not unconscious of her own beauty and force of character. To be thrown into fairly intimate contact with a man whose attitude was ever one of frigid reserve made her wonder if anything were the matter with herself. It seemed to her that Fitzgerald treated her with a lofty disdain, and this was not pleasant.

"Yes," he responded. "Paul has disappeared from the palace—run away, I imagine. Doctor Leland rather fancied that he might have come here. Paul admired you intensely, you know."

"I'm so sorry! But he will be found, of course; he has not been here at all, or I should have seen him. He may turn up here yet. When was he missed?"

"Early this morning, at the call for daylight prayer. The household, of course, is Mohammedan."

As he spoke, she saw his eyes flicker slightly, as though far inside of him something had wrenched and bitten at his soul. But she had no suspicion of the truth.

"We're just about to lunch," she said. "Wont you stop? We have a very simple and democratic establishment—"

Somewhat to her surprise, Fitzgerald promptly accepted the invitation, dispatching one of the servants to the palace with his horse.

"In some ways," said Minna Carewe, while they awaited the luncheon-call, "I am sorry that Paul turned out to be the Rajah's nephew, and was adopted. He seemed such a manly little fellow! It must have been a wrench for you to give him up to his uncle, even though you had not seen him for several years."

"It was, in a way," responded Fitzgerald.

"And then when you think of the life he will inevitably have there—"

FITZGERALD was perspiring when one of the nurses announced luncheon. It was obvious to him, of course, that Minna Carewe had been speaking with entire innocence; yet her words had been as whips to his soul. Truth to tell, he was badly shaken by the boy's disappearance.

As they passed to the dining-room on the rear veranda of the hospital building, the brown nurse who had summoned them gave Fitzgerald a swift, keen glance. He nodded slightly, and in brushing past her, handed her a small object which she concealed with a motion like the deft, lithe motion of a snake.

They lunched alone, the nurses being at a separate table near by. During the meal Minna Carewe felt again the strangely implacable fiber of which her guest was made. It recalled to her that little ebony tablet. She began to realize how closely the description fitted Fitzgerald; strength was his virtue indeed—a cold, impenetrable strength that had no give at all. The thought repelled her.

When the tea was served, she sipped the brew and glanced up at the nurse who had brought it to her.

"Is this the tea I brought from Singapore?"

"No, Miss Carewe; it is the special tea Tuan Pangor sent as a present—orange flower."

"Oh, very well." She dismissed the matter carelessly.

Five minutes later, with her smiling permission, Fitzgerald lighted a cigarette. As he did so, he glanced at the nurses' table, a cold command in his gaze. One of the nurses, the same who had summoned them to luncheon, approached and laid a note on the table before Minna Carewe.

"A man just brought this from the palace, miss."

Minna Carewe, with a lift of her brows, opened the note. While she read it, Fitzgerald glanced up at the nurse; the latter smiled very cheerfully. She was pretty, this brown nurse. In her smiling prettiness lurked the same indefinite hint of obscene Asian depths that lurks in the features of a Cingalese buddha.

"Look at this, Captain Fitzgerald! Perhaps we had better go right over—"

Inquiringly, Fitzgerald took the note that she extended. It was upon the monogrammed paper of the Rajah, and was written in English:

> Dear Miss Carewe:
> If Captain Fitzgerald is at the hospital, will you be kind enough to ask him to come to the palace at once, and to bring Doctor Leland with him? My son Paul has been found, and is rather badly hurt. I am sending over the car, as the call is urgent.
> PANGOR.

Fitzgerald crushed the note in his hand as he rose.

"By all means, Miss Carewe!" he exclaimed. "That is, if you will be good enough. Perhaps you had best bring some dressings and so forth. I shall send to the plantation for Leland at once."

She nodded, rose and departed.

Fitzgerald pocketed the note and sauntered through the corridor to the front of the hospital. He went to the front veranda steps and glanced down the road. In the shadow of the roadside trees a little distance away was waiting one of the Rajah's automobiles. Fitzgerald lifted his arm, and the machine came to the hospital and halted. One gathered that the arrangements had been made sometime previously.

MINNA CAREWE appeared, under her arm an instrument-case and a roll of first-aid banadages. In the doorway she paused for an instant, putting one hand to her eyes.

"The sunlight is dazzling—it almost makes me feel faint!" she exclaimed. Her face had suddenly become very pale. "But it is nothing. The car is here?"

"Yes. Will you accept my arm? One feels the sun extremely in the open."

Together they passed out to the automobile.

Twenty minutes later Fitzgerald entered the library of the palace. Tuan Pangor leaped to his feet with a quick exclamation.

"Well! It's not done?"

Fitzgerald coldly regarded him for a moment, then dropped into a chair and proceeded to light a cigarette. He glanced up with the first curl of smoke.

"Yes." His voice was venomous. "She has been taken to the apartment that you prepared. She will not waken until tomorrow. Are you satisfied?"

Tuan Pangor slowly relaxed into his chair again. His heavy features wore an ironical expression as he regarded the Briton. For a moment he tugged at his long mustache, smiling as though to himself.

"You have fulfilled your bargain," he said in a silky tone, "as I have fulfilled mine. But now you are cheated, eh? The boy is gone."

Fitzgerald looked at him steadily, his bronzed, hard face thinning to an edge. His cold eyes were murderous.

"If I thought you had done anything to him, Tuan," he said, "I would—well, no matter. I believe you are square. But remember this! Before you go to the harem, you find that boy! You know me. I mean those words literally! Before you leave this building, Paul must be found."

"Otherwise?" queried the Rajah, smiling in his hearty but cattish manner.

"Otherwise," said Fitzgerald steadily, "I will shoot you like a dog."

Tuan Pangor threw back his head, his white teeth flashing in a laugh.

"Melodramatic, Fitz! But I don't blame you. 'Pon my word, old chap, you remind me of—of a cobra, dashed if you don't! No, don't worry about the boy; I like him, and he'll make a better rajah than ever I would. Think I'll send him to Eton next year, what? By the way, I have sent out

men, and we'll locate him in an hour or two. I got the whole shikaree force up here from the hill villages—"

AN attendant came into the doorway with a salaam. The Rajah motioned him to speak.

"Tuan, a yellow man brought this note for Tuan Capitan and awaits an answer."

"For me?" Fitzgerald turned, and took the note handed him.

He glanced at the superscription, then checked himself in the act of tearing open the envelope.

"See here! You must get your papers signed up immediately—the documents concerning both Miss Carewe and Leland. The nurses must swear that she has been using drugs, and left for the palace of her own volition. As temporary magistrate, I must get the papers sworn to and sealed and sent to-morrow at latest; the marriage ceremony must be celebrated by that time also. Don't neglect this! When the affair is bruited about at Singapore, the protection must be complete and absolute."

"Very well." The Rajah nodded. "I'll have everything finished by to-night, old chap. I'll also get off a note to Mohammed—the Perak sultan, you know; the best the poor beggar could get for himself was a half-caste French girl from Saigon—"

"Oh, be damned to you!" snarled Fitzgerald viciously, and tore at the envelope. The Rajah chuckled to himself, rose, and went to the tantalus in the corner, where he began to mix a drink with elaborate care.

But Fitzgerald was staring at the letter in his hand, and his hand was shaking. Twice his eyes lifted to the Rajah, whose back was turned, and twice he tried to speak; each time the words died in his throat. A mortal pallor overspread his face, and he read the message once again:

Captain Fitzgerald:

The bearer of this is awaiting you with a carriage. Come with him at once, for I must speak with you privately. If you show this note to a third party, or speak of it, your son dies; in fact, it is probable that he will die anyway, unless your bargain with Tuan Pangor is broken. It is of this that I would speak with you.

You have planned your *coup* for to-morrow. I carried out mine last night. Remember, this is between us two alone! You will recall my name. The life of your son answers for the safety of Miss Carewe. Come at once.

LI FAR, OF SINGAPORE.

Fitzgerald came to his feet. The Rajah was vigorously working at his cocktail-shaker, whistling as he shook. Staggering a little, Fitzgerald thrust the note into his pocket and went to the door.

"I'll be back presently," he said over his shoulder. Tuan Pangor did not turn around. "And remember what I told you about the harem!"

The Rajah chuckled. It was well that he did not turn to look at Fitzgerald, for the latter left the room like a man stricken with the palsy.

