COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL EACH ISSUE

TWICE-A-MONTH NOV. 7, 1923

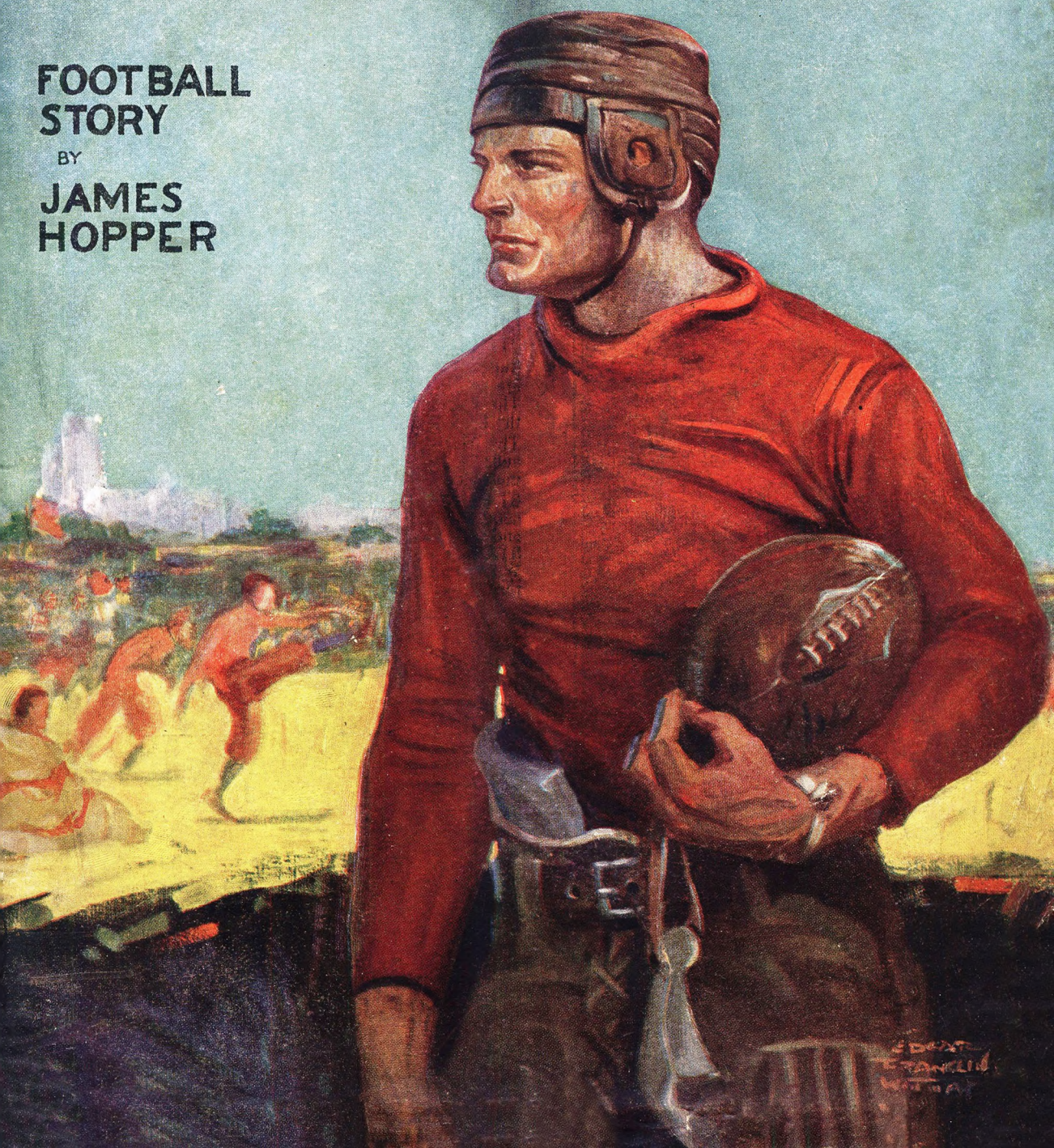
The Popular Magazine

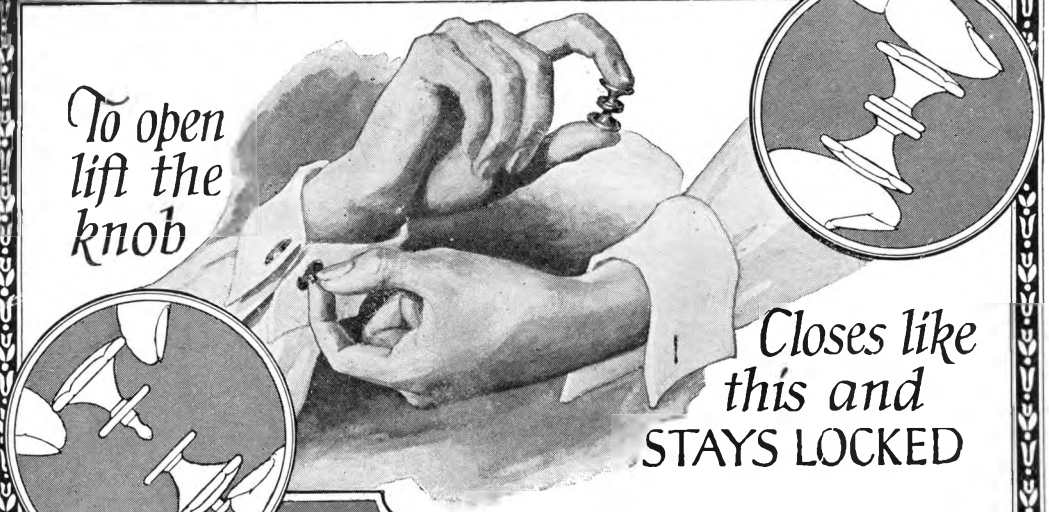
20 cts.

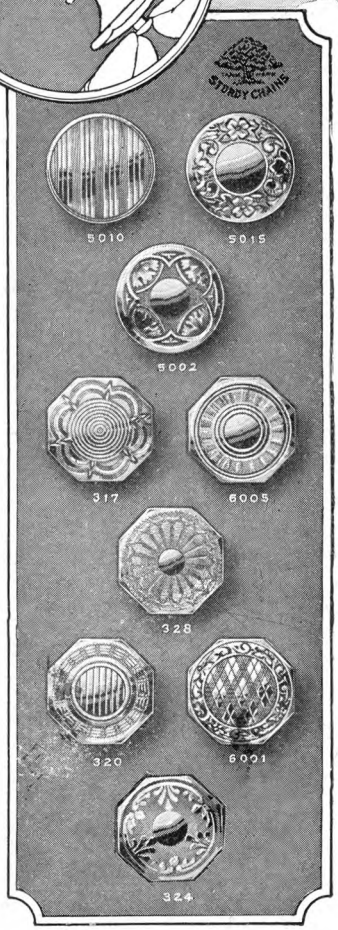
FOOTBALL STORY

BY

JAMES HOPPER







Something New and Better In a Separable Cuff Link

HERE is a new idea, an improvement over the old order of things, that is adding comfort and satisfaction in the matter of dress,—the STA-LOKT Cuff Link.

Superior—decidedly so! For when its two halves are pressed together they lock and stay locked! The *only way* they can be opened is by lifting the knob, which instantly releases them.

The STA-LOKT is an absolute insurance against cuffs "popping open" at some embarrassing moment.

STA-LOKT links are attractively designed and come in white, green or yellow gold filled quality and with solid gold tops. Your jeweler has the STA-LOKT and will be glad to show it to you. Write us for Sta-Lokt leaflets, including new Cuff-Line shape. From $1.50 to $7.00 the pair.

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MANUFACTURING JEWELERS
ATTLEBORO FALLS, MASS.

Makers of Sturdy Chains and Bracelets for ***fifty-eight years.***

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PATENTED
TRADE MARK REGISTERED

Cuff Link

Get a Job Like These

Earn $3500 to $10,000 a Year

in the Big Pay Field of ELECTRICITY

20 Years Old—Makes Almost $500 a Month

Harold Hastings of Somers, Mass., says: "The profit on my electrical business amounts to $475 a month. My success is due entirely to your instruction. You make your men just what you say—Electrical Experts. No man will ever make a mistake enrolling for your course."

Dickerson Gets $7,500 a Year

"I earned $80 a week when I started with you—$60 a week when half through your course. Now I clean up at the rate of $7,500 a year. Thank you a thousand times for what you did for me. Electricity pays big on the farm." Herbert M. Dickerson, Warrentown, Virginia.

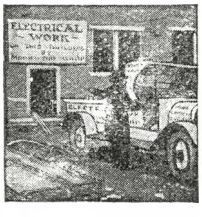
$20.00 a Day for Schreck

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $500 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18.00 a week."

A. Schreck, Phoenix, Ariz.

Pence Earns $9,000 a Year

W. E. Pence, Chehalis, Wash. says: "Your course put me where I am today, Mr. Cooke—making $750 a month doing automobile electrical work—think of it—$9,000 a year. Besides that I am my own boss. My wife joins me in thanking you for what you did for us."



$30 to $50 a Day for J. R. Morgan

"When I started on your course I was a carpenter's helper, earning around $5.00 a day. Now I make from $30 to $50 a day and am busy all the time. Use this letter if you want to—I stand behind it."

J. R. Morgan, Delaware, Ohio.

It's your own fault if you don't earn more. Blame yourself if you stick to your small pay job when I have made it so easy for you to earn $3500 to $10,000 a year as an electrical expert. Electrical Experts are badly needed. Thousands of men must be trained at once. One billion dollars a year is being spent for electrical expansion and everything is ready but the men. Will you answer the call of this big pay field? Will you get ready now for the big job I will help you get? The biggest money of your life is waiting for you.

I Will Train You at Home

I will train you just like I trained the five men whose pictures you see here. Just like I have trained thousands of other men—ordinary, everyday sort of fellows—pulling them out out of the depths of starvation wages into jobs that pay $12.00 to $30.00 a day. Electricity offers you more opportunities—bigger opportunities—than any other line and with my easily learned, spare time course, I can fit you for one of the biggest jobs in a few short months' time.

Quick and Easy to Learn

Don't let any doubt about your being able to do what these other men have done rob you of your just success. Pence and Morgan and these other fellows didn't have a thing on you when they started. You can easily duplicate their success. Age, lack of experience or lack of education makes no difference. Start just as you are and I will guarantee the result with a signed money back guarantee bond. If you are not 100% satisfied with my course it won't cost you a cent.

FREE—Electrical Working Outfit and Tools

In addition to giving my students free employment service and free consultation service, I give them also a complete working outfit. This includes tools, measuring instruments, material and a real electric motor—the finest beginners' outfit ever gotten together. You do practical work right from the start. After the first few lessons it enables you to make extra money every week doing odd electrical jobs in your spare time. Some students make as high as $25 to $35 a week in spare time work while learning. This outfit is all FREE.

Mail Coupon for FREE BOOK

—the Vital Facts of the Electrical Industry

The coupon below will bring you my big free electrical book—over 100 interesting pictures. The real dope about your opportunities in electricity—positive proof that you, too, can earn $3500 to $10,000 a year. Send for it now. Along with the book I will send you a sample lesson, a credit check allowing you a $45.50 reduction, my guarantee bond and particulars of the most wonderful pay-raising course in the world. Send the coupon now—this very second may be the turning point in your life. Send it while the desire for a better job and more money is upon you, to

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Chicago Engineering Works

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The Cooke Trained Man is the Big Pay Man

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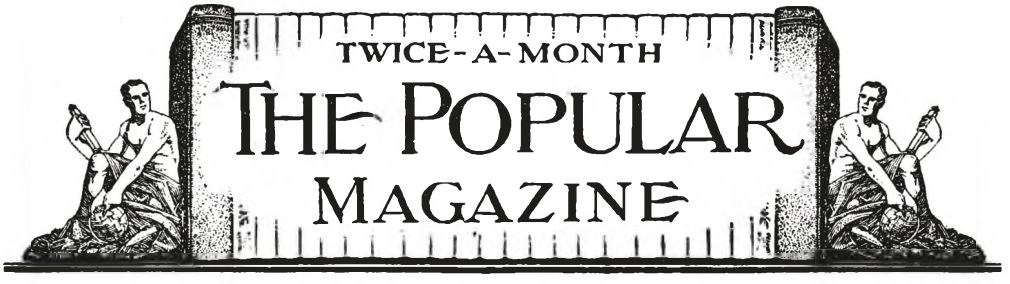
Without obligating me in any way send me the "Vital Facts," your Free Book, Sample Lessons and particulars of your Free Outfit Offer, Free Employment Service, and proof that you can fit me for a big-pay electrical job.

Name.....

Address.....

In the next issue of the POPULAR, the first installment of a new serial by Edison Marshall, "LORD OF THE BARREN LANDS," and a complete book-length novel of the prize ring, "THE GLADIATOR," by Wilbur Hall. See that your news dealer reserves a copy for you. The date is November 20th.

Vol. LXX NOVEMBER 7, 1923 No. 2



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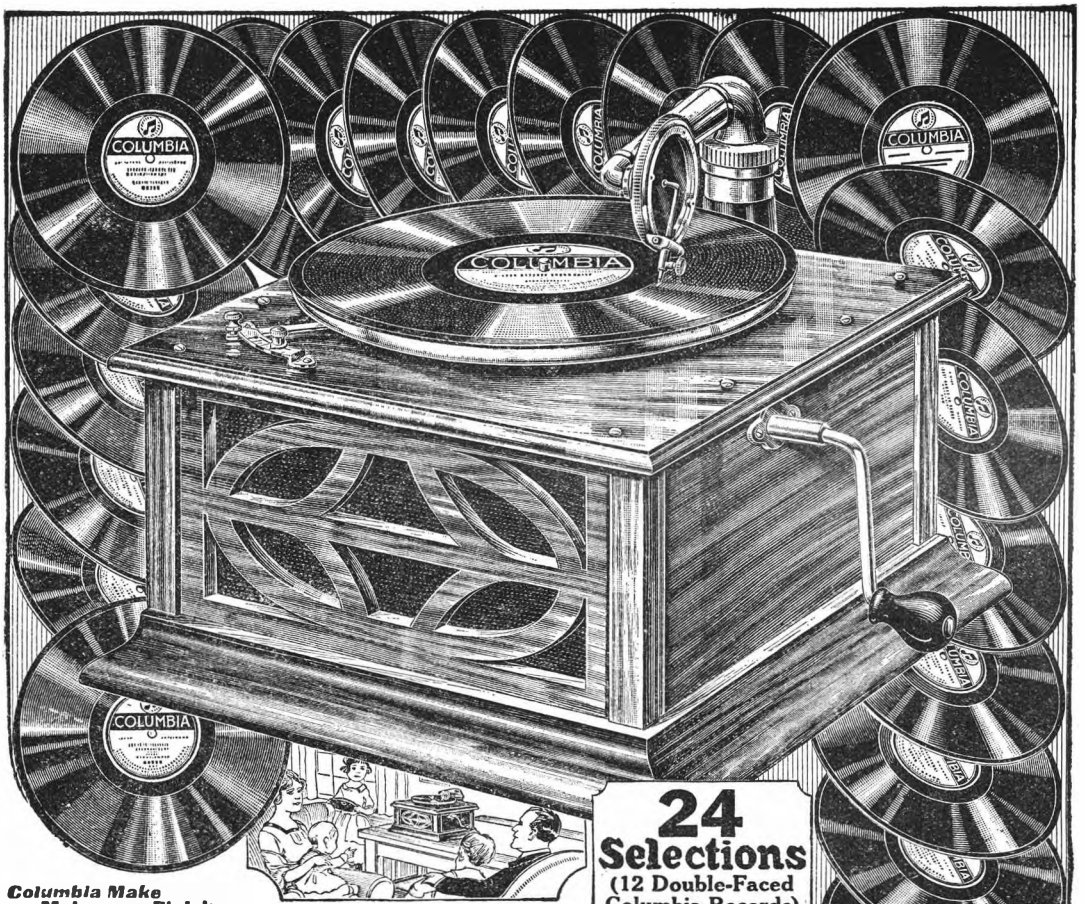

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Mahogany Finish

No Money Down

Coupon brings this wonderful standard size Phonograph with 12 Columbia Double-Faced Records (24 choice selections) absolutely FREE. Pay only $3.95 and small transportation charges on arrival. Use outfit *30 days on Free Trial.* If not satisfied, return Phonograph and all records and we refund your $3.95 and pay transportation charges both ways. If you keep them, pay balance on the Phonograph a little every month. Take

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And bear in mind, **we send you twelve 10-inch double-faced records FREE with the Phonograph.** This means 24 of our choice selections, including popular "hits" like—Song of Love, Sleepy Head, Jabberwocky, etc. Don't put off—no money now. Better send the coupon at once. If you have a phonograph get this one as a gift for a friend.

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MAKE MONEY silvering mirrors, all kinds plating, knives, spoons, auto headlights. Outfits furnished. Free booklet. International Laboratories, Dept. 110, 311 Fifth Ave., New York.

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AGENTS Wonderful Opportunity! Salary and Commission—one policy a day means $130 a month for you! Permanent income on renewals. Policy pays $5000 death, $25 weekly benefit—injury or sickness. Premium $10 yearly. Big demand everywhere. Write quick for territory and outfit. Underwriters, Dept. BB, Newark, N. J.

TAILORING SALESMEN—Make $75 a week selling all-wool suits at one amazing low price. Tailoring, raincoat and other agents write at once. Goodwear, Chicago, Inc., Dept. 620, Chicago.

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AGENTS WANTED—SOMETHING NEW—Fire Fighter sells easily. Makes a spectacular demonstration; car owners, homes, factories, stores, practically buy on sight. Our men make $10.00 to $50.00 a day; exclusive territory. If you wish to establish a business of your own with unlimited possibilities for making big money, write us today. Fyr-Fyter Co., 187 Fyr-Fyter Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

TAILORING SALESMEN. $50.00 extra profit guaranteed. Sell Wright's men's suits and overcoats made-to-measure, $23.50—$26.50—$29.50 retail—Boys Suits Too! Lowest prices biggest money-making line in America. Every sale boy's suit gives you live prospect for man's suit. Women buy too. You double your sales and profits. You get your profit in advance—we deliver and collect. Large samples men and boys' clothes in handsome carrying case—Free. Write for full particulars. Wright & Co., Congress, Throop & Harrison Sts., Dept. C 53, Chicago.

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FREE List of Government Positions obtainable men and women 17 to 45 years. Salary $1600 to $2600. Write to-day for booklet, list and sample lessons. United Business Training Ass'n, 2111 Dinan Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

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WANTED. $133 month. Men 18 up. Railway Mail Clerks. Write for list positions. Franklin Institute, Dept. C2, Rochester, N. Y.

EARN up to $400 monthly, living expenses paid. We place men and women; trained in spare time at home for hotel executive positions. Easy Terms. Free Booklet. Stand. Business Training Inst., 211 Carlton Court, Buffalo, N. Y.

TAILORING SALESMEN. Make $10.00 profit on sale. Get our outfit made-to-measure suits. 160 fabrics. Six prices $18.00 to $39.00. Finest goods. Union made. Fix your own selling prices. Make all the profit you want. Undersell all competition. Lower prices than any other line—you get big profits in advance. We deliver and collect. Guaranteed quality by firm established 1880. Write for full particulars. Fred Kauffmann, The American Tailor, 1300 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Dept. E 53.

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EARN $20 weekly spare time, at home, addressing, mailing, music, circulars. Send 10c. for music, information. American Music Co., 1658 Broadway, Dept. E-16, N. Y.

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WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. New York Melody Corp., 402 F. Romax Bldg., New York.

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PROMINENT LONDON MUSIC PUBLISHER is open for available songs by American Writers, Amateur or Professional; songs judged on merit, not writers' reputations. For further particulars write to American representative. Jack Mahoney, Dept. N, 145 West 45th St., New York.

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(Continued on third page following)

Blame Yourself

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

LET'S be specific. What do you want in life? You want more money than you're getting. You want your own home, car, membership in a good club, you want to wear good clothes, educate your children and put away enough money to make you independent. If you are like other men, you want to be your own boss. You want to travel and meet the wide-awake people who are doing things.

Take any ten average men who are in blind alley jobs at low pay. Analyze each case without prejudice. You'll find that every one of them is solely and entirely to blame for his poor earning power. Every one of them has had a golden opportunity. They either have failed to recognize it, or, recognizing it, lacked the courage to follow it up. But now comes your chance. If this page doesn't bring you a big increase in salary—quick—you have no one to blame but yourself. By J. E. Greenslade

All right. I'll tell you a quick, easy way to accomplish all this. If you don't take it you are the only loser. You are the only one who will have to face the accusing finger of the man you might have been. If you do take it you'll thank me the rest of your life for putting this information in your hands. For now it is possible for you to quickly enjoy bigger earnings, and have all the joys in life that your bigger self demands. If this was a guess I couldn't print it. I know it to be a certainty. It is proved by the cases of thousands of other men who have done exactly the same thing. Listen.

What It Brought These Men

For instance, Ellis Summer Cook, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, left a $25 a week job and last year made $9,000! H. D. Miller, another Chicago boy, was making $100 a *month* as a stenographer in July, 1922. In September, 3 months later, he was making $100 a *week* as a salesman. W. P. Clenny of Kansas City, Mo., stepped from a $150 a month clerkship into a selling job at $500 a month. He is making $850 a month now. M. V. Stephens of Albany, Ky., was making $25 a week. He took up this training and now makes 5 times that much. J. H. Cash of Atlanta, Ga., exchanged his $75 a month job for one which pays him $500 a month. O. H. Malfroot of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER—so thorough is this training. All these successes are due to this easy, fascinating and rapid way to master certain invincible secrets of selling. But why continue here when I can send you hundreds of similar stories of success?

The Secret Is Yours

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

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This book, "Modern Salesmanship," explains why thousands have quickly succeeded in the selling field—how it is easy to make big money once you are in possession of the Secrets of Selling and how you can quickly get these fundamental secrets. It will also explain the National Demonstration Method which shows you how to overcome nearly every sales problem you will meet in a lifetime in the selling field. This is the book I will send you, absolutely free. Read it—then decide for yourself.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 4-S **Chicago, Ill.**

National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. 4-S Chicago, Ill

I am willing to investigate the opportunity you offer without cost to myself. Please mail me Free Proof that I can become a Master Salesman and qualify for a good sales position. Also send your illustrated book, "Modern Salesmanship," and particulars of membership in your Association and its Free Employment service.

Name .....

Address .....

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

Age ..... Occupation .....

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WE need more men immediately to sell Better Brushes. Previous training in this line is not absolutely necessary, but men who have had experience in selling direct to the home will find this an unusual opportunity to earn big money and advance to positions of responsibility and ever-increasing profit.

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FREE: 14kt. gold-filled Waldemar chain and knife if you order now.

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KNIFE AND CHAIN FREE

$100 a Week

"Wouldn't you like to earn that much, too?"

"I know you would, Bob—think what it would mean to us! It worries me to see you wasting the best years of your life when you could make them count for so much.

"Can't you see it, Bob? Don't you see that the reason men get ahead is because they train themselves to do some one thing just a little better than others?

"If the International Correspondence Schools can raise the salaries of other men, they can raise yours. If they can help other men to win advancement and more money, they can help you, too. I am sure of it.

"Don't let another year slip by and leave you right where you are to-day. Let's at least find out how the I. C. S. can help you. Let's mark and mail this coupon right now!"