CHAPTER IX

FITZGERALD GOES CALLING

BY the time Captain Fitzgerald had been driven into town and had been inducted into the mysteries of Li Far's remote place of abode, he was outwardly his usual cold self again. Fitzgerald knew nothing of Li Far's white porcelain vase and the peculiar deal with Tuan Pangor; but he had suspected a Chinese hand in the excellently forged birth-evidences of the boy, which made Paul nephew to the Rajah in sight of all men. And now Fitzgerald began to remember old tales, half forgotten, which in the days before the war he had heard about one Li Far of Singapore.

They recurred to him dimly and vaguely, those tales, but with fearful high-lights here and there—one story in particular, concerning a man's severed hand knocking for admittance at his own door. A gruesome and terrible touch to most of them—and all dealing with Li Far. There were business stories too, more authentic and very queer to western minds.

For the first time in all his years of residence, Fitzgerald felt himself really face to face with the obscure but vital forces of Mother Asia, the ancient and obscene. And this, he dimly realized, was because he had damned himself body and soul, had made himself a part of Asian iniquity. And was he now going to fail? With a smile Fitzgerald threw his shoulders square and entered the room where Li Far awaited him.

"I am glad to see you again," said Li Far, bowing. "You are just in time for tea, I think. Please sit down! This is a pleasant town in the hot season, is it not?"

A bit nonplused by this greeting, Fitz-

gerald held himself stiffly and surveyed Li Far with icy gaze.

"I did not come here to bandy polite words," he rasped. "Where is the boy Paul?"

The bland and wrinkled face of Li Far remained quite blank.

"You shall be taught politeness—and other things," he said, the words bitten off until they fairly crackled at the white man. "You came here at my orders; accept what is given you—or else leave!"

The stalwart form of Fitzgerald quivered; humiliation exploded over his head like a bomb, and yet he dared not refuse to face the bitterness of it. He knew his Asia too well. He knew that Li Far held the whip. He knew that this old man was not bluffing.

Fitzgerald controlled himself with a spasmodic effort. He stiffly sat in the chair that his host had indicated; his fingers twitched nervously at his mustache, for he perceived suddenly that Li Far must know—everything.

"Your note," he said jerkily. "It came —a bit late—"

"Ah, yes!" assented Li Far with suavity. "So I have discovered! But let us talk of more pleasant things! Here are some very good cigarettes, Mr. Fitzgerald. Do you know, I have often thought of our meeting in Singapore? Yes."

Fitzgerald could find no words. He was armed; the wrinkled old man facing him could be broken in his powerful hands like a rotten stick; the temptation was great. But he thought of the boy Paul, and before the thought his strength was as jelly.

Li Far smiled, reading his mind.

"Certainly, you could kill me; but you realize that the result would be unpleasant—for your son? Yes. Try one of these cigarettes, sent me by a friend in Cairo."

FITZGERALD took one of the proffered tubes. Mr. Li Far filled his long bamboo pipe.

"Where is the boy?" inquired Fitzgerald, his voice strangely muffled. But his host absolutely ignored the question.

"As I was saying," ruminated Li Far, "I have often recalled our meeting in Singapore, when you accompanied Miss Carewe to my unworthy shop. It was really a momentous meeting, although to you it must have seemed unimportant. I presume you scarcely noted the fact that Miss Carewe was my friend; at the time, I laid some emphasis upon that point, hoping that you might understand."

Fitzgerald suddenly gave him a keen glance.

"What? You did not know—"

"Yes." The black jade eyes almost twinkled at him. "I had heard of the Rajah's bet concerning a white wife. I had heard of the new hospital. I had heard of your appointment as temporary Resident. And what is more, I had heard of your son.

"I did not, unfortunately, coördinate these facts until later—that is, I did not grasp them in the proper proportion and relation. There I was at fault, I humbly admit."

Fitzgerald remained silent. He realized that he was face to face with pregnant things—with defeat, even!

"It is too late," he muttered sullenly. Li Far ignored his words again.

"You have accomplished a clever bargain with Tuan Pangor," said the Oriental, "but now you are about to make another bargain—with me."

"It is too late!" said Fitzgerald, gathering strength. "I have already fulfilled my bargain with the Rajah. Miss Carewe has been—er—"

"Ah, yes—drugged, I assume. You were forced to spring your *coup* a day ahead of time. There again I was at fault, for I had not anticipated such a thing." Li Far placed his pipe upon the table. "Still, what has been given may be regained."

Fitzgerald gave him a bitter look.

"Impossible! Miss Carewe has already half consented. You failed to take woman's ambition into account. To become a ranee was strong bait—"

"Liar!" The old man smiled thinly. "Do you take me for a fool? Listen! I am giving you orders! No touch of scandal must linger around that woman who is my friend. The documents which you and Tuan Pangor have prepared are in your keeping; they must be sent me the moment you leave here. By to-morrow morning Miss Carewe must be in the hospital, safe."

THE beading of sweat upon Fitzgerald's brow had swollen into globules and running drops. He brushed a hand across his forehead.

"Damn you!" he said thickly. "I tell you it is impossible."

"Ah!" exclaimed Li Far, his metallic voice like a thin bell of silver. "Let us see if your vocabulary cannot be enlarged."

With his knuckles he touched the gong beside him.

Fitzgerald, fearing some secret assault, half rose; but nothing happened. There was deep silence in the room. After an interminable space Fitzgerald detected the eyes of Li Far lifting over his shoulder. Compelled, he turned and looked, there at the wall. A stifled, gasping cry burst from him.

For where had been a wall was now blank space and another room; the wall had folded silently away. In that other room Fitzgerald saw three figures watching him. Two of these were half-naked Chinese figures, who stood quite immobile, each of them holding a heavy, brutal Chinese knife.

The third figure, between these two, was the white, naked figure of a boy, hands above his head, lashed to a post that ran from floor to ceiling. A cruel pear gag choked his mouth. His eyes were fastened upon Fitzgerald in unutterable horror and appeal.

"Be careful," advised the metallic voice. "If you seek a weapon, the boy will be the first to perish!"

A low, frightful cry was wrenched from Fitzgerald. His cold eyes were glittering with the deadly, venomous fire of a cobra. His tongue licked at his hot, dry lips.

You have seen a snake, looped and tethered helplessly, striking out in mad anguish at all around him, tongue flickering, fangs gleaming with lightning-swift flashes of white, body writhing in vain convulsions. Thus stood Fitzgerald, helpless in his agony, all his deadly cobra's soul shining from his tortured eyes, his whole body quivering.

Wise old Li Far gazed at him for a moment, silently, then made a slight gesture. The wall of the room folded back again. The hideous vision was gone!

"Is your vocabulary enlarged?" asked the old man dryly.

"You—you devil!" croaked Fitzgerald, turning upon him in a spasm of fury. Words choked in his throat; a ghastly blueness was in his face.

"Sit down, and let us talk of more pleasant matters," said Li Far blandly. He knuckled his gong until the room was filled with soft tremors of sound like the ghostly chuckles of unseen things.

AN attendant entered, bearing a glowing charcoal brazier, and upon this a pewter kettle with tiny cups. Li Far opened the kettle and drew forth the inside kettle of wine, about which lay the boiling water. He poured wine into the cups, then sat back in his chair and complacently surveyed Fitzgerald.

"The afternoon is growing late," he said, "and I have important business awaiting me. What, if I may inquire, has become of Doctor Leland?"

"He is at my plantation," said the other thickly. "I—I have warned the Rajah that until the boy is found, he is not to visit the harem—"

Li Far beamed in delight at this intelligence.

"That was well done!"

"Damn you!" snarled Fitzgerald. "Tell me what you want!"

"With pleasure. Immediately after dinner, ride to the plantation and bring Mr. Leland to me, here. I desire to manage this affair myself, and he might be too hasty in the matter. After that Miss Carewe can be returned to the hospital."

Fitzgerald gazed at him from distended, bloodshot eyes.

"Tuan Pangor will not consent; and against his palace guards we are helpless."

Li Far made a suave gesture. "But you have ingenuity, my dear sir! Undo what you have done; that is all. I promise that your son shall be returned to his place in the palace, and that the Rajah will be glad, very glad, to keep the boy as his heir."

A wild and incredible gleam of hope lighted Fitzgerald's face.

"You mean that?" he cried.

"I usually mean what I say—as I have proven to you. But you must manage the return of Miss Carewe." Li Far smiled, and raised his cup of wine.

Knowing that he was dismissed, Fitzgerald clutched at his own cup, draining it at a gulp, and rose to his feet.

"But be careful to give the Rajah no hint of my interference in these matters," Li Far cautioned him in bland tones. "I think that he might not approve."

Fitzgerald gazed at him a moment as though in stark wonder, then caught up his helmet and went to the door. He staggered a little as he went.