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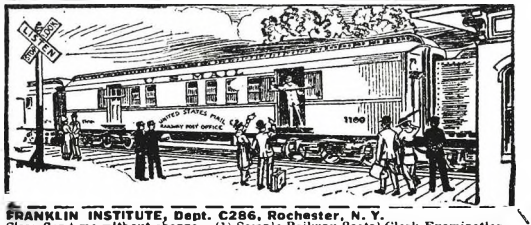

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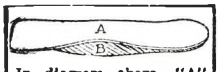

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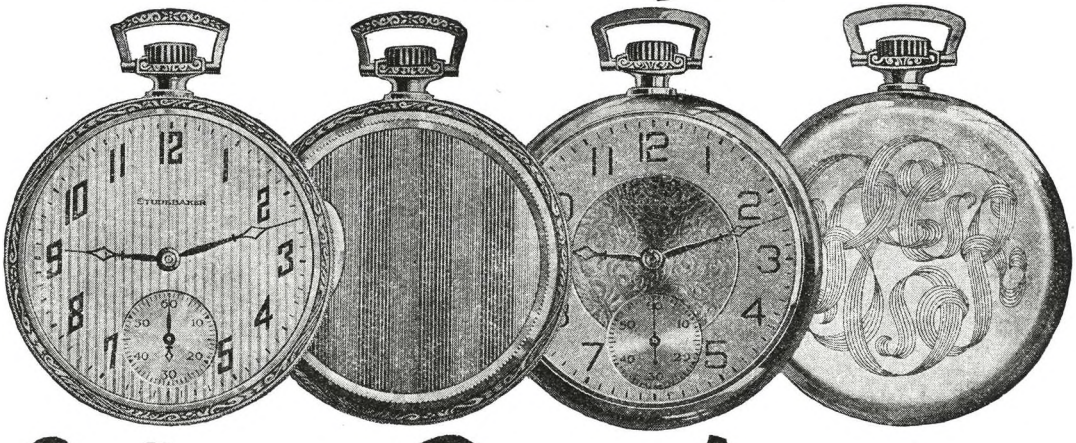

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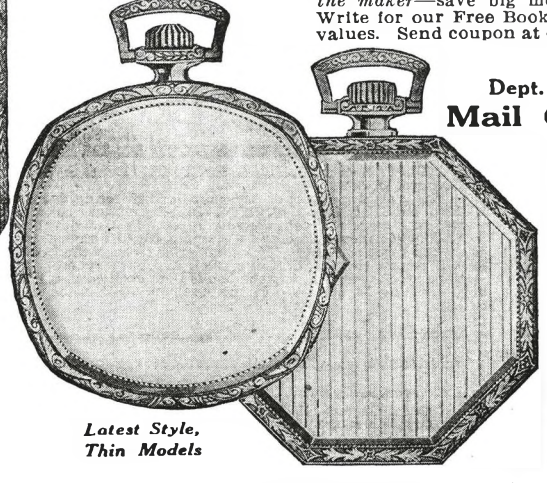

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXX. NOVEMBER 7, 1923. No. 2

The Amethyst Scarab

By L. Adams Beck

Author of "The Splendor of Asia," "The Lost Clew," Etc.

When Mr. Beck writes of the East he writes of a world and a civilization that he knows perhaps better than the average American knows his own home town. He has not merely visited the Orient. He has lived there and made a study of it. In particular he has made a study of the Oriental mind. And he has succeeded, we think, in plumbing its mysteries as deeply as any man of the West has ever plumbed them. In this story readers of the POPULAR will find some of the fruits of his researches in Eastern psychology. It is a tale of what happens when the East and the West meet in conflict. And in it the author shows that deep and fundamental difference between the mysterious soul of the East and the spirit of the Western races.—THE EDITOR.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE shaft, cutting the sand like a wound and shored up with beams and planks, led down to the mysteries below, and about the opening lay painted mummy lids, with rings and pottery and many broken fragments, the relics of a dead ancientry. In the passage at the bottom of the shaft the heat was frightful. The quiet of ages brooded there, dark, stagnant, oppressive.

Ken Mallory wiped the sweat out of his blinded eyes and looked at Conway leaning exhausted against a jut of rock before the sealed door of the tomb chamber. The passages they had already explored lay in two directions like the burrows of a rabbit warren, empty, exploited. They had been at it for two long years without much to show for it. Those years, the money spent, the hope deferred, the strain relaxed, all seemed to rush on them with a cumulative weight, and honestly, at that moment they did not care a curse for anything they might find inside the door. That would pass, of course—it was just strain.

Outside the Arabs jabbered and yelled now the great moment had come. Four trusty men kept them off, doing sentry-go at the top of the shaft. Only Masoud, the headman, was down below with the two leaders.

It had been a queer business altogether —never a queerer. These two men, Mallory and Conway, among their war experiences had run up against a Frenchman from Egypt—a liaison officer at Poperinghe. They got friendly, for French was a strong suit of Mallory's as well as Conway's and the other fellows did not get beyond a few nouns and expletives—so that they were sorry for the poor chap and he often spent the evening in their dugout talking nineteen to the dozen and picking up what stray crumbs of comfort they could spare him, for the British army had nothing to grumble at there, and the less said about French comforts the better. Looking back they reckoned him a more uncommon fellow than they had guessed at the beginning, for his neat dark head, finished little features and trimmed-off mustache had something dolly about them—the kind of thing one used to guffaw foolishly at in the average Frenchman until you came to know the fire and vim of them—and the two were apt to be a bit patronizing at first.

That mood passed. They came to like and respect him. He went a long way outside his duty one cloudy night when there was a poor devil with a smashed leg groaning out in No Man's Land—and when they got back from outpost duty they found it was Alphonse. He was Monsieur le Capitaine Jules Geoffrin de Neuville but they called him Alphonse and shared such good things with him as came their way. He never got anything from home—might not have had a friend or relation in the world—but he paid his way for all that, for he rewarded his pals with Romance.

He had been everywhere, seen everything. He would sit in the light of a candle stuck in a bottle—with his smoldering dark eyes fixed on distance and the nerves in his lean face working, and tell them of places and things they never had heard of before. Mallory said to him once that he could make his fortune as a professional story-teller in the Eastern bazaars, and Alphonse laughed quietly and cocked his eye at him.

"That too, my friend, I have tried. It is a poor living but amusing," he said and lit a scanty cigarette and went on to the next story.

It happened to be of Egypt. He had been helping De Cartier, the great Egyptologist, on his famous excavations at Abu Tisht and was present when the Osirian cave was opened up. Mallory could see Conway staring transfixed as Alphonse gradually fired his imagination with the close airless passages that must be crept through on hands and knees, the final emergence into a shaft that led down, down into the bowels of the earth, the fall as into a well that nearly ended his earthly adventures and then—then—the light, the frescoes, the stunned astonishment as the men looked round and realized that they were in the presence of an antiquity that left them dumb, before which Europe became a mushroom impertinence and themselves the barbarians of yesterday.

"For, look you, my friends," said Alphonse one night, "these people, the Egyptians, they had forgotten more than our wise men know. It is true they did not devote their energies to steam, to oil, to flying and the like"—a wild spindling shriek as a shell tore overhead to settle like a bird of prey one knew not where—"the arrow and the sword were good enough for them —but it was in the mind they made their triumphs. What we call magic—which is only the science of the mind—that they had at their command. Marvels, miracles, and yet all the result of cold knowledge. Knowledge of which we stumble at the alphabet."

"A trick of their priests!" Conway threw in contemptuously.

"Yes and no, my friend. So far as the priests made the gods responsible for the marvels, a trick. So far as that the marvels happened, no trick. Science—the mind of man. That was their domain. It was a secret lore handed down from the lost Atlantis."

"The lost Atlantis—what's that?" Mallory asked. He had not the remotest notion at that time whether it was a woman, a religion or a city.

Alphonse stared at him pityingly and there was a great outburst of guns to punctuate his next remark.

"Atlantis was a great island, my lambs, and it now lies beneath the Atlantic Ocean and you may see the peaks of its lost mountains en route to the Land of Freedom."

"Dreams! Nothing's really known of it," Conway said contemptuously. "Try another, Alphonse. Not good enough."

"But pardon me! There was an old gentleman long ago who pretended to some wisdom. Indeed the world has credited him with a certain amount ever since. Have you ever heard of Plato, my son?"

Mallory heaved a boot at him. This to a Cambridge man! Alphonse dodged it and went on:

"This old gentleman says he learned certain things from the priests of Sais, a very ancient city of the Egyptian delta. There was a great temple there to the Goddess Who Was, Who Is and Shall Be. And this is what they told him."

He stopped to stretch out his hand for another cigarette. Conway supplied it automatically.

"They told him their histories went back for ten thousand years—and Plato, my friends, did not live yesterday—and spoke of a mighty power which long before that was aggressing against the world. This power was in a huge island situated beyond what we call the Straits of Gibraltar—larger, they said, than Libya and Asia Minor put together. And the island was the way to others from which you might reach what they called the opposite continent."

"America!" they cried, like one man.

"Go cautiously, my friends and listen. The priests, speaking of the Mediterranean, said it was but a harbor, having a narrow entrance but 'that other is a real ocean and the land surrounding must truly be called a continent.' What say you to this?"

"By George!" said Conway relapsing into English in his astonishment.

"But they did not describe that continent. That was one of their mysteries. They said that in the island they called Atlantis was a great and wonderful empire."

"Then why isn't it there now? And where is the island?"

"Because there happened violent earthquakes later and tidal waves, and in a single day and night Atlantis sank beneath the sea. And they said there is much shallow mud in that part caused by the subsiding of that island."

"You don't believe it? They were pulling his leg," Mallory threw in, clothing the idiom in the best French he could muster.

"I believe not. I *know*," replied Alphonse with a hawk's eye on Mallory's grog. Mallory protected it by drinking it on the spot.

"How do you know?"

"I have seen."

"What then?"

"The papyri that came from Sais and tell a little of Atlantis."

"Go along with you!"

"I have seen them in the Valley of Kafur, and very strange were the writings. My master deciphered some and would have done more but for the cholera. Cholera respects not learning. He died of it.

"De Cartier found the papyrus in a chest with claws and feet of gold in the tomb of Meri-Ra, a king of the Sixth Dynasty. Part was history and part prophecy. The people of Atlantis were in the beginning simple and virtuous, it said—this agrees exactly with Plato—but as they grew rich and powerful they grew proud and luxurious. The old story, my boys! What nation has survived civilization? Civilization is a disease that kills us all sooner or later."

"But it's rather a pleasant way of snuffing out," Mallory said, remembering the nights of London with a sigh.

"Not so, my friends. A day in the Orient is worth a cycle of Europe. But to return—the papyrus contained a singular prophecy which De Cartier read me, laughing at first and grave after." From his pocket he drew a notebook. "For it said this:

"'"The Burden of Isis'—She was the great goddess of Sais—'Harken to the beautiful words of my lament. Fallen, fallen is the great land of the great Ocean. Weep for her queens, her wise men, her captains great in war. Weep for her maidens, the light of all the earth. For the sea has swallowed them, the fishes swim in their palaces, and for gold there is weeping. Behold they are gone as a dream flitting through the night. For the fury of the Gods was upon them and by their anger they were broken.

"'Have mercy upon them, O Osiris. Be not angry for ever. Let the dead people live again and set them in a land they knew not. Restore their beauty and delight and let them conquer for the virtue that is in their dead bones.

"'And Osiris answered Isis his wife that entreated before him.

"'The great white people shall put on again the garment of flesh, and their sinews shall be iron and their strength terrible. They shall dwell in a cold land of the North and come out from it like locusts and run over the earth with wings and wheels, and the nations shall tremble and abase themselves. And the sign of this shall be that the dead Queen Nefert Lady of Crowns, she whose body lies in the land of

Egypt shall return from the land of the Dead. She shall glory in her beauty, she shall live and triumph!'"

He clasped the book again.

"I had a copy made of that papyrus when De Cartier died. I took it to Buisson—the greatest of our hieroglyphic readers. He read it attentively and pronounced it to be the oldest papyrus that had ever come his way. 'As to the prophecy,' he said, 'I have seen so many fulfilled that my belief in the Egyptian wisdom strengthens daily. They could sensitize the human mind as we cannot, for we have bartered that domain of mental and spiritual knowledge for commercial success. And I would say, my friend, if ever the body of this Queen Nefert is found, look out for strange happenings.'

"That was his verdict. But the body is not yet found."

"But was this Nefert a queen of Atlantis?" Mallory asked.

"But certainly! Her story is that she deserted her own land for an Egyptian lover —then died and was buried there. Buisson said another curious thing that has remained in my memory.

"He said, 'It is a mistake to open these very ancient Egyptian tombs. They were sealed with strange ceremonies and for excellent reasons. And when they are torn open strange things find their way out into the world.'"

"Diseases?" asked Conway.

"Certainly diseases, my friend; did not Buisson die mysteriously directly afterward? The first outbreak of the plague form of influenza was coincident with the opening of the tomb of Atet—a king of the earliest dynasty. And, if like me, you have the curiosity to trace cause and effect, you will find plague, cholera, many other little pleasantries of nature emerging into history with the opening of famous tombs. But that is not all."

"What then?"

"Difficult to explain—influences, more—much more for those who have skill to read the occult. Those places were shut and they should be respected. Have you not noticed also that good luck never attends the riflers of these tombs?"