When he was once more alone, Li Far poured himself another cup of wine. He sipped the hot fluid, his black eyes lifting to the picture that hung upon the wall, and a light of appreciative contemplation filled his wrinkled features.

"Proportion," he murmured, "is a beautiful thing! I am glad that Leland is safely out of this affair; he is a good man, but very rash. He would see a need for haste where there is no need, and it is written that he who treads upon the tiger's tail must watch well his steps. He is a tiger, that Tuan Pangor! But I wonder what he will say when I tell him about that beautiful white vase?"

And Li Far smiled to himself as he sipped his wine and studied the wall-picture.

PRESENTLY the gong outside his door sounded, and the door opened to his command. Into the room came the boy Paul, alone; he was fully clothed, but looked as if he were exceedingly bewildered. Li Far stood up and took his hand.

"Sit down, Paul. You trust me still, do you not?"

The boy gazed at him with frightened and doubtful eyes.

"I do not know—I do not understand! Was my father here?"

"Yes, and now he has gone." Li Far smiled at the boy. When the old man smiled, thus, one understood that he had been a boy himself—and had not forgotten. Paul's luminous eyes softened under the smile.

"But where is he?"

"He comes to-night," explained Li Far. "You are sure that you would like to be Rajah if St. George were to take care of you?"

"Of course; I like him better than Papa, even! When is my papa coming back?"

"To-night, perhaps," said Li Far quietly. "You and I are going to have dinner together, and after dinner I am going to get St. George, eh?"

The boy's lip quivered suddenly, unexpectedly.

Old Li Far held out his arms, and the boy came to him, sobbing; the old man folded to his breast the curly young head, and above it his eyes closed wearily. Perhaps Li Far was thinking of his own son, who had never come to earth.

CHAPTER X

St. George Plays the Phonograph

DARKNESS found Leland reposing upon the couch in the living-room of Fitzgerald's bungalow. The two Malays who guarded him lighted no lamps; they squatted in the doorway, talking and smoking, quite oblivious to him, apparently. He had been well bound, but his hands had been bound in front of him, and he had not been lashed to the couch.

Leland was grimly thankful that no lamps had been lighted. He had been hoping for this. Under the center-table, he knew, was still slung St. George's revolver. He had seen it there when they laid him on the couch—an old-style weapon, held in a leathern sling so that one could shoot beneath the table without warning. Typical of St. George, he thought.

What had happened to Minna Carewe, of course, he did not know, but he could imagine. He sickened to think of the desperately old and simple game that was being played. He saw most clearly why he had been picked for his rôle—an inoffensive, harmless little man, no family to mourn him, no influential friends to investigate his ending. A scapegoat!

Impatience grew upon him as the darkness settled down. Only that same morning all his plans had been inchoate; he had seen no way of prevailing against the superior forces around him, no way of rescuing Minna Carewe from the unescapable trap. But now, now that the crisis had come, he had found what he sought. At least, he had found how the thing might be done, and as he lay awaiting the darkness, his brain plotted each detail.

One of the natives lighted a cigar shaped like a ram's horn, sauntered over to inspect the captive, and returned to the doorway. Outside, the night-birds were calling monotonously. A bat or flying-fox was in the room, swinging from wall to wall with thrumming wings, seeking the doorway which eluded it, yet eluding all objects with the marvelous sense possessed by these creatures alone.

Inch by inch, Leland had been hitching his feet toward the edge of the couch; now a single movement would finish it. He waited until one of the Malays laughed; then, catlike, he threw his body up, his feet over the edge. He was sitting

with his bound feet upon the floor. The talk of the two Malays had not ceased; he had made no sound.

Leland leaned forward, got his hands to the line about his ankles, and set to work. It was not easy, and he feared lest his cramped breathing attract attention. But at length the cord gave, loosened, fell away from his ankles.

ONCE more the American waited interminable minutes for the low laughter from the doorway. It came, and as it came, he rose to his feet. Waiting no longer, he took two long steps forward—and a floor-board creaked lugubriously beneath his weight. From the Malays broke an exclamation of alarm. They rose, one of them trailing a match across the shagreen haft of his knife.

Those two steps, however, had brought Leland to the table. In the darkness his bound hands went true to the revolver; he had marked the spot well in his brain. He got the weapon from its underslung sheath just as the match flared. Jerking up the revolver, he fired.

The second Malay flung down his match, but that light had proved his bane. Before the match had left his hand, Leland fired again. Then, dropping the revolver upon the table, the American felt about for his open instrument case, and found a scalpel. He had no further interest in the two Malays; he was quite sure of his own work. The room was very silent.

Sitting down, he got the scalpel between his feet and sawed his wrist-bonds against its edge. This, too, was slow work, for the instrument slipped from between his soles. After five minutes the cord loosened, and his hands broke apart. He was free.

"So far, so good!" said Leland as he rose.

He knew where St. George kept his cheroots, and after a moment secured one. Carefully avoiding the two motionless things on the floor, he stepped out on the veranda and fumbled through his pockets for a match. He found one—then halted in striking it. From the road he caught the drumming of approaching hoofs.

"Luck, pure luck!" he muttered cheerfully. "Looks as though things were breaking right at last! Here's St. George now. Did he hear the shots? Not likely. He's riding at a good clip, but not galloping. Hm! This saves me a walk back to town, bless the luck! Wonder if he found the boy?"

Stepping back into the doorway of darkness, Leland took out the revolver and reversed it in his hand.

Outside there was no moon, would be none until midnight or after. The blazing tropic starlight, however, gave no lack of radiance by which to distinguish objects. Leland made out the dark figures of horse and rider sweeping up toward the bungalow. Suddenly he realized that this was not the huge bulk of St. George, and he grinned.

"Fitz, bless him!" he exclaimed inwardly. "Better yet! Around the palace they all know that white sun-helmet of his. It'll be as good as a passport to me, at night!"

Fitzgerald checked his horse at the veranda steps, dismounted, and rushed forward.

"St. George!" he cried as he came. "Gone to sleep, you cursed fool? Where are you?"

"Here," said Leland, stepping from the doorway as he struck.

FIVE minutes later Leland descended the steps, scratched a match and lighted his cheroot. He now wore the white helmet of Fitzgerald. Swinging into the latter's saddle, he headed the horse back toward town at a sharp canter. He had discarded the revolver, having secured from the senseless Fitzgerald an excellent automatic, to which he was more accustomed.

Leland was passing the grove of wild rubber trees that stretched townward from the plantation limits, when he drew rein sharply. Almost without warning a horseman had materialized upon the road ahead and was now drawing rein in turn.

"That you, Fitz?" came the growling rumble of St. George. "I've been chasing you all over hell!"

"It's not Fitz," drawled Leland, smiling to himself. "Stick up your hands mighty quick—up high where I can see 'em!"

An oath of astonishment, and the other obeyed. The two men were but six feet apart.

"A little surprise for you," chuckled Leland. "If you're good, I'll not hurt you. Did you find the boy?"

"No," responded St. George. "And don't *you* worry, either! I was coming back to let you loose." A flood of vitriolic oaths burst from him. "D'you know what's up?"

"What?"

"I've been to the palace. Fitz was there for dinner, but rode out afterward; I missed him. However, the boy's not been found. The Rajah has thrown out his entire force of shikarees and constabulary, and all the servants he can spare to find the boy—or so he says, the black swine! My opinion is that he simply scragged Paul to get rid of him."

Leland was silent for a moment. "It may be so," he slowly replied. "Where's Miss Carewe?"

"In the harem; she's in the ranee's apartment on the ground floor, right wing. What I want to know, where's Fitz?"

"Oh! Interested in him?"

St. George growled an oath. "I'm done!" he said violently. "It was Fitz and his devil's ambition that got Paul into this mess; and now the Rajah has murdered the boy—as he did his own brother to get the throne! Anyway, I've an old score of my own to settle with Fitz. Now that the boy's dead, I'm going to do it!"

"You'll find him back yonder at the bungalow." Leland edged his horse to one side to allow the other passage. "I tied him up. Sorry I couldn't use persuasion on the Malays."

St. George sat his horse for a long moment, gazing at Leland in the starlight.

"My Lord!" he exclaimed at length. "You *were* misjudged a bit, eh? By the way, most of the black boys are gone from the harem, helping to search for Paul. There's a guard at the door, and probably a eunuch inside—no more. Wait till I get through with Fitz, and I'll give you a hand."

"I don't want you, thanks." And Leland laughed lightly.

"My Lord! It's a rum go," said St. George, urging his horse forward.