He ran off a list of adventurers who had certainly met with inexplicable misfortune. They listened respectfully but unconvinced, as he added:

"Yet this did not keep myself—I who speak with you—from trying my luck. Learning the place from this papyrus I opened the tomb at Khar that yielded a royal mummy and the greatest treasure of scarabs known as yet. And I have had the devil's own misfortunes. Every one has got the credit of my work except myself and as I sit here now my pay is the only thing between me and starvation and my heart is racing me to death if even the guns spare me. All the same, I would do it again tomorrow if I could. I would go down to Khar and follow up the shaft of which I saw the beginning which leads to the gallery in the rocks of Khar, and I dare swear the finds there will stagger the world."

"I say, let's make up a party of three after this blessed business is over, and go there together," said Conway eagerly.

"Alas, I shall not be there to accompany you," sighed Alphonse, gently possessing himself of another cigarette. "In the curse sealed upon the tomb inscriptions the finder of the Khar scarabs was promised a violent but glorious death. I violated it and I shall take my punishment like a man. I shall not march into Berlin with you at the end of the war."

"Where then?" Mallory asked, stupidly enough.

"Ah, my friend, if I could tell you that, the very guns, opening the gate to so many, would stop to hear me. Dead, in any case. Simply dead!

"But when I go, I bequeath you this notebook as the reward for many cigarettes and much camaraderie," he said, striking a dramatic hand on the pocket. "It has a copy of one papyrus and it will give you the clew, and if you like excitement better than ease, follow them up. But yet I counsel you not to let Queen Nefert loose upon a world that has troubles enough already. She is best where she is."

A week after that Alphonse was killed. There were no friends to be informed, no sign of what he had been. Many a dog might be blotted out with less observance than that very gallant and singular soldier. Conway and Mallory were his only mourners and they missed him amazingly. Of course they took the notebook, of course they pored over it until every word was photographed on their brains, and of course that is why they found themselves in Egypt when the guns had said their last word.

CHAPTER II.

So I resume where the two of them, faint yet pursuing, leaned against the rock in the hot downward shaft of the chamber in the Khar Valley and faced the sealed door. And it was then a curious thing happened. Masoud had a kind of fainting fit. Not surprising, for he was a big bull-necked fellow, had been exerting himself precious hard, and the hot dark heat in there nearly did for his masters as well. However, he slid in a limp white heap to the ground. Mallory had to tilt a few drops of brandy down his throat before they could do anything with him. Then came the queer part. He began to talk as if in sleep, his eyes showing in a white line under the half-shut lids. French! Mallory stared at Conway and he at Mallory. Masoud did not know a word of French. Fluent Arabic, extremely rocky English—these were all his store and quite enough too for the day's work. But this was correct French, with the true Parisian roll to it:

"The guns—the guns!" he said faintly, and then was silent.

"That shell! It screamed like a woman. How can a man talk in such a devil's uproar!"

Mallory saw Conway's eyes dilate and fix. His own breath seemed to stop—his heart to halt. They knew the voice, though it came weak as if through leagues of distance.

"That which is sealed is sealed. So! Do not open the doors to the strength shut within. Let the dead bury their dead."

Another awful pause. Then in a wild cry: "The Horror! The Horror! Turn—turn while there is time!"

Presently and astonishingly he sat up and instead of the gradual recovery they expected the next thing he did was to get on his legs and apologize. In fact never was a man more apologetic—he had twisted his foot, but it was nothing, a flea bite. Let them now go on!

Conway, winking at Mallory, addressed him in French to the effect that the delay was nothing and they scarcely supposed he would be up to any more work that day. Masoud, looking as well as ever he was in his life, evidently thought the heat had affected Conway's brain and stared at him in helpless amazement, leaning on the pickax which had done such good service. Not one word did he understand. That was as plain as mud in a wineglass. A pause, and Mallory motioned him to go on, and with a great heave he let drive at the barred door now clear of rocks and earth.

"But I say," whispered Conway, "is it wise, Mallory? Did you hear that? Who did you think it was? Not Masoud, I swear."

"It sounded like Alphonse. But who's to say Masoud didn't serve with De Cartier and know Alphonse? These fellows are as deep as this shaft and deeper. It won't stop me. You can never catch up with the Arab brain. Dare say it has something to do with tomb robbing."

"That's true. And they're one and all born tomb robbers. Alphonse said the best treasures here have all been rifled and sold privately by the Arabs. Let's go on. I don't give a fig for all the ghosts and devils in Egypt."

Conway picked up another ax and set to beside Masoud. Suddenly the door splintered and yielded. There was an outrush of imprisoned air exactly as when a boy bangs an inflated paper bag against a wall; fetid, sickly air. They stood back and scrambled a little way up the shaft and sat down to wait events, staring down into the dark. The place might be empty. Yes, yet the air went up beside them like the flitting of dry wings and there was a horrid silence as of expectancy below.

They waited half an hour and then Masoud got down again and they followed. He lit a candle and fixed it on a stick and held it at arm's length into the black open jaws that confronted them. At first it burned a little blue and flickering, but presently a clear orange though it revealed only a few feet of emptiness about its little beam. At that safety signal Conway trimmed and wiped the three lanterns and motioned to Mallory to go first by right of seniority. There was a big raised ledge to the door and he stepped over it and down, the others following.

Had they known, had they guessed what they were doing, Mallory would have dropped dead there and then sooner than face it. The lanterns were powerful, coal oil, and they strung out to throw the light as far as possible. A great chamber, with overhanging juts of rock from the roof, roughed out from a cave. It was a huge oblong, unexpected recesses caving in here and there and, as far as the main surface

went, entirely empty. There was no time then to explore the bays, as Conway called them.

As they stood his lantern caught a dim glimmer of gold at the farther end and they all set off full speed along the dry sand of the floor to see what they could make out. It almost seemed as though the sand had either been strewn or left there by the people who had sealed the door, for surely it never could have penetrated that sealing and the massive walls. Moreover Mallory could have sworn he saw barefoot tracks going back to the door from the extreme end where darkness reigned supreme. He touched Conway and pointed silently, and Conway stared, his eyes rounding in astonishment. But nothing was said and he raced on.

Suddenly he stopped and flashed his light upward—gold and colors. A wall painting. The wall of rock had been smoothed with the utmost care until it was prepared for the artist, with a surface like glass which was then apparently gilded. In this the figures and inscriptions were deeply incised and filled with colored pastes smoothed level with the gold surface—the colors fair and fresh as when they left the hand of the craftsman ages before. They had hardened like adamant.

There portrayed upon the wall the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion, girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to.

That description in the Bible is exactly what they saw. Solemn lines of princes, not a single woman among them, converging to a throne supported upon lions' legs and claws of gold, and raised upon a high dais so that the occupant towered above the heads of the hushed audience like an idol to be worshiped. Wide rays of gold broke from the head and conveyed the impression of divinity, and lo! this divine ruler was a queen. It is difficult to describe the majesty of the one seated figure. A solemn black river of hair descended on each side of her face which was painted an ivory white in contrast to the dark features of the surrounding Egyptians and Nubians. The eyes were closed; the full lips were dark vermilion. The head, supported by the high inlaid ivory back of the throne, was crowned with a diadem so singular that they had never seen the like. Golden snakes interlaced, their three venomous heads darting forward above the brows.

Rows and rows of jewels encircled the throat and fell in a flood of splendor to the knees, meeting a jeweled girdle about the loins in plaques of jewels set in gold.

The bare feet rested upon a couchant sphinx, dreaming its secrecies also, it seemed, for the eyes were closed.

They stood astounded before this great fresco, for great it must be called, both from its size and the impression it gave of an awe-stricken crowd, of waiting, silence, majesty. These figures were mysterious, terrible, possessed by instincts and obsessions the explorers could never know or knowing could never comprehend. Beautiful but terrifying and more especially terrible in the white mysterious calm of the central figure.

"That lady—she dead!" said Masoud in a guttural whisper in Mallory's ear.

"Nonsense. Whoever saw a dead queen holding a court?" Mallory whispered in spite of himself.

"I think he's right!" Conway joined in. "I think the face is whitened to suggest death. What else could it be?"

There was no answer ready. Probably he was right, but, dead or no, the thing fascinated Mallory, drew him to it in silent thought. Standing stock-still he mastered the details slowly and did not notice that the other two had moved on. What was that she held so stiffly in one hand? A long-stemmed lotus, and from the other depended the looped cross of life so familiar in Egyptian paintings and sculpture. Was she beautiful? The artist had aimed at beauty, had struggled to express it, but the unnatural size and lengthening of the eyes gave a strange unreality so that she appeared to be more the symbol of a woman than a woman herself.

Suddenly a shout from Conway, more like a cry: "Mallory, come here! Come here! Quick!"

He could not see them. They had stepped into a bay. He sprang to join them. The bay was the low entrance to an inner chamber and the others had gone on. He must stoop almost to the level of his knees to get through, and struck his head in doing it and not only that, but nearly fell into the lower floor beneath; then recovering, joined the two who stood like statues, flinging their lights far and upward.

What—what was it that dawned spectral through the gloom?

They were not alone, a fourth was added to their party. But a silent, a terrible one.

On a dais of black granite from Syene, polished like a mirror—an astonishing magnificence for those earliest days—was raised a high throne, a throne with a curved seat and stately back, poised on lions' legs and claws of gold. A figure sat upon it, the bare feet resting on an ivory sphinx, dead white, reflected in the black waterlike surface of the stone! The head was crowned. The hair——

They stared dumb. The woman of the picture, living but sleeping.

That was the first impression. Then—no, not living, not sleeping! No breath heaved that fair bosom, stirred the locked lips. There was no trembling in the stiff hand that had grasped the golden lotus for ages; the cross of life never wavered in the other. Dead!

Death is always terrible. Ten thousandfold more so in this petrified loveliness. In the picture outside she held her court amid hundreds of eyes that sought her like a divinity. Here, alone, and the more majestic, she sat with closed eyes surveying some inward secret unspeakable and awful.

The first impression passed. Conway set his lantern on the ground, snatched out his pocket sketchbook and kneeling on one knee began to draw feverishly.

"They won't believe it. They can't unless we have a record. I don't believe we can snap it and a flash light is unthinkable, but get the camera down! Why, I'm not certain I'm not dreaming it myself. Look at the jewels!"

But Mallory stood lost, utterly abstracted. All the imagination Conway lacked was his in double portion. He called to mind reading long, long ago, the true story of a tomb opened in Rome—an ancient tomb—and within it was the body of a young girl of the great Julian family, fair and exquisite as when she lay down to take her eternal rest, a lily of death, beautiful as the Roman Venus rising from the sea and yet again from the grave. For one breathless instant the Romans beheld such beauty as the wearied world offers no longer, and then, as the blinding Italian sunshine struck her, the whole crumbled swiftly into a little heap of gray dust and only the incredible memory was left.

Would that be the fate of the throned loveliness before him? There was no question now of her beauty; the outlines of the marble-white face were clear and nobly cut, the lips curved like the bow of a goddess, the black rivers of silken hair flowed to her feet as she sat. Yet even these, and the gloom of the long lashes, were not the chief delight. It was the soft innocence of the face—the faint, faint smile that touched the mouth. She looked a child sleeping in the arms of death.

"My aunt, what a find!" cried Conway, working rapidly. "Why, it'll mean staggering the world, old thing! An Egyptian queen of a date before the First Dynasty; throne, lotus and all complete—a beauty like this too! Her jewels! Why, we're made men. I wonder how on earth they preserved her. My heartiest thanks to poor old Alphonse. Why—what in the world! Are you asleep, man?"

For still Mallory stood, dreaming beyond the reach of the other's voice, fixed, rapt before the white face above them. Conway threw aside his block and pencil and shook him by the arm.

"I say—don't let's have any more of these stunts. Masoud was enough. Wake up, man! You're as white as the woman!"

Mallory passed his hand stupidly over his eyes. Slowly, slowly he reached the surface of consciousness once more. He faced Conway, trying to laugh—a little awkwardly.

"It's deuced hot in here and the whole thing's so astonishing that it curled me up for a minute. Go on sketching while I take notes of the details. We must lose nothing."

He got out his own notebook and began systematically cataloguing.

He stopped suddenly, seeing a small object beside the throne—a ring of dull beaten gold with an amethyst scarab set in it. It lay on the sand as if it had fallen from the lovely hand that held the lotus. It had been hers; in life she had worn it. Now it had passed to him. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that Conway was intent on his work, and Masoud at the back of the throne. He stooped quickly and retrieving the ring slipped it on the third finger of his left hand. A pledge, a token, what? It had evidently been a thumb ring, for it fitted him well. He went on with his list, reading aloud for Conway's benefit.