A LITTLE time afterward St. George dismounted at his bungalow steps and strode across the veranda. At the doorway he scraped a match, went inside and lighted the oil lamps on the wall. Then he turned and coolly surveyed the prostrate Fitzgerald.

The latter had recovered his senses. Bound and gagged, he was staring at St. George and making inarticulate noises. The giant laughed, went to him and took him up in his arms. With no visible effort he lifted the bound man and dropped him seated in the nearest chair.

"Never mind trying to talk, Fitz," he said, a terrible steadiness to his voice and eye. "It's my turn now; you've talked your way into hell. Remember how you got me drinking and gambling, years and years ago in Bombay? And then, cashiered? And then, reeling through all the hell-pits of Asia? That was your work, Fitz. You knew it, too; that's why you gave me this job when you found me on my uppers in Rangoon. And you the Earl o' Desmond's son, the gallant blade! But you were exposed later—only, you got paid money to stay here, eh?"

St. George coolly appropriated Fitzgerald's case and lighted a cigarette.

"And now, Fitz," he pursued, gazing with a frightful calmness at the bound man, "Paul is gone. The Rajah's done for him. You didn't know it yet, eh? That's my guess, at least. And it's your fault, Fitz. Talked your way into hell this time, you have!"

He turned to a phonograph that stood against the wall, and began to search through a case of records. The eyes of Fitzgerald followed him in awful pleading, in dumb, agonized effort to convey a message. But St. George had his back turned.

"They say you're hard as hard, Fitz," rumbled his voice. He was winding the phonograph now, and fitting a needle. "Nobody ever found much of a soft spot in you, Fitz, but I did, years ago, and I remembered it. You can't help your Irish blood, Fitz, and you can't stand *this* tune! I've kept this record hidden away for years, old chap, waiting for this moment. And now cry, damn your bleedin' soul; for when that record's done, I'll prick you into hell!"

The low, wailing minors of an Irish air filled the room. It was the same air which Minna Carewe had idly touched upon in the palace music-room, making Fitzgerald wince—that strangely wistful, plaintive, heart-tugging air which in the bastardized Anglo-Gaelic is called "*Shule Agrah.*" Few Irishmen can hear that air, rightly played, and remain unmoved.

Fitzgerald was not one of the few. Somehow it wrenched at him, even in this moment, tore at his very quivering soul—

or perhaps the anguished thought of his position tore at him. His straining eyes were fearful things to see. St. George, however, did not see them. He was selecting some tablets from Leland's hypodermic outfit.

As the record finished the last bars of its air, St. George came to the side of Fitzgerald, syringe in hand, and his hand was very steady. Presently he stood looking down at the bound man, saying nothing.

Unheeded, the needle scratched into the record's center, filling the room with a blur of sound.

CHAPTER XI

The Evasion

LELAND had left his horse well outside the palace gates. He reconnoitered the palace itself very carefully, aided thereto by an abundance of lights. It seemed that Tuan Pangor was little worried by the disappearance of his adopted son and heir, for there was nautch-dancing in the music-room, and much revelry. So far as Leland could see, the usual quota of palace servants was on hand.

Skirting the main building, Leland threw off precaution and strode openly down the garden path that led to the seraglio. If any saw him, here in the garden, the white helmet would stamp him as Fitzgerald. In his sleeve, ready to drop into his hand, he carried the automatic.

"It's a good scheme," he reflected, doubt now weighing upon him. "But, facing the reality of it, things look different!"

He knew in his heart that it was a mad scheme. He might, conceivably, be able to get Minna Carewe away from the harem, with or without an alarm. He might get her to the stables where the Rajah's cars were kept. He might even get her away in a car and drive down to the coast port, twenty miles to the west. But after that?

"We may be held there for days before a boat drops in," he muttered. "Confound that Li Far! I might get some assistance from him, if he hadn't hidden himself away from sight. Well, no matter now. I'll have to shove along on the lines laid down, pray for luck, and not shoot until necessary."

Discerning the shadowy outlines and the dim lights of the harem ahead, he slowed his rapid stride. The main building he knew slightly from his previous visit; there were several structures, old and new. Minna Carewe would be in the main harem, and he recollected what St. George had said about the guard and the eunuch.

Knowing that he must inevitably be seen by the guard, Leland halted to light his pipe, then went forward, assuming the stiff gait of Fitzgerald. As he approached the entrance, he saw the squatting figure of a Malay arise, and with satisfaction noted that there was but the one man here. The door behind the guard was closed.

"Luck's holding good so far!" thought the American. He spoke aloud, counterfeiting the curt tones of Fitzgerald.

"Tuan Pangor is here?"

The Malay saluted. "He is at the palace, Tuan Capitan."

"The boy has not been found?" Leland drew closer as he spoke.

"Not yet, Tuan Capitan."

"Listen to me." Leland beckoned, and the Malay leaned forward.

Pipe in his left hand, Leland allowed the automatic to fall into his right. He threw up his arm, not too hard; the cruel forward sight nicked across the scalp of the brown man, cutting to the bone.

With a single gasp of expelled breath, the Malay crumpled in a heap.

Leland stooped over him. With the man's flame-bladed kris he cut the silk sarong into strips, then bound and gagged the man and dragged the body into the shadow.

HE turned to the closed door. To his dismay, it refused to give to his hand. He had already searched the Malay, finding no key. He knew well that to seek admission through a window or other side entrances would be utter folly.

He put a crashing blow on the door with the pistol-butt.

After a moment a wicket high in the door slid open. A voice floated to him—a thin, slimy voice, a voice redundant with vague evils and monstrous imaginings.

"Who is there?"

"Tuan Fitzgerald, with a message from Tuan Pangor. Open and come out, dog! Am I to be kept all night awaiting your pleasure?"

"I come, Tuan Capitan," wafted the hurried response.

Leland smiled grimly. Obviously he was making an excellent understudy for Fitzgerald!

An inner bar to the door slid back, and the door opened. There emerged a huge black guardian of the inner mysteries—a sprawling, misshapen figure that bent before Leland in a deeply respectful salaam. Leland struck at the base of the skull.

As the blow fell, Leland shivered slightly. To him it seemed as though he were striking at some unclean and loathsome remnant of a primeval world. He shrank from the very touch of the creature; the feeling made him strike fiercely, madly, as one strikes in the dark at some crawling reptile.

The obscene body gave a low, shuddering groan and collapsed.

Swiftly, Leland stepped inside, dragged the body after him, and closed the door. His quick gaze sought the corridor beyond, and a breath of relief escaped him to find it empty.

Working rapidly now, he got the senseless eunuch bound and gagged. Turning to the corridor, he advanced and paused to get his bearings. From some unseen quarter floated the laughter of women, the low piping of flutes, the sensuous odor of incense and perfumes. To his right was a closed door, and Leland went to it, noiseless on the carpet.

As he came to the door, he caught from within the voice of a native woman, raised in laughing exclamation. He paused. This was the place indicated by St. George—but had the giant told the truth?

Trembling a little, Leland grasped the knob and opened the door. An empty room met his gaze. He stepped inside, amazed—then paused in comprehension.

THE room was empty, indeed, but it was richly furnished in European style, and at the far end was a great curtained opening. From those curtains Leland heard the prattle of women's voices and a rustling of silk. His lips compressed; disliking what he must do and yet lashing himself to the task by thought of Minna Carewe, he softly crept to the hangings and parted them a trifle, until he had vision of the alcove beyond.

Overwhelming relief seized upon him. Here were two native women, cigars between their teeth, brown bodies half clad in filmy garments, arranging the covers of a mahogany bed. Here was the boudoir-suite which he had seen being unpacked, the room that was newly furnished for a white ranee! And here, on a chaise-longue against the wall, he saw Minna Carewe lying.

For a long moment Leland watched her, in his eyes a deep tumult of emotion. She lay as one asleep, the bosom of her blue nurse's costume softly rising and falling, her head turned to one side; against the relaxed sweetness of her face played the disturbed tendrils of her pale bronze hair.

Leland roused from his absorption. The native women were approaching Minna Carewe, and it was evident that they had been preparing the bed to receive her. Summoning up his scanty Malay, Leland pushed his automatic between the curtains and spoke.

"Silence! A word from you means death—be careful!"

He advanced, pulling the curtains together behind him. The two women, paralyzed by alarm and fright at this intrusion, and doubtless recognizing him, stared like dumb things. Leland saw in them the solution of the greatest problem that had fronted him—how to get Minna Carewe out of here and to the stables. He might carry her at a pinch; yet that would leave him practically defenseless.

"I do not mean to harm you," he said, softening his tone. "Obey me, and you shall have no hurt. How long has she slept thus?"