He stopped. Again the weird sense of unreality captured and took possession of him. What was the use of making lists when beauty—incarnate beauty sat before him? Could he catalogue her charm, that faint maddening mysterious smile that set her a world away? An insane longing to drive his companions out of the cave, to sit down there alone and worship till he died—these were the thoughts that narcotised his reason. Was it the hot close air or some miasma imprisoned for ages in the heart of the tomb cave, or was it her ring, now clasping his finger so close, that dazed his brain and hypnotized him?

"I just marvel how they preserved her in this lifelike way," said Conway over his shoulder. "She might be asleep. Nothing of the mummy about that! But no doubt the chemists will get at the secret. She must have been an uncommonly handsome woman."

Unbearable! Hateful! He felt he could stand it no longer. Must she be lifted from her throne and set down in some museum for cold and curious eyes to stare at? Better shovel the sand over the whole thing and blot out all memory of it to the Day of Judgment. But no—it was too late already. The Arabs above were hoarse with shouting and excitement. For good or evil the thing was done.

They took rubbings of the hieroglyphics on the steps of the throne. They set a guard upon the tomb. They closed and barred the door, and climbing up the shaft again, sent word to the Egyptian authorities and notes for the savants of the great capitals, and then lay down exhausted to sleep in their huts; and the ancient night jeweled with stars and crowned with a crescent moon setting in the dim west brooded over the outrage to the majesty of forgotten kings—the gash and wound in the smooth golden sand of the wastes.

Conway slept soundly that night, Mallory scarcely at all. The darkness was full of voices that answered no questions but mourned and mourned. Who was she? Why had the manner of her burial differed from that of every other royalty known in the long history of Egyptian exploration? Why had she died so young? True:

> Queens have died young and fair,
> Dust hath closed Helen's eye.

But yet surely there must be some wild and terrible romance behind it all. How could he breathe in peace until the hieroglyphics had been deciphered and the truth known? He pressed the ring to his lips and felt the sharp-cut inscription against them. It was sickening to feel it a mystery from him. How could he sleep until he knew?

CHAPTER III.

The earliest dawn brought with it Walworth, a skilled hieroglyphist who happened to be working up at the neck of the Khar Valley sixteen miles away. They had sent him word the night before and he came, eager as a boy, though a man of sixty, a picturesque figure with his long white beard, perched on a swiftly moving camel, and his faithful retainer Salim in attendance—a man known to all Egyptologists and nearly as learned in antiquities as his master.

Mallory and Conway almost dragged Walworth off his beast in their excitement at seeing knowledge at hand.

No need to tell his astonishment at the inlaid fresco. It surpassed their own for his had knowledge to back it, and he assured them that the earliest known thing of the kind dated from the Fourth Dynasty.

"It will revolutionize our knowledge of Egyptian history and set back their art to at least 6000 years B. C., if not earlier," he said almost awe-stricken. They could hardly persuade him to leave it for the chamber within.

"There can be nothing more amazing than this," he repeated again and again. "The dress, the customs, the features, all point to the most astonishing antiquity. I take the woman to be a goddess, not a queen."

He turned to Salim, who broke into fluent Arabic.

"Queer. He says it's a woman—no goddess, a stranger queen. Well, we shall know presently. I have my papers here. No, boys, don't show me anything else. Let me digest this marvel first."

Mallory was silent now. He could see her again. It was like a man standing at the door of a royal audience chamber.

But Conway could endure it no longer. He almost carried Walworth into the lower chamber. He must see the marvel of marvels.

A sick trembling took Mallory at the mere thought of seeing her again. He followed mechanically. Was it some strange quality in the air, some miasma that af-

fected him only? He could hear their low cheerful voices hollow from within, then a cry—and dead silence. He leaped after them, wild with anxiety.

The lanterns flashed on emptiness. She was gone! The throne still stood there, the sphinx, the vases—all, all but the one jewel, the central splendor. The gracious figure was gone. It had vanished. She had escaped them.

He sprang up the high steps of the throne. A heap of dust lay upon it, the necklace, the girdle, buried in dust lay there, the anklets and armlets had fallen on the steps as if they had slipped quietly from smooth limbs overpowered with their gorgeous weight. He could hear Conway gasping, almost sobbing with the cruel disappointment. He could hear Walworth's calm incurious voice:

"Sure you saw it? All three of you? Sketches, eh? Well then, she's crumbled into dust. It has happened with the bodies of ibises and some of the sacred cats at Bubastis. Sad pity!—yes, indeed! And what a loss to the world. Lucky the jewelry survives."

Thus they meandered on while Mallory stood dead silent, raging inwardly. He would not show them the ring. He would wait and keep his secret.

The emptiness in his heart! How should he face it? That was the problem. If he had been alone—but no, how could he even think with Walworth rambling on?

"It was the outer air. No, my boy, you couldn't have averted it. Opening to the outer air was fatal. Never mind! You have the sketches. That's always something. Now let me sit down to the hieroglyphics."

That roused Mallory at last. He came heavily down the steps and stood behind Walworth while Salim set his camp stool and got his papers, and brought two fresh lanterns and put one on each side of the throne. Conway occupied himself in photographing the picture by all the light he could collect and the longest exposure he dared, but with little hope.

But Mallory stood behind Walworth.

"There's an inscription on each step in characters I never saw before," was the great man's final verdict. "Salim says the same, and he has seen everything there is to see. It rather suggests the Assyrian cuneiform character, but is not that. The hieroglyphs that run underneath I believe to be a translation."

After four hours of steady work they returned to the upper light for food and rest, and this was the result so far:

"The Queen of the great country that lies afar in the great sea. The Queen Nefert beloved of Hat-hor, companion of Isis, Lady of Jewels. She who treads on the necks of her foes. Queen of Wisdom. Terrible in Majesty. She who speaks and it is done. Before whom the Kings are abased.

"She was a stranger queen, and this must have been before the unification of Egypt," Walworth interrupted himself to say. "I haven't unraveled 'the great country' yet. Probably somewhere beyond the Mediterranean."

But Conway and Mallory were staring at one another in a wild surmise. Alphonse! The lost Atlantis. Nefert.

Walworth continued in his monotonous singsong:

"The great King, the King Zezar made this tomb for her glory. Her praise reached heaven. The heart of the King died with her."

That was all. The rest must depend on the inscriptions below the picture—afterward found to be the same—or any chance find of contemporary or later papyri. He wanted to discuss the chances but the two men could wait no longer. Mallory, with Conway prompting, told him the story of Alphonse.

It turned out that he had known him a little—did not think very highly of his Egyptian knowledge—"Brilliant but sketchy. Superficial"—but admitted his value as an explorer. Past that point he listened with acute attention. Of course, as a scholar himself, he knew the Platonic story well and like all scholars had speculated on its fascinating possibilities. But this—could it be a light thrown on an antiquity so immense that all trace of it had been lost until now? Impossible! Yet what else——

He stared at them, troubled, perplexed.

"It can't be. But where's the papyrus that he spoke of? De Cartier is dead, so is Buisson, and if Buisson had read such a papyrus the news of it should have reached every Egyptologist within a week. How do you account for that silence?"

"Alphonse accounted for it by saying that he and Buisson agreed to wait until he could return to Egypt and complete his exploration. He left the papyrus with Buisson and

Buisson died almost immediately after of some disease the doctors could not diagnose. Alphonse applied for the papyrus again and again but it was never found. So he was assured by Buisson's secretary, but in a thing of that value who can tell?"

"Damned bad luck!" said Walworth morosely. Mallory interposed, trembling with eagerness—there was no doubt the whole thing had got on his nerves.

"But we've the copy, sir. Alphonse's copy. It's not worth a rap to the scientists, for of course it's open to the objection that he may have forged it. But to us and to you——"

"Yesterday I should have said unhesitatingly that he had forged it. To-day, after seeing what I have seen, I don't know. Fetch it out and let me have a look. The internal evidence may save or damn it."

Mallory went to the little clamped box that held their treasures and carefully drew out a flat packet, where secured between two thin boards and wrapped in damp-proof paper lay Alphonse's most precious legacy. He disengaged it with careful fingers and laid the parchment on the camp table before Walworth.

Alphonse had spared no expense. It was all copied on parchment, the hieroglyphs beautifully clear and finely executed, the work of an expert. Mallory looked hungrily at Walworth, envying the knowledge that could make clear way through the labyrinth to the secret. Birds, jackal and vulture-headed gods, signs like axes, hawks, disks, snakes—and through this jumble a man must drive to find out what concerned him more than anything earthly!

Walworth put his spectacles serenely astride his nose.

"You'd better leave me to it," he said, "and I warn you I can't do much till I get back to my books and papers. Now you two boys clear out and leave me here with Salim."

He would say no more. They wandered about the chambers more or less all day. The jewels were gathered up now, and the throne begun to be packed, and desolation reigned where the pale moon of beauty had glimmered in the inner darkness. Mallory could neither bear to see it nor to drag himself away. His one consolation was the ring that clasped his finger. She had left that when she fled from them. In the evening Walworth laid before them the work he had achieved. There were gaps and uncertainties, but roughly it meant something of this kind:

It repeated Alphonse's rendering of the prophecy of the return of the people of Atlantis, and proceeded:

> The Queen Nefert. She went down to the grave with scorn and loathing. With scorn and loathing shall she arise, for her day is not done. Break not down the door. Cast not down the stone lest she arise and come very terrible in hatred. In the same form shall she come, and her sign is war and terror.

There was a lot more, but it read like a kind of wailing repetition of the above, with invocations to strange gods and secret ceremonies to propitiate them. Then it ended with a cry:

> And the curse of the traitor and the rent heart be on him who breaks the seal I, Zezar, have set upon the door.

Walworth laid down the parchment and blinked serenely upon them through moony spectacles.

"If this is authentic—mind you, *if*—for I've never met such a human document in hieroglyphics before—there was evidently some grievance against the lady and they sealed her down for keeps. She appears to have been one of the firebrands of antiquity—a sort of almost antediluvian Cleopatra. Salim tells me there's a superstition among his people that when the door is opened for them, these buried royalties reincarnate and give trouble. But of course the ignorance and superstition of these Arabs is simply deplorable and there is no end to their absurdities. They positively infect the Europeans who work among them. Witness Buisson—a sensible man otherwise."

Conway declined to be frightened himself, but foresaw trouble.

"Oh, I say, sir, draw it mild—don't let this get out," he urged. "If that notion got about among our men we're asking for trouble. As it was, Masoud threw a rather remarkable fit before we got in at all, and no doubt they've made the most of that."

"What was it?" Walworth pricked up his ears.

Mallory told him.

"Doesn't look well," was Walworth's conclusion. "That man had some private knowledge, depend upon it and wanted to frighten you off. And now I must be trotting. Good moon to-night; I should reach my base about nine o'clock. Well—so long!

I wish you both a continuance of your good luck. You should take a dose of quinine, Mallory. You look seedy."

They overwhelmed him with thanks and stood hurling questions at him until the camel moved off. It left a lonely feeling in the air when he was gone. It seemed somehow that they had bitten off more than they could chew; the job was one that needed more knowledge, more experience than they could bring to hear on it. It daunted them. They stood in the flooding moonlight for a while almost in silence, then Conway turned and inspected Mallory critically.

"You do look a bit white about the gills, old man," he said. "Do you feel queer?"

"A little," Mallory admitted. "A bit giddy—swimming kind of feeling in my eyes, as if I'd had a debauch on bad whisky."

Next morning eight Arabs were down, and Mallory unable to lift his head from the pillow, a very sick man indeed. It was a stunning and most unexpected knock-out. The whole business fell on Conway. The men who were still on their legs loafed in groups, looking sullen and angry. Masoud survived and Conway tried to get opinions out of him. Had he ever seen this kind of thing before?

Certainly he had, and by the favor of Allah he had escaped by virtue of an amulet which——

But Conway's patience broke down at the amulet. He informed Masoud flatly that he wasn't out for fairy tales. He wanted to know what was wrong with the men. Anything in the food?

"It is the tomb sickness. May the twelve Imaums protect us! Send for the French doctor at the camp at Zisht, but what can he do? In these tombs are hidden like bats diseases that men know not. And worse. And worse!"

CHAPTER IV.

Six weeks later Mallory, white and drained of strength, was convalescing at Abuksa and Conway was in Cairo up to his eyes in business, doing two men's work. The find and the story had stirred Europe and Asia. The two were lions in a small way and Conway had been obliged to leave stringent instructions with Masoud, who was on duty, that no one was to be allowed to molest Mallory.

But precautions are not much good when the little tin gods of fate take a hand in the game.

Conway was hardly gone a fortnight when they intervened. For Mallory was beginning to get about a bit now, to feel the smoldering of a certain interest in life, in success, in the things that used to matter once upon a time—in remote ages. There were curious changes, however. He had gone through experiences in his illness that no mortal man but himself would ever know. How her face had haunted him—the white remoteness, the closed eyes that must dream so sweetly under the lashes that lay like night on the fair cheek, the divine pale sweetness, moon-white in the gloom. She possessed him.

But always the dreams ended in horror. Within his very arms she would crumble and be gone—a torrid wind sweeping away a handful of ash. There was nothing but her ring left. To that he clung as if to his only earthly hope. So it went on through weeks of agony, but he drifted back to life at last, cured as he thought, heart-whole, with the dregs of the mysterious disease washed out of him at last. She could never be a mere matter of antiquarian interest as she was to Conway, but his heart had returned from its strange quest and was at peace. An episode, but to be kept secret from all the world. He never spoke of the ring to Conway.

This left him open to observe the other guests at the hotel with a kind of languid curiosity. It was filling up a little for October, though the rooms were still empty enough. Two women caught his wandering eyes first. They intrigued him by a doubt about their relationship, for they could scarcely be mother and daughter, and if not, they were difficult to place: one was so much the elder.

He heard the younger calling one day outside his window.

"Sara, Sara, do hurry up!" and liked the voice, gay and sweet with a kind of suppressed laughter in it. The answer came from the window above him:

"Don't wait for me, Venetia; do you hear? Go on with the Greys. I'll follow in ten minutes."

He was too weak then to trouble about them but later had the curiosity to go to the office and ask, for he saw them often now passing and repassing, and once or twice fancied the elder looked at him with a sort

of compassion after Conway had gone off and left him alone.

"The Misses Bassett, London. I think two sisters," the clerk explained. "Very nice lady. I think, rich."

With that information Mallory retreated to his long chair in the cool colonnade and dismissed them from his mind. But they returned to his thoughts.

This went on for two or three days more and now he began to wish he had the courage to speak to the elder one. She looked about forty-five, a clear, open face with a healthy color in the cheeks and dark hair touched with gray. The younger he had scarcely glimpsed as yet under the brim of her sun hat.

The next day he was walking up and down the colonnaded veranda when the elder came in with a book in her hand. Suddenly she stopped beside him, her color rising like a young girl's.

"I wonder if this book would amuse you. We have been so sorry for you all alone and evidently not quite strong. Do forgive me if I intrude. I have been rather ashamed of saying and doing nothing for so long."

"If you knew how I wanted you to speak to me I shouldn't have to tell you how grateful I am," he said eagerly. "I have been ill and it's been a long pull up."

"Yes, and without your wife!" she said kindly. "They told me at the office she was to join you later."

"My wife! I don't possess such a blessing! Why this wild romance?" Mallory said laughing, and she joined in. When she told the circumstantial tale from the office, patched together from heaven knows what misunderstandings, it made them friends at once.

"Perhaps I deserved the mistake, for now you know I had the curiosity to go and ask who you were," she confessed. "A pretty cool proceeding, wasn't it?"

"And so did I. And am I as much at sea as you were? They said you were two ladies from London, sisters, and that your name was Bassett. How far adrift did they get there?"

"No, that's quite right, except that we're half sisters. My sister is young enough to be my daughter. I know we're a perplexing pair."

She sat down in the wicker chair beside him and took out her knitting. The soft afternoon breeze was blowing about them. He felt better than he had thus far, and the prospect of a talk was delightful.

"Surely it was a great pity your friend had to leave you alone. His name is Conway, isn't it? And are you not the wonderful two who made the great find in the Valley of Khar? We have talked of your discoveries almost night and day for the last month."

She was so interested, so keenly desirous to hear, that Mallory launched out a bit, his own interest lighting up as he saw hers. After a while she laid down the knitting, her hands clasped on her knee as she listened entranced.

"If only my sister were here. I shouldn't have this treat all to myself. May I call her? Oh, here she comes!"

Light feet were running up the steps and a light figure was bright against the sky at the farther end. She came up to him with the same frankness as the other. It seemed scarcely to need an introduction, she sat down so readily and dropped into the talk so naturally.

It never struck him that a girl of two or three-and-twenty, for she looked no more, might prefer a lighter subject of discourse than Egyptian antiquities. Her bright eyes were so sparkling, so eager as he described the great fresco that he never doubted she was as keen as he was. No attention could be more flattering; it led him on to the entrance of the inner chamber, and there for a minute he paused. Could he speak of that strange experience yet? Was it possible? Her eyes encouraged him. He went on. After all, it seemed quite simple now he was started.

"The poor beautiful creature!" cried the elder Miss Bassett. "Ah, there's something terrible to me in thinking of a young girl sitting there in the dark all those ages. One can't help feeling she must have known it and have been thankful when you let the light in at last."

"But it ended her. She might have been there eternally beautiful but for that. I felt next day as if we had killed her."

"I think of her as a prisoner. You set her free," said Venetia Bassett in the thrilling voice that redeemed her every word from commonplace. But Mallory started, for it recalled other words to his mind. Buisson's, quoted by Alphonse: "I counsel you not to let Queen Nefert loose upon a world that has troubles enough already."

That was another sort of freedom, and the first harvest from the open grave had not been joy. Eight Arabs dead and he himself escaped by such a miracle of constitution that the doctors told him he bid fair for a hundred years unless he came across another Egyptian tomb. His face was troubled and she read it swiftly.

"Have you any superstition about opening these tombs, Mr. Mallory? I read a book of Buisson's after we came here where he hints of something of the sort. A hint, no more."

"Not the least!" he assured her. "There have been one or two coincidences and of course they are remembered and quoted and so the story grows. But we have talked of nothing but my adventures. Mayn't I know a little about you? Why you are here and where you are going."

They were here to see something of Egypt. Their house in London was let. They liked traveling, were keenly interested in Oriental life, had been in India, Burma, everywhere. Their uncle had been commissioner in the Indian state of Mianpur and they had lived with him there for years.

"And at the end of this month we're bound for India," Venetia said, taking up the tale. "We're going to Mianpur to visit the begam—queen—and if the way is clear, to Kashmir later. Ah, that's the earthly paradise. Do you know it? There's going to be trouble in India and we must get there and back before it begins."

When they parted half an hour later they were strangers no longer, and a sort of quiet content filled Mallory's mind as he looked out over the sands and the evening sky. And now he began to remember Venetia's face. Her personality had been too engrossing for him to consider it analytically in her presence.

Her figure—that was charming, light as a bough swaying in the wind; her eyes—yes, they were dark hyacinth blue with a softness of gold-touched lashes that matched her darkly auburn hair pressed close to her head in waved abundance. Beautiful hair and growing delightfully, springing in strong curves from the low white brows and over the temples, it was massive as the ivy garlands of an old Greek bronze. Then was she a beautiful woman, he asked himself, one that all male minds must sway to, dragged aside from their orbits by an irresistible attraction? Not a bit of it—not beautiful, but lovable, infinitely charming and gracious and sweet.

"And that suits me a thousand times better," he thought and then pulled up short. "Me?" What had he to do with her? Ridiculous!

One night, a week later, he stood in the colonnade looking up to the stars that hung so low and mellow over the ancient land. He was waiting. He admitted that to himself. Of course he had no notion of intruding on their kindness, but whenever a step came along his eye shot that way, hoping it was one or the other, but most of all Venetia.

At last. It was Sara Bassett. They sat in the mingled starlight and electric light under a great palm that made a nook of its own, and talked of India.

"I wish I were going too. I want to get out of Egypt. I want to smell the sea," he said wistfully. Then suddenly, in response to those kind eyes: "Why shouldn't I do it? Would it bore you if I went in the same boat? Be frank—but honestly I don't think you could be anything else if you tried."

She laughed. "I shan't try, and I have nothing to hide. We should be as pleased as possible if you were on board the *Akbar*. And there's another inducement for you. That wonderful Mr. Revel is going too."

"Never heard of him. Do tell me."

"We met him in Cairo a month ago. The most fascinating person and great on Egyptian antiquities. Young, handsome, knows all about everything—one of those wonderful quick minds, bright as an electric flash—talks well—altogether a most unusual person. He's going out on a visit to Mahmud Mirza, Sultan of Mianpur. That came out when we said we were going to visit his mother, the begam."

"Where does he come from?" asked the cautious Englishman.

"Well, his name might be anything. He simply said that except for an English education his life had been spent more or less in the eastern Mediterranean countries. He had been in India before and had an Indian servant who seemed devoted to him. I think he knew your friend, Mr. Conway, for he spoke of asking him some questions."

"Probably a Levantine. Don't like' em!"

She laughed again. "Let me reassure you. Very rich. That's a good letter of introduction."

"Yes—if other things fit in. But so many

of these Levantines are such almighty bounders."

Venetia, coming up, slid into the talk without a break. It delighted Mallory to look at her, the frank eyes, the delightful smile that hovered about her mouth when she was pleased or amused, but more than all the atmosphere of serene sunshine that came and went with her.

"Now you're talking of Theon Revel. The most interesting person I ever met."

"Revel! That might be Russian," Mallory said reflectively.

"Well, there's no mistaking Theon. No doubt that comes from his Greek mother. I think if you do come in the *Akbar* you'll like him. I never heard any one make antiquities live as he does. He told us the story—indeed he was in Rome at the time—of the discovery of a very ancient Roman tomb—have you heard of it?—when they found a beautiful young girl's body that fell into dust almost as soon as they looked at her. He saw it!"

"Extraordinary that we should know two men who have seen that amazing sight. That never crossed my mind before," said her sister. "It almost frightens one to think of seeing an actual woman who lived so long ago. I should like to hear you both discussing and comparing."

"Yes—those long lovely nights on the Indian Ocean, with the great moon and dipping stars—it will be delightful to sit and listen to you two learned people. Not that Mr. Revel looks learned. He looks like—like——" She hesitated.

"Like what?"

"I won't say a Greek god because it's the most worked-to-death disgusting old chestnut that ever! What is it, Sara? You describe him."

"I tried before you came and failed. Well, he's tall, straight, dark, but lots of men are that. He has a quiet, passive kind of manner and yet a sort of radiance about him. You feel as if there were something bright and wonderful behind that might break out some day and startle you. Some kind of hidden power."

Mallory laughed.

"I know. An engine working at half pressure, and then you turn a steam cock, and gee whiz—the revolutions fairly dazzle you!"

"That's my theory in a lower plane!" Sara Bassett said, laughing too. Now, Venetia, come along. It's getting late and there are heaps of things to be done."

But Venetia lingered a little as they turned to go.

"I'm glad you're coming," she said.

CHAPTER V.

A very strange thing happened four days later. They were all dining in the long cool coffee room, the jalousies open to the evening air, when a man came lightly in and looked about him, the waiters hurrying to find a table. Glancing easily round, his eye fell on the Bassetts, dining with Mallory, and instantly he crossed the room.

"Miss Bassett! What a delight! I little thought I should find you here at this sort of between-season time. Miss Venetia! How are you both? May I sit here?"

A chair was brought and they introduced him to Mallory.

"Mr. Revel." It was all as cordial as could be. While the others were knitting up the broken threads Mallory had time to look at the stranger and draw his own conclusions.

Handsome, haughty, yes! His bow had been distant though of a type Mallory could distinctly approve; his speech was faultless. He might be twenty-nine, the hard brilliance of youth softening a little with knowledge and experience. His clothes hinted at Bond Street, he wore only one ring, an amethyst scarab set in dull gold. But Miss Bassett was right, the man was unusual. He had turned to Mallory now.

"It's strange you should be the first person I'm introduced to, for I came up to see you before sailing for India. I met Mr. Conway in Cairo the other day, and though he could scarcely stop to talk for a minute, and in fact snubbed me mercilessly, what he told me decided me to try and catch you before you moved on anywhere. The fact is, I have been tremendously interested in your work and I think I have some information that might be useful to you."

"Really?" Mallory's eyes leaped to life at once. This promised better than the bombardment of ignorant curiosity that Conway had to face all day long in Cairo. Revel looked like a man who might know things worth while. As Miss Bassett rose, they joined up, and followed the women together to the veranda.

"Yes. May we smoke, Miss Bassett?"

He offered a cigarette case contrived out of a very ancient flat box of fretted greenish gold. The design was intricate. It had what looked like another scarab of lapis lazuli set in the side. Mallory, trained to a certain extent by three years in Egypt, thought the ring looked a fine specimen. He said as much, and Revel courteously held it out.