"Since coming here at noon, Tuan," responded one of the frightened women. "She will not waken until morning."

"Can you carry her?"

Sensing the import of his words, the two women glanced at each other, fearful and indecisive. Leland read the look, and put harshness into his voice.

"Come! If you raise any alarm, I shall have to shoot, and you shall be the first to die. Otherwise I shall not harm you. The guards are powerless to help. Obey me, and you have nothing to fear. Get a wrap and place it around her, then lift and carry her as I bid. Will the drug leave any ill effects?"

"None, Tuan," answered one of the women, submissive to his will.

THEY procured a large shawl, in which they wrapped Minna Carewe. Leland saw that they were not unused to this

business; they raised her sitting body between them, hands clasped beneath her, the listless arms about their brown necks.

Leland went to the door ahead of them, and opened it. The impossible had been accomplished, and already visions of high emprise were crowding upon his brain. He was glad that Minna Carewe knew nothing of this affair; she would know naught of it until the morrow, when the worst would be over.

And there would be a reckoning; Leland thought of it with savage delight. A reckoning and a return, with the power of the British *raj* to swing the scales of justice right. There was sore need of a hospital here, and he was not minded to give over his work lightly; also, Minna Carewe would never throw away the property left by her brother. They must return!

He opened the outer door and motioned the two women to pass out. Then he checked himself abruptly; it was evident that something had happened, that somehow there had been an alarm. Voices were in the gardens, and flickering lights. A low cry of fear broke from the women.

"To the stables!" ordered Leland steadily. "Walk fast!"

Staggering rather than walking beneath their burden, they obeyed. Leland followed them into the darkness. Already he was scoffing at the alarm; once in the Rajah's big car, he could afford to laugh at them all.

As he was thinking thus, the two women ahead of him stopped short, upon their lips a wail of fear and anguish. Leland leaped forward to hush the noise, when to his amazement he found a man standing in the path ahead.

"Not so fast, my dear doctor," purred a voice. "This is a very pleasant meeting, eh?"

"Tuan Pangor!" Leland threw up his automatic. "Damn you—"

Even as he pressed the trigger, something smote him from behind.

CHAPTER XII

The Yellow Hand

THE Rajah sat in his library, the doors closed and guarded, and drained a whisky and soda. He lighted a cigarette and gazed steadily at Leland.

The American, now fully conscious and cognizant of his plight, was lashed fast to a chair. His face was white; against the whiteness burned his deep blue eyes, like the incense-lighted sapphire eyes of the Wat Phrong pagoda. There was fear in them, but no fear for himself.

"I suppose, Doctor Leland, that I should be very dramatic; but I am too English for that. I cannot torture you." Tuan Pangor's voice was cold; but his eyes, those glittering eyes that would never be English, gave the lie to his words.

"You've put me in a rotten bad fix, eh?" he resumed, fingering his cigarette. "You realize that I have no choice but to make you shut up. I've sent for Fitz, and when he arrives, we'll go over the matter."

"You mean the method of my murder?" Leland smiled scornfully.

"Murder? Certainly not!" The Rajah chuckled heartily. "My dear chap, why should you be crudely murdered? No; we will prevent you from talking—or from being believed, which is more to the point—in a much more artistic manner. Who would believe a drug-fiend? Well, we can make one of you in six weeks—what?"

Leland turned a shade paler. Before he could answer, however, a knock sounded at the door, and in response to the Rajah's voice an attendant entered. He silently handed a card to Tuan Pangor, who read it and then grinned.

"Bring him in at once." The Rajah turned to Leland, smiling. "Now attend, my friend! You shall learn how futile you were against my widespread power."

Tuan Pangor rose and extended his hand with a hearty greeting. Leland's eyes lifted to the door; a low word of amazement came to his lips. In the doorway stood Li Far!

"Enter!" said the Rajah cordially. "You are just in time—look at poor Leland, here! He was running amuck and had broken into my harem; was only downed after a fight. Poor chap! Cocaine or morphine, you understand. Rotten shame, what?"

WITHOUT a trace of recognition Li Far blinked at the astounded American.

"Ah, yes!" he answered blandly. "It is really too bad, Your Highness. You will send him to Singapore for treatment?"

"Oh, we'll take him in hand ourselves for a time," said the Rajah complacently. "It may not be too late to save him; Fitzgerald may be able to set him on his feet in a month or so. Only right, what? The decent thing, you know; mustn't kick a man out just because he's the under dog."

"Your excellent feelings do you credit," said Li Far suavely. He accepted the chair which Tuan Pangor set forward, and transferred his attention to the Rajah. "But, Your Highness, I have some very bad news for you. I hastened here, although the hour is late and I was preparing to return south to-morrow."

"Bad news?" the Rajah's brows lifted inquiringly. "In what way?"

"You remember the white vase?" asked Li Far. His host nodded impatiently. "And the tiny projection which scratched your hand? Well, I have discovered something—something I hesitate to tell you. That vase was one made use of under the Ming dynasty; the tiny projection was impregnated—"

Instinctively the Rajah glanced at his palm. He sprang to his feet, then slowly resumed his seat. A breath of relief escaped him.

"My word! For a moment you frightened me; but see, the cut has healed entirely! It was but a scratch, thank Allah! Had there been any poison, the cut would not have healed."

Li Far blinked. "There was no poison, Your Highness. It was worse."

"How! Worse?"

"Leprosy."

Tuan Pangor laid down his cigarette. He tried to speak, staring at his wrinkled visitor, but failed in the effort. His eyes slowly distended.

Leland, meantime, had relaxed in his chair. He saw that there was going on before his eyes some ineffably deep and subtle drama which he could but dimly comprehend.

"A lie!" croaked the Rajah hoarsely. "That—that is impossible."

"Listen to me," said Li Far impassively. "I knew your father before you, and served him. Am I a liar? Very seldom, Your Highness; only when it becomes necessary to friendship. I would cheerfully lie for the sake of my friends, but not for myself. Well, then! I have come to tell you of this discovery in order to save you. The secret of this leprosy is an old one among my people, who are very wise. I need not have told you unless I wished, for the disease requires seven years to develop. If the remedy is applied in time, it will never develop."

TUAN PANGOR looked at this wise, wrinkled old man who faced him with such an infinity of knowledge in his aged features. Out of the Rajah's eyes died the look of savage terror and suspicion. He nodded, as one nods to a master in wisdom.

"My word! You gave me a bad turn." An uneasy smile struggled to his lips. "Have you come to sell this remedy?"

Now it seemed to Leland, who was drinking in every word with acute intentness, that this was indeed the intention of Li Far. He was dumfounded when the old Celestial shook his head, smiling faintly.

"Your Highness, does one sell friendship? No. I have here what is necessary; three drops of this would sell in China for a thousand times their weight in purest pearls; this bottle and its contents are three hundred years old; yet see how little has been used!"

He handed the Rajah a small flat bottle of agate, highly carved. The neck orifice, which was stopped with a jade stopper, was but a half-inch in diameter; through that orifice had been hollowed out the entire bottle until it was but a thin carven shell of agate. Tuan Pangor held it to the light. It was two thirds full of a dark fluid.

"If I did not know that you were my friend," said the Rajah, an ugly light in his eyes, "I might think—"

Li Far rose and held out his hand, dignity mantling his aged figure.

"Very well, Your Highness, return me the bottle—"

"Wait!" Tuan Pangor seized the whisky bottle before him, and with shaking hand poured a drink. "I would not offend you, Mr. Li. No! Three drops, you say?"

Li Far bowed his head. "Three only."

The Rajah, smiling feverishly, measured three frugal drops into the whisky; he then measured three more, and shot seltzer into the glass.

"A precaution cannot offend," he said, a glint in his eyes. "Half to you, my friend, and I drink the rest. Eh, what? A little thing for friendship."

Li Far accepted the glass with a bow, and for an instant his gaze dwelt upon

the horrified eyes of Leland. In his gaze was a light that answered the glittering frown of the Rajah, answered it with almost a scornful merriment. When Tuan Pangor's fathers were jungle-men and sea-pirates, the fathers of Li Far had already seen a Christian kingdom vanish out of China. Behind the brown man were a scant few hundred years of Asian evil; behind the yellow man were three thousand years of Asian wisdom.

"I am always glad to prove friendship," said Li Far, and drank half the liquid.

Tuan Pangor seized the glass from his hand, drained the contents, and dropped into his chair again. A breath of relief escaped him, and he wiped beaded sweat from his brow.

But Li Far, quick as light itself, drew from his pocket a tiny vial of thin glass, and lifted it to his lips.