"It is a fine one. Can you make out the inscription."

"Not a bit. Wish I could. What is it?"

"'Thou endest the night.' It is part of an ancient charm quoted in the Book of the Dead. That scarab was given to a Greek ancestor of mine who visited Egypt a very long time ago!"

"How long ago?" Venetia asked, touching it curiously.

"Perhaps you would scarcely believe me if I told you. My mother's ancestry goes a very long way back and that ring was handed down in her famliy. The other scarab which is older still came later, and I had it set in the box. For a reason."

"What reason? May we know?" she asked with interest.

But Revel politely ignored her question. He lit his cigarette and his head, with its fine-cut dark features, lay back against his chair, his thoughts on something which certainly was not Venetia, and his answer was not to her but to Mallory.

"My reason turns partly on the information which I think might interest you. Will you hear it now?"

"I'm greatly indebted to you. The sooner the better."

"Four years ago I was traveling in Egypt on my way to Khartoum with a man named Ibn ul Farid, a Persian descended from the famous Magians—wise men of Persia—and of the strangest occult powers. I won't lay myself open to ridicule by saying I believe in magic as the word is commonly used, but I have seen Ibn ul Farid do things which must be grouped under that name or nowhere. We were passing through the Khar Valley and had camped there on just such a night as this.

"We had eaten our evening meal," Revel continued, "and sat at the tent door talking as it might be now. I remember he was repeating passages from 'The Secret Rose Garden'—I know some Persian—and suddenly he stopped in the middle of a sentence and there was a dead silence. I looked —could see nothing. Our men apparently were sound asleep, dead tired by the long day. We two might have been alone in the desert valley.

"He caught my hand and held it firmly, and instantly I saw, dimly at first, as one sees the negative of a photograph held against the light, then steadily clearing up with sharply defined color and form. A man and woman were by the side of the crag that rises near the shaft you opened; but not people of to-day. No, no! The man was in the tightly swathed garment familiar to us in the oldest Egyptian hieroglyphics and figures, the woman in a robe that clung to her limbs like flowing water. He wore a miter-shaped headdress like a priest's. She was crowned with a diadem of three gold snakes intertwined, the three heads striking forward as if seeking prey. By no means an Egyptian crown."

Mallory started but said nothing. Revel did not seem to notice it.

"They stood, as it seemed, in silence. Then he drew from his breast a jewel and a roll of papyrus and offered both to her. She took them eagerly. And even as she did so a dagger flashed out in his hand and with one swift and terrible blow he drove it into her heart. One instant she wavered and then fell at his feet, the dry sand scattering as she fell. I started forward to help, to defend, and so wrenched myself from Ibn ul Farid. All was gone. There was nothing. The sickly moonlight fell on empty sand, rocks that looked deserted since the beginning of time."

"You saw that?" Mallory's tone was coolly critical and incredulous.

"And more," Revel answered, "for the Persian caught me back savagely. 'There is danger—danger!' he cried. 'Around these things the air is charged with deadly vibrations. Keep back for your life's sake, but watch!' And as I yielded, for his grip was like iron, once more I saw. No longer the crags. A chamber so great that the end vanished in darkness. Nubians, black as ebony, holding torches as if at a great solemnity. Behind them in the flickering light men like princes, each with a band of gold about his head, and on a throne a dead woman holding her silent court. You have seen that sight, Mr. Mallory. I need not describe it. But mark what followed.

"I saw the king take from his breast a roll of papyrus. I saw the chief priest

ascend the steps of the throne and open what I must call a panel in the ivory and gold of the back beneath a great carved sun disk. In this he deposited the roll and even as he did it all the Nubians flung down their torches and darkness rushed upon them like a sea, and I heard a great voice that wailed and thundered in the echoes of the chamber.

"'Nefert the Queen shall bear her doom and carry her secret until times and a time.' And Ibn ul Farid flung my hand from him and I saw only the moonlight and the sand and crags. And there was a great silence."

There was one also in the veranda. Mallory stared on the ground, conscious of distaste and unbelief, yet impressed in spite of himself by the solemnity of the man's tone.

"You're certain you saw this? And what was the Persian's explanation?"

"Before I give you that I must tell you that at dawn I went over and over the place where I had seen the two standing. You will remember this was more than two years before you had made your shaft, and that nothing was even guessed of the treasures beneath. Lying in the sand I found this scarab set in my case. On the lower side is incised a name—the name of Zezar, but not the Zezar of any dynasty we know—a king of some utterly unknown time, of whom all we can say is that he was a king in Egypt. You will see that on the upper side is cut an emblem no one has yet deciphered. It looks like a fish and a boat."

Mallory examined the box with the closest attention, and looked up sharply.

"And you carry a treasure like that about with you, loose—a thing you might forget or drop! Surely that's a little—well, rash, isn't it?"

"I have a reason for keeping it upon me and in company with the scarab of my ring. But if we speak of treasures may I look at your ring? Surely that's one, if I am a judge at all."

He leaned over eagerly and Mallory had no choice but to stretch out his hand to the stranger. He would not take the ring off. He drew the line there. Revel examined it eagerly, looked at his own and looked back again.

"That's an extraordinary thing!" he said. "Look! Do you see it's the same stone, the same inscription as mine? Amethyst, and cut on it: 'Thou endest the night.' Well, that is truly amazing. But what's that below? I haven't got that. It looks like a human heart. It is."

He stopped, looking keenly at Mallory.

"Where did you get it? Mine has been in my family for more years than I dare say."

"I got it a long while ago." That was all the answer Revel got.

"Do pardon me—but can't you throw any light? Imagine the interest to me!"

Imagine the interest to Mallory! But nothing would wring an admission from him.

"It was found among a raffle of Egyptian odds and ends. I never knew its history."

Revel saw he could go no further. He drew back politely.

"Well, if you ever are interested I'll tell you the history of mine. It's an amazing business. We have always believed there neither was nor could be a duplicate in the world. But to return to the Persian: I demanded an explanation next day, for that night he would say nothing. He told me that he was sensitive to the influences of the past, and that just as a water diviner feels the neighborhood of water so he felt instinctively when what he called the dead vibrations are set trembling. 'Do you mean that you feel and see the spirits of the dead?' I asked. He answered, 'The Egyptians believed that the *Ka* or Double inhabited the tomb. That is what I see and what you saw when I grasped your hand. Below those crags there are certainly the bodies of the dead, and what we have seen are their Doubles—the Dwellers in the Tomb.' I asked, 'Did you know we should see this?' He answered, 'How should I—I a Persian from Azerbaijan? All I now say is—we have seen. Let us leave the place swiftly.'

"I made a small sketch map of the crags and fixed the position, and we moved on with the utmost haste. Our dragoman, who had seen nothing, remember, said, 'This place not good—men sick if staying. We go on.' And we did."

Venetia leaned forward, pale in the weird moonlight. They both had been listening keenly.

"Do you believe that anything really was hidden in the throne?"

"Certainly. But whether it is there now is another story. I don't know what precautions Mr. Mallory has taken. It's worth trying. That is why I give him the infor-

mation. Ladies, it grows very late and I make an early start to-morrow. Will you permit me to say good night!"

They all rose and he kissed the sisters' hands, foreign fashion, then bowed to Mallory. It seemed as though there were an unaccountable coolness between them, on Mallory's side at least. He hated that ring business! He pulled himself together hurriedly, catching Venetia's astonished eyes weighing his behavior.

"Thank you very much for a most interesting talk. I shall be meeting my colleague in Cairo, and we'll examine the throne together. It is in the vaults of the museum now. From one or two things you've let drop I see you have knowledge of these matters, and I shall very much hope for more talk with you."

"A great pleasure, but I sail for India in the *Akbar,* so my time is short."

"Oh, but Mr. Mallory talks of coming too," cried the elder Miss Bassett. "And in that case there are endless opportunities. He even talks of Kashmir—our own goal. It's not settled yet, though."

Suddenly Mallory knew he was going. There was no more hesitation. The reason was not yet clear to him. "Yes, I'm going by the *Akbar,*" he said. "I shan't be wanted in Cairo for some months and my friend will see to our job meanwhile. Must have a change."

The usual pleasant courteous things were said and presently he was alone. He lit a cigar and sat down to think.

CHAPTER VI.

Before he came down next morning there was a rap at his door and when he opened it a slim dark-eyed young man in a white turban and coat stood there, holding out a large envelope.

"From my sahib to the sahib," he said in very halting English and bowing, disappeared. Something about the man struck Mallory. He stood looking after him a minute and then tore the letter open.

A drawing, hastily but clearly done of the throne, the lions' heads, the sun disk on the back which he remembered so well. A line from the margin indicated the disk, and beneath this was scribbled "cache." With this was a note:

DEAR MR. MALLORY: I felt it might simplify matters if I sent you a sketch. I hope it may prove useful. I shall look forward to meeting you on board. Faithfully yours, T. REVEL.

He held the paper in his hand, bewildered. The throne was a secret to the public for the present. Yet here—could he be sure no one had got through the fence? Impossible to say, especially with a rich man and in a country like Egypt.

His thoughts flew back to the story of last night. He dressed hurriedly, eager to catch Revel before he started, to ask a hundred questions he had not thought of until now.

When he got downstairs he went straight to the office. Too late. Mr. Revel had gone a quarter of an hour before. He was riding. His servant had taken the light baggage. They did not know where.

Mallory thought a while and called Masoud.

"What was Mr. Mallory's servant? An Indian? Find out for me."

Ten minutes later Masoud was salaaming before him. "They cannot know for certain, excellence. A name they heard was Ibn ul Farid, but it is not known. A young man, very silent. I know not his nation."

That evening was the last before the Bassetts' return to Cairo and he was afraid they might have no time to spare after dinner though he had not seen them all day. But Venetia was pacing slowly up and down the empty veranda and alone, the other guests playing bridge or talking in the lounge inside. Her eyes were an invitation and he joined her at once and fell into step.

The sense of soothing and rest that came with her presence filled the air about him. It was delicious to be with her.

He woke with a start because after a while she spoke of Revel. "Don't you think he has something very unusual about him? I often try to define it but I never can. It's a beautiful face, but it isn't only that. What is it?"

His dream fled. He was broad awake now. She looked up at him expectantly.

"He's a very good-looking fellow," he agreed a little dryly. "He reminds me of some one or something I've seen, but I can't place him."

"I can. He's exactly like that wonderful bust of the young Antinous in Paris. You know the one I mean. Those very long agate eyes, the sensitive nostrils, the beautifully cut lips—a little full."

"You seem to have studied him." Mallory interrupted, and was instantly ashamed

of himself before her clear look. He went on in a different tone: "Yes, you're right. It is the Antinous. The same firm marble chin with a cleft in it, and the heavy eyelids and full throat. But there's some other likeness too. Something dangerous about him. I felt as if the eyelids might suddenly flash wide open and reveal—what? Of course I'm speaking of the bust. And Antinous had not too good a reputation."

"You felt that?" she said, interested. "So did I. The languid beauty of that bust is just a mask. Do you feel that about Mr. Revel?"

"If you mean that he's inscrutable—yes. Dangerous? I don't know yet. I can tell you more when we touch Bombay. It may only be the different race that shuts one off. Very difficult to get over that. One must always allow for it!"

He was determined to be generous, just because he was certainly piqued by the interest she showed so plainly.

"I never met any one a bit like him," she said. "What did you think of his information about the throne?"

"Not much. But it never does to neglect any clew. A bit of thread may pull upon a rope that opens a treasure house. I shall see to it in Cairo."

There was a pause. Then he swung round and looked her in the face in the moonlight. It was dim and mysterious over the far-stretching sands.

"Miss Bassett, I must ask you a question that's vital to me. I'm going to India for the rest, yes—but with a hope behind it that may mean life or death to me later. If you feel that there's no chance whatever for me—never could be—be merciful and say so now. I don't ask more than that. Just say, 'I can't tell. It's too soon. Some day it might not be utterly impossible.' Do I ask too much?"

Mallory never could do things like any other man. He made no attempt to approach her, to touch her hand, to say a single word to win compassion. Perhaps it was because the occasion was thus stripped of all frills that the naked earnestness of his voice struck home.

She too stopped, and looked as straight at him as he at her.

"I understand you. I can't say more yet and I won't say less. I repeat your words. It's too soon. I can't tell. Some day it might not be utterly impossible. Yes—I'll add one thing more. I'm glad you are coming."