"This," he said, "is the antidote." And he dropped the empty vial to the carpet.

Tuan Pangor stared at him, not understanding at once—until slowly a dreadful comprehension dilated his eyes.

"You—" he cried the word chokingly, horribly. "You—"

"Exactly—I!" Li Far, bowing slightly, exposed an automatic pistol that slid into his hand. "If you will oblige me by sitting still for a moment, just a moment! It would pain me to be forced into crudity, after this exquisitely artistic conduct."

He smiled benignly at the Rajah, who was sagging in his chair like a man drunken.

CHAPTER XIII

The End

ON the morning following these things, Doctor Leland sat on the hospital veranda with Mr. Li Far of Singapore, and spoke of certain events.

"She is hungry—that is all," said Leland. "I sent her to sleep again—we'll have to tell her much of the truth, eventually; she must be put in good shape to hear it."

"Nonsense!" Li Far chuckled over his pipe. "If you had half her poise and fine spiritual balance—well, never mind! It was very unfortunate about Fitzgerald, but I do not imagine that the authorities will inquire too closely. As to the late Rajah—"

"Oh, I shall be glad to certify heart-failure! Still, in his case, inquiries might be made. If there is an autopsy, what then?"

"The same verdict," responded Li Far. "It is a delicate fluid that acts upon the heart but leaves little trace. There will be no further trouble, I assure you. After the funeral, the usual homage will be given the boy Paul; he must take a native name, of course. What sublime artistry, to leave him thus in the Rajah's place!"

"And St. George will take care of him," commented Leland thoughtfully. "A good man, that, at bottom. The responsibilities will bring out old qualities in him."

Li Far nodded.

For a space the two men smoked in silence, until again Leland spoke, this time with his old awkward manner.

"By the way, one of the nurses has disappeared."

"I had her removed last night," said Li Far blandly. "She knew too much about drugs, and recent events. I shall educate her anew, in Singapore."

"If you insist on leaving to-day," said Leland, stirring uneasily, "can't you hurry up a new Resident here? One with full powers, of course."

"I shall do my best." The black jade eyes of Li Far twinkled. "You have some special reason for wishing it?"

"Oh, nothing—much. That leprosy story of yours; was it true?"

"I never lie—except in friendship. Miss Carewe is my friend." Li Far laid down his pipe and smiled faintly. "You spoke of the Resident, eh? That would not exactly suit Miss Carewe, I imagine. I have taken the liberty of making other arrangements."

"Eh?" Leland's eyes bit out at him. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing—much!" Again Li Far's eyes twinkled. "But I have summoned the missionary from Ulu Klang; he should arrive here by the end of the week at latest. I hope that he will not be disappointed. Missionaries are very fond of weddings, I have observed."

Leland eyed him in slow amazement. "Man, are you a mind-reader?"

"Oh!" Li Far made a deprecatory gesture. "I knew about that a long time ago—a long time ago in Singapore, in my little shop!"

THE END

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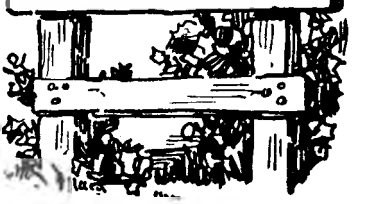

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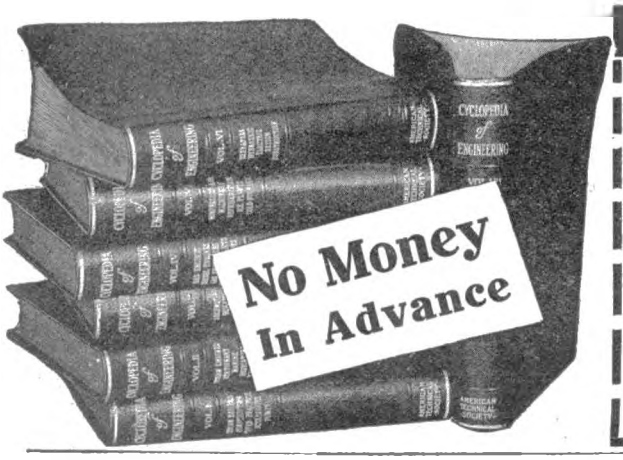

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Will you prepare yourself or will you let the fellow next to you or the man below you get ahead of you, simply because you will not devote a few spare hours a week to your own self-advancement.

Have you as good a position with your company as you expected?

Is your income as large as you thought it would be?

Do you stand as high in your community as you had hoped?

Do other men come to you for advice in business?

What you will accomplish in the future is best gauged by what you have done in the past.

Are you training yourself now for the bigger job ahead?

How to acquire this training

No man can learn in his own department all he needs to know about business. The principles of production, marketing, accounting, finance—are fundamentals that every business man must know to become a greater success.

He should also have a sound knowledge of credits, transportation, advertising, selling, and kindred fundamentals.

Train yourself thru the Alexander Hamilton Institute and you will be laying up assets for your future that are indestructible.

75,000 successful men have enrolled for the Modern Business Course and Service. These men represent executives of all types.

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13,534	Presidents have enrolled
2,826	Vice-presidents "
5,372	Secretaries "
2,652	Treasurers "
11,260	Managers "
2,626	Sales Managers "
2,876	Accountants "

and thousands of others in all kinds of positions—in all kinds of work. In fact, ambitious men are quick to realize just how much the Course will help them towards greater achievement.

Get further information

Find out for yourself just how valuable the Course is and whether you think it is applicable to you and your business.

Write for our free 112-page book, "Forging Ahead in Business." It demonstrates how you can improve yourself—your earning capacity—your productiveness and how you may become a better leader thru self-training.

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NERVOUS AMERICANS

By Paul von Boeckmann

For 25 years the leading authority in America on Psycho-physics.

We are the most "high strung" people on Earth. The average American is a bundle of nerves, ever ready to spring into action, mentally and physically. The restless energy of Americans is proverbial.

We may well be proud of our alert, active and sensitive nerves, as it indicates the highest state of civilization, courage, ambition and force of character.

The vast opportunities open to us in every field; our freedom of Government, which prevents no one from reaching the highest goal, economically, politically and socially, is the incentive that has led us to develop our nerves to super-keenness and alertness, for in the present day high tension life a dull and slow nerved person cannot succeed.

Our high nerve tension has not been without its grave dangers and serious consequences. Neurologists agree that we are more subject to nervous disorders than any other nation. Our "Mile a Minute Life" is tearing our nerves to shreds and we are deteriorating into a nation of Neurasthenics.

Since the Nervous System generates the mysterious power we term Nerve Force, that controls and gives life and energy to every muscle, every vital organ, every drop of blood and bodily cell, nerve exhaustion necessarily must result in a long train of ailments and weaknesses.

The noted British authority on the nerves, Alfred T. Schofield, says: "It is my belief that the greatest single factor in the maintenance of health is that the nerves should be in order."

How often do we hear of people running from doctor to doctor, seeking relief from a mysterious "something-the-matter" with them, though repeated examinations fail to indicate that any particular organ is weak or diseased. In nearly every case it is Nerve Exhaustion—Lack of Nerve Force.

The symptoms of nerve exhaustion vary according to individual characteristics, but the development is usually as follows:

FIRST STAGE: Lack of energy and endurance; that "tired feeling," especially in the back and knees.

SECOND STAGE: Nervousness; sleeplessness; irritability; decline in sex force; loss of hair; nervous indigestion; sour stomach; gas in bowels; constipation; irregular heart; poor memory; lack of mental endurance; dizziness; headaches; backache; neuritis; rheumatism, and other pains.

THIRD STAGE: Serious mental disturbances; fear; undue worry; melancholia; dangerous organic disturbances; suicidal tendencies, and, in extreme cases, insanity.

If only a few of the symptoms mentioned apply to you, especially those indicating mental instability, you may be sure your nerves are at fault—that you have exhausted your Nerve Force.

Nerve Force is the most precious gift of Nature. It means everything—your happiness, your health, your success in life. You should know all there is to learn about your nerves, how to relax, calm and soothe your nerves, so that after a severe nerve strain you can rebuild your lost Nerve Force, and keep yourself physically and mentally fit.

I have written a 64-page book which is pronounced by students of the subject to be the most valuable and practical work ever written on nerve culture. The title of the book is "Nerve Force." It teaches how to soothe, calm and care for the nerves. The cost is only 25 cents (coin or stamps). Bound in elegant cloth and gold cover, 50 cents. Address Paul von Boeckmann, Studio No. 77, 110 West 40th St., New York.

The only way to judge the value of this book is to read it, which you may do at my risk. In other words, if after applying the advice given in this book it does not meet your fullest expectations, I will return your money, *plus* the outlay of postage you may have incurred. I have advertised my various books on health, breathing and other subjects in this and other magazines for more than twenty years, which is ample evidence of my responsibility and integrity. Over a million copies have been sold.

You should send for this book to-day. The following are extracts from people who have read the book and were greatly benefited by the teachings set forth therein.

"I have gained 12 pounds since reading your book, and I feel so energetic. I had about given up hope of ever finding the cause of my low weight."

"Your book did more for me for indigestion than two courses in dieting."

"My heart is now regular again and my nerves are fine. I thought I had heart trouble, but it was simply a case of abused nerves. I have re-read your book at least ten times."

A woman writes: "Your book has helped my nerves wonderfully. I am sleeping so well and in the morning I feel so rested."

"The advice given in your book on relaxation and calming of nerves has cleared my brain. Before I was half dizzy all the time."

A physician says: "Your book shows you have a scientific and profound knowledge of the nerves and nervous people. I am recommending your books to my patients."

A prominent lawyer in Ansonia, Conn., says: "Your book saved me from a nervous collapse, such as I had three years ago. I now sleep soundly and am gaining weight. I can again do a real day's work."

Classified Advertising Department

RATE:—$1.00 per line—cash with order. No advertisement of less than 4 lines accepted.

The January issue will appear on December 1st. Forms close in Chicago November 15th, by which time order, copy and remittance must be in our hands.

Maker of a Nation at 26!

Wholly unused to warfare, this young Englishman won the confidence of a whole nation, became an Arab, and rose to the position of uncrowned King of the Hejaz.

That is part of the romantic career of Colonel Lawrence during the Great War. It is a story that has never been told before—the romance of a young English scholar who was called from the deserts of Arabia by the lure of a glowing mission.

This youth—a mere boy of 26—was by a combination of daring and wisdom one of the chief forces in the defeat of the Turks. Read it in the September issue of

ASIA

The American Magazine On the Orient

where it is told by Mr. Lowell Thomas, War Correspondent, Traveler, Explorer, Associate Editor of ASIA, who lived with Lawrence on the Arabian sands during the campaign, and knows him in action as no other American does.

ASIA, richly illustrated, is the only general magazine published treating exclusively of Oriental matters. It is as instructive as it is entertaining.

ASIA fills the need for correct knowledge about the countries and peoples of the Orient. The high responsibility we now hold in our new international position brings us into close diplomatic and trade relations with every part of the world.

China's affairs are our affairs—Japan's interests are our interests—near Eastern matters are our concern. No longer may we stand aloof. And, therefore, we must know more about Asia.

ASIA, the magazine, brings the Orient to you. Not as dry-as-dust discussion, but through articles contributed by authorities, illustrated with remarkable photographs and reproductions of paintings. Each issue contains an average of ten articles, and is profusely illustrated with from fifty to sixty illustrations.

Special Introductory Offer—Five Months for $1.00

A Five Months' Tour of the Orient

ASIA sells for 35 cents a copy. If you send the coupon at once you may have five issues at one dollar, commencing with the September (Shantung) number. There is no room here to tell even a part of what will come to you in the five issues, but this is some of the contents of the September issue.

(SHANTUNG SECTION, 70 PAGES) entirely devoted to the Shantung question, handled by experts in Far East affairs.

Among those who contribute are: Thomas F. Millard, summing up the case of China. Mr. Kawakami gives the case of Japan.

Dr. Arthur Judson Brown, Mr. Patrick Gallagher, Dr. Jeremiah W. Jenks, Mr. John C. Ferguson and Mr. Louis D. Froelick, Managing Editor of ASIA, are a few of the other contributors on "Shantung."

THOMAS LAWRENCE, Prince of Mecca by Lowell Thomas.

SOUTH SEA TALES by Rose Wilder Lane and Frederick O'Brien.

PEKING MONOCHROMES by Will Thompson.

INDUSTRIAL TURKEY by William L. Hall.

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HUMANIZED RUSSIA by Gregory Zilboorg.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912.

OF THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1919.

State of Illinois, County of Cook. } ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Charles M. Richter, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of The Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, The Story-Press Corporation.....1912, North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Editor, Karl Edwin Harriman.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor, None.

Business Manager, Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

Louis Eckstein.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Louis M. Stumer.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Benjamin J. Rosenthal..North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Stephen Hexter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
A. B. Stumer.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of the stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustee, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is.....
(This information is required from daily publications only.)

CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1919.

[Seal.] LOUIS H. KERBER, JR.

(My commission expires Jan. 4, 1921.)

Every Woman Can Have a Charming Personality

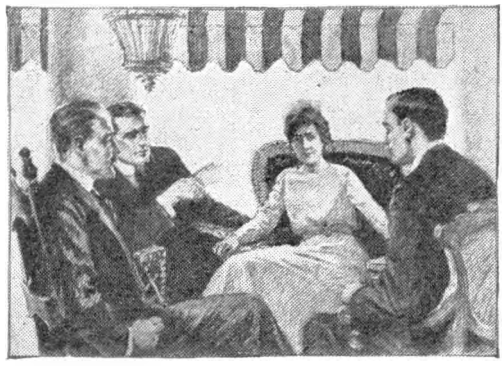
So many women, particularly young girls, imagine that **charm** is a rare gift accorded by the fairies at birth. If the gay sprites have put their mark of favor upon you, you are singularly fortunate, but if they passed you by you are just plain, unlucky and there is nothing you can do about it. **Girls, dear girls,** this is wrong, so wrong. The secret of charm, of a winning personality, of a presence which draws others to you as the magnet draws the needle, can be gained by any woman who truly wishes it.

WHY I KNOW

I make this statement confidently, for I know whereof I speak. During my years, both here in America and abroad, I had boundless opportunity to study intimately women in all walks of life, women of high and low degree, the grande dame wrapped in priceless furs, motoring in the Bois du Boulogne, and the *chic* little milliner from the specialty shop on the Rue de la Paix. **So many wonderful things have come out of France** that it is scarcely surprising that her women have the ability to enwrap life and those about them with a rose-colored glow which is one of the many secrets of the **French woman's irrisistible attraction.**

THE MAGIC WAND

If you had the ability to remake yourself, if you could wave a wand and be just what you have always dreamed, would you do it? I am sure you would. Now, I have this wand, this magic stick which has so often transformed the ugliest duckling into a beautiful swan. I may be the Fairy Godmother to your dearest dreams. Possibly it is some trifling habit that stands in the way of your having a truly winning personality. If you only put the proper rules into use you should improve amazingly.



You no longer need to envy other women. You have it in your power to obtain admiration, to command attention, to become winsome—to succeed in your aims.

HOW TO HOLD MEN'S INTEREST

For all they are so confident and masterful, men are "only boys grown tall." They are not so hard to please—if you know how! Often you will hear someone ask: "What do big men see in those tiny fluffy women?" The tiny fluffy women have, possibly, the gift of adaptability. They know how to fit into a man's moods—to hearten him when he is down, to charm him when he is glum.

JULIETTE FARA

HOW TO WIN

You should adopt some of these secrets of the French women. They are easily acquired. Remember, I refer to winsome ways which the most modest and respectable person may use. And I am sure this includes you, dear reader.

I WANT TO HELP YOU

After coming back from abroad I decided that, beyond everything else, I wanted to see the American girl wear a world-wide crown as "The Girl with Super-charm." So I collected all the data, methods and experiences I had obtained in France to put at your disposal. I wanted every American woman and every American girl to share with me the secrets of fascination.

YOU CAN BE ATTRACTIVE

It is not necessary to be a beauty or to possess a brilliant mind or to wear stunning clothes to have this power of fascination. How many times in your own experience have you watched a really homely woman, surrounded by men, the very center of attention? How many times have you seen a self-made girl, one who has perhaps only just managed to finish grammar school, the most feted and courted girl of your acquaintance?

CULTIVATE WINSOMENESS

So often I have seen possibilities in some woman, some young girl, that needed only a hint to bring out all the best qualities in her. Dozens of times I have felt like going up to some woman and saying: "I know a secret which will completely change your whole life! Will you let me tell it to you?" But I couldn't very well so accost a stranger, could I?

But oh! I do want to share my knowledge with the hosts of eager-eyed girls and women in this America that I love. I want to let you profit by my experience. I know it will benefit you and make you happier and more alive, as well as markedly successful.

VALUE OF PERSONALITY

I have been astounded at the difference in outlook, in opportunity, that the absence of personality makes in the lives of those who, lacking this one necessary attribute, really lack everything. I have made an exhaustive study of this subject—in railway carriages, on board ship, in the dining-rooms of the great hotels, not only in England and on the Continent, but right here in our own America. I know that there are hundreds of women who need certain private information to change from wall flowers and failures to popularity and success.

BOOK FREE TO YOU I have put some of my secrets into a little book called "How" that I want you to read. The Gentlewoman Institute will send it to you entirely free, postpaid, in a plain wrapper, just for the asking. My advice to you is to send without delay for this free book "How." I know that you want to possess happiness and contentment and gain all those good things of life which come to you as the result of having a winning personality. "How" will show you the way.

Juliette Fara

IMPORTANT To obtain Madame Fara's little book "How" free, you may fill out the coupon and send in; or you may write by letter or postcard requesting it. Address as below:

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Please send me, postpaid, free of cost, and without any obligation on my part, Madame Juliette Fara's little book entitled "How."

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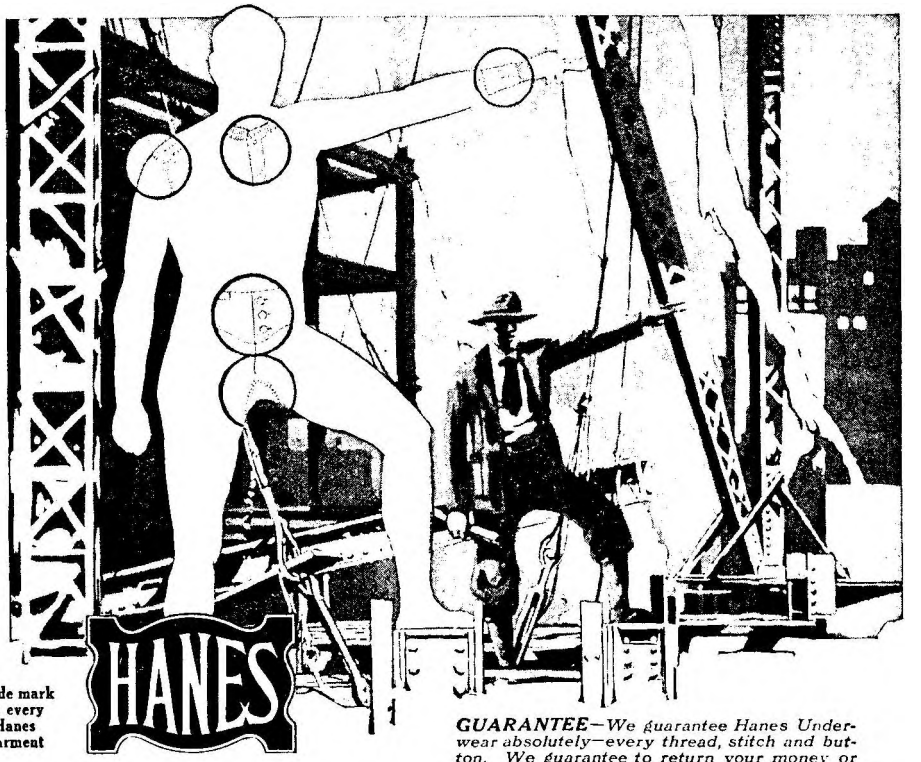

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GUARANTEE—*We guarantee Hanes Underwear absolutely—every thread, stitch and button. We guarantee to return your money or give you a new garment if any seam breaks.*

Quality and care put into Hanes Underwear will astound any man!

YOU'D rate Hanes winter Men's Union Suits and Shirts and Drawers *sensational value* if you followed the bales of fine, long-staple cotton from the moment they entered the Hanes Plant until you saw Hanes Underwear packed into boxes for shipment all over the nation!

What goes into Hanes in quality and workmanship comes out to you in extra-wear, extra-comfort, extra-warmth! We tell you frankly that Hanes is the biggest underwear value ever sold at any price! *Prove our statement for your own satisfaction!*

Read every detail and compare with the circles in the diagram figure above, because you should understand what Hanes hands you: *Guaranteed* unbreakable seams, with reinforcements at buttonholes and at every strain point; elastic knit collarette that snugs up to the neck, preventing gaps; shape-holding elastic knit shoulders that "give and take"; durable, snug-fitting three-button sateen waistband: elastic knit wrists; pearl buttons sewed on to stay! Put behind that array of wear and comfort features Hanes perfect workmanship and *Hanes quality!*

Hanes Union Suits have never been near-equaled at the price. They have all the desirable features of Hanes Shirts and Drawers *with a closed crotch that stays closed!*

"Hanes" Union Suits for Boys are as wonderful value as our men's garments. To mothers and fathers Hanes boys' Union Suits are superb. Cozy, fleecy warmth and the finest workmanship put these boys' suits in a class distinct from all others. *They certainly do stand the wear and wash!*

See this Hanes Underwear at your dealer's. If he cannot supply you, write us immediately. *Any Hanes garment will outlive our guarantee!*

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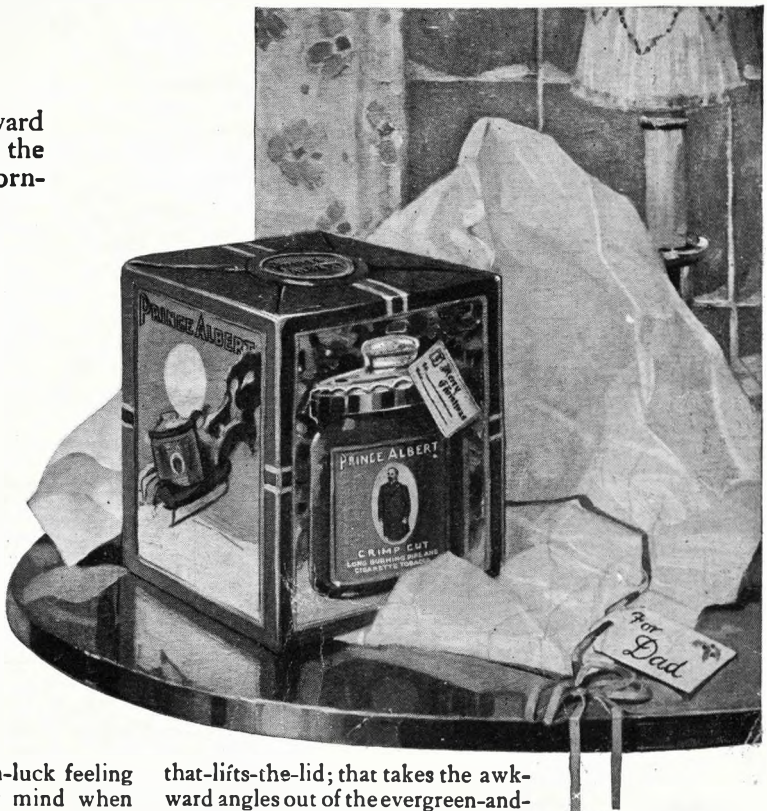
Warning to the Trade—Any garment offered as "Hanes" is a substitute unless it bears the Hanes label.

TAKING awkward angles out of the early Christmas morning atmosphere!



HOW that low-on-luck feeling will peel off *his* mind when the happy-handout-happens Christmas morning; and, his keen eye sights the stage all set with the pound crystal glass humidor of Prince Albert tobacco gowned in the glories of a radiant holiday rainbow! Turkey takes to the tall timbers compared with the all-star-feast *you* spread so temptingly before his smokeappetite!

PRINCE ALBERT for Christmas, lands on a man's tank-of-thanks like a spill-of-snow when the sleigh-bells are rusty from lack of jingles! P.A. asa *man-gift* is the high-sign, the last word, the directest route to his comfort, his contentment, his smoke-happiness! It's the touch-that-lifts-the-lid; that takes the awkward angles out of the evergreen-and-holly atmosphere and makes the family think and talk in one language!

YOU'LL enjoy seeing *him* fuss his old jimmy pipe all brimful with Prince Albert! Or *getting his* "rolling his own!" Never was such a delightful makin's cigarette as P.A. supplies! He can smoke the limit with Prince Albert *for it can't bite his tongue or parch his throat!* Our exclusive patented process fixes that! He'll just want to get thirty-six-smoke-hours out of the legal twenty-four, *that's all!*

FILL his smokecup to overflowing! Prince Albert will hum a smoke te-de, te-dum long, long after Christmas is but a merry memory!

PRINCE ALBERT is also sold in handsome pound and half pound tin humidors, in tidy red bags—wherever you buy tobacco.

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Winston-Salem, N.C.

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