"With all my heart and soul I thank you. You shall be bound in no way, though my own mind is absolutely fixed."

Her eyes fell. "We should certainly know each other better," she said, faltering a little. "I must go in now. Sara evidently is not coming down."

She laid a cool hand in his and smiled a little nervously and was gone. He stayed alone for half an hour, revolving many things. Somehow his declaration which was to have brought them nearer had set them farther apart. He saw now, too late, that it put her in a difficult position, one where she must be always a little constrained and on her guard one way or another.

The time in Cairo was hectic. Conway, overworked, thwarted and delayed by the Egyptian government at every turn, was a little irritable and inclined to resent Mallory's flight to India. He knew he needed it, none better—but it was the handiest grievance to pick up and he used it. Perhaps he too was a little used up by this time.

They were together at Shepheard's in the sitting room where all his business was transacted and Mallory had just laid Revel's information before him.

"And do you expect me to approach these Egyptian johnnies with a fairy tale like that? If the man had anything sensible to say he could have said it here instead of going off to you at Abuksa."

"Well, as a matter of fact he said you were too busy to be bothered. What did you think of him?"

"Didn't think at all. Too busy. But people here make a tremendous fuss of him, though no one seems to know where he comes from. He spends a lot of money, they say. What did you think yourself?"

"Don't know." Mallory's tone was doubtful. There was a pause. Then he went on: "After all, you know, old man, that Alphonse's sounded as like fairy tales as anything else, but they've largely worked out into fact. I'm for examining the throne."

"So might I if I could get at it!" Conway retorted bitterly. "But the latest development of this blithering government is that they claim the whole show and until they've argued it out with our people at home they'll

no more let you or me go near it than they'll pitch it into the Nile. It takes the heart out of a fellow."

Here was a facer. Conway sat drumming impatiently on the table, tense with vexation and irritability. Mallory looked moodily out of the window. It was not only the Revel business. It meant delay, vexation, possible failure of every hope. For a minute he rejoiced that the dead beauty had escaped the sordid commercialism and exploitation of the cruel day that had awakened her.

"There's nothing we can do then?" he said at last heavily.

"Nothing but kick our heels here. I'm half minded to chuck the whole blooming show and go off and let the bigwigs fight it out themselves. Oh, my sainted aunt, what a world it is!"

There was a knock at the door as this discouraging conclusion was reached, and Conway yelled "Come in!" as furiously as if he knew a personal enemy was outside.

The door opened quietly and Revel stood before them. "I fear I intrude," he said.

Both men were on their feet in a moment, with the smile of civilization that means as little as the outstretched hand. Conway was barely civil and no more. He looked rather suspiciously at the visitor as he thrust a chair forward.

Revel took it in his calm way, a little stiffened with haughtiness. He was faultlessly dressed in a suit of light gray. It set off the ivory pallor of his face and the curiously long agate eyes set in such dark eyelashes as any Western beauty would have coveted. The other two looked warworn, timeworn, dulled, beside that amazing clearness and slender strength.

"Thank you. I shall only detain you a few minutes," he said, then drew out the cigarette case Mallory remembered so well and took a small object from it which he kept in his hand.

"Referring to our talk at Abuksa, Mr. Mallory—no doubt you have put the matter before your friend. Are you likely to go any farther?"

"As we're up against the Egyptian government it seems the whole thing is stalled," Mallory said. "I fully appreciated your kindness in running up to Abuksa, but we're properly done in."

"To put it in a nutshell," Conway interrupted, "while the British and Egyptian governments are quarreling about dividing the swag the unlucky finders are—to put it literally—not to have a look in. At the same time you'll forgive my saying that they could hardly be expected to raise the blockade for a—ghost story!"

Revel looked at him with cool unconcern.

"I believe I might get you in if you want to investigate."

"I don't think!" Conway said grimly. "All the paths of log rolling, palm greasing and bakshish have been tried out pretty thoroughly. No can do!"

"Those are not exactly my methods." Revel was still looking steadily at Conway, his shoulder turned to the other.

"May we know them?" Conway demanded. Mallory still was curiously silent, his eyes fixed narrowing on Revel.

"To be frank," the latter said coldly, "neither your words nor manner are encouraging, Mr. Conway. If you will not think it discourteous I prefer to discuss them with Mr. Mallory."

Conway got up shrugging his shoulders and lounged slowly out of the room. He flung a warning word over his shoulder as he went.

"As you please. But remember, Mallory, it's my business as well as yours."

The door shut upon him and there fell a long silence, broken only by the noises from the street outside. There was a sense of waiting in the air.

CHAPTER VII.

It was growing dark and there was a cold flare of electric light on the wall from outside that enabled them to see each other fairly well. Mallory put out his hand to the switch, but the other held it back. His voice, very low and quiet, was dominating:

"I have a very reliable servant—an Indian. No—don't trouble yourself to speak. I know what you would say—that unless you see the thing done yourself you have no guarantee against a fraud."

Why was it an effort to speak? Why did the splash of light on the wall contract and focus to a hard white circle whirling giddily? It dazzled him—it held his eyes—his tongue felt like lead in his jaws. The cool voice threaded his stupor.

"Fix your eyes on this." Revel was holding out a small glittering object, very daz-

zling. "Give me your will." He surrendered it and could not tell how. "So—so! Lean your head back. Watch the light steadily. Now—quiet!"

Mallory heard a man's voice in the far distance. It seemed to say: "Ibn ul Farid."

Suddenly there was another man—but how? Now the light appeared to circle his face. Every sense of Mallory's was absorbed in staring at this face with the giddily revolving light about it. He could not move his eyes, could not tell what Revel was doing. The glittering thing had vanished. Then something seemed to burst in his brain and all the light went out in darkness and quiet. It was as if he had sunk leagues deep into the night. A hand held his, now. He was walking—where? A huge vaulted room, with what appeared to be a low groined ceiling, solid and dark, lit by a faintly flickering light carried by a man in front. Strange objects half veiled in shadow, wholly grotesque and terrible, surrounded them—stiff figures, some swathed in bandages like mummies, some boarded up to the shoulders, great chests—still vaguer shapes beyond melting into invisibility.

Suddenly the man in front whirled his light sharply. It fell on an object very familiar to him. The throne of the dead Queen Nefert.

For one wild moment he believed he saw her loveliness enthroned—the crowned head, the white features composed in that unutterable calm. Illusion, illusion! That vanished like a dream. There was the throne—empty, all ivory and gold, resting on its lions' claws of gold, a dead emblem of dead sovereignty. No more. Why had he thought there were men with him? He was alone in a dreadful stillness. There was a lantern, but it was in his own hand. He set it down and passed his hand over his forehead. He felt as if he were lost, entombed, wandering forever in the labyrinth of the pyramid passages he had seen in the Al Kekhar, when first he came to Egypt.

The light struck upward on the bossed ivory back. It strengthened. He noted the great sun disk that centered the ornamentation, the sun with rays about it. Memory sprang awake instantly and stormed his brain.

"Revel. The papyrus. I'm here for that."

It seemed to him that he went up the steps, that kneeling on one knee at the top he pressed his finger firmly on the great sun at the back—in the very middle. Something was loose under his hand. It revolved slowly but smoothly, sliding over the flattened surface of design to one side of it. There was a cavity that went down the length of his arm behind. He ran round to the back and plunged his hand in, and brought up a roll, tried again, to the utmost length of his fingers, found nothing more, and as he withdrew his arm saw the disk slide smoothly back into position once more.

"It's done. That's what I came for!" he said exulting, the roll clasped firmly in his hand, and even as he said it the swimming giddiness seized him once more, he became conscious of the whirling circle of light on the wall—but there was no face in it now; he noted that, and suddenly he was again sucked down into the vortex of the night and knew no more. Time ceased to be.

A smell of brandy, a wet towel on his forehead, a sickening faintness slowly clearing off—the lights lit in the hotel sitting room, himself lying on the atrocious red velvet couch, and Revel and a stranger standing beside him, made up his first consciousness. He lifted heavy eyelids and tried to look about him. Finally, with a great effort, he struggled up to his elbow.

"What is it? What happened?"

The stranger advanced blandly and took possession of his wrist.

"Ah—pulse much better now! That's good—you've had a fainting fit, sir. I am Doctor Moore. This gentleman summoned me from downstairs. Quiet for a bit, and you'll be as right as rain."

The two talked in low voices at the window while he recovered, and still the processes of thought went on. But he was there—*there* a while ago, as truly and really as he lay here now. He had never been in the vaults of the museum, but if ever he got in and could compare them with this vision he could swear the place would be the same. He remembered one great seated figure of Thothmes the First with a singular break in the forehead that gave the effect of an ax driven down and cleaving the granite like a wedge. That it was there in verity he needed no assurance. How could he imagine a thing he had never seen? It was as real as the chairs and tables about him

now. But the roll—he fumbled on the sofa for that. He pushed his hand under the red velvet pillow. Nothing. He sat up stark and searched hurriedly about him, felt under the sofa—nothing. The doctor came up again at the movement.

"Feeling better? That's good. It was the merest nothing and you won't have any return. Mr. Revel tells me you had an illness not so long ago and no doubt this was just a little reminder not to go too fast. That's all. Well, well! Glad to be useful!"

He bowed himself out and Mallory sat up and looked about him. Revel came and stood by him, looking down at him kindly.

"What happened?" Mallory asked.

"Very soon told. We were speaking about the papyrus roll and the throne, and quite suddenly, without any warning whatever, you fainted off. I did my best with water from your room, and brandy, but after a minute or two I phoned down for a doctor. And, as you see, he succeeded. Have you ever done it before?"

"Never, and I'm all right now. Extraordinary! But I can't get the thing clear. Did you speak of your servant—before I went off?"

"Certainly. I said I had a very useful servant—an Indian, and that I should employ him if necessary to get us what we want. Why?"

"I remember that. Is his name Ibn ul Farid?"

Revel looked at him in the utmost surprise.

"No. How did you get hold of that? His name is Ahrun. A Moslem."

Mallory reflected.

"They told me in the hotel at Abuksa."

"They were entirely wrong. But again why?"

"I thought I heard you call—Ibn ul Farid."

Revel shook his head, laughing a little.

"What else did you think?"

Mallory got up and threw himself into an armchair.

"The most astonishing—amazing thing! I was in the vault of the museum here——"

"Do you know it? Have you ever been there?" the other interrupted.

"Never. But there it was. And I went through all the junk stored there, and there was the throne, and, by George! I found the pin in the sun disk and shoved it back and got the papyrus, and I'm as certain the thing happened as that I sit here."

Revel looked at him good-humoredly. "As I have been with you ever since you fainted, I'm afraid I'm not open to that solution," he said. "It was suggested to you by our talk. The last conscious impression you had was of the throne, the papyrus and the museum. The horse went on galloping when the bit and bridle of reason were withdrawn. I have seen it before."

It appeared so insane to contradict this that for a moment Mallory was dumb. Then he gathered his forces again. "Have you ever been in the vaults?"

"Certainly."

"Then answer me this—is there or is there not a red granite statue of Thothmes the First, with a wedge-shaped chunk cut out of the head and running right down to the nose?"

He waited for the answer so eagerly that Revel smiled a little before answering:

"Certainly there is, and you may see a picture post card of it in the lounge downstairs and in every shop of the kind in the city. That is the famous Thothmes which was said years ago to be spurious and they have removed it to the vaults till the question is settled. You must have seen the picture a thousand times."

Mallory was silenced. That was undeniable, however much his own conviction defied it. He considered a minute and tried again.

"I saw the throne standing in a deep recess to the left near the top of the room as I came up by the statue of Thothmes. If it's standing in that exact position that's a proof——"

"Of what? You certainly never left this room. I did not even leave you to phone. What are we arguing about when that certainty confronts us?"

Revel was perfectly courteous. Indeed he was humoring the fancies of an invalid, but Mallory began to be conscious that to persist in face of this assertion would be gross rudeness. He apologized with a good grace and yet could not shake off his rooted conviction.

"You must pardon me, Mr. Revel. Time and space cease to be when one is unconscious and one is at the mercy of the unknown. I owe you many thanks for your kindness while I was helpless. It convinces

me that I badly want a sea voyage to put me completely on my legs again. By the way——" He stopped a moment and looked with bewilderment at his hand. "Where's my ring!"

The amethyst scarab was missing. In a moment he was on his knees by the sofa, hunting distractedly in every corner. Revel stood above him.

"Are you certain you had it on when you fainted?"

"Certain? Why it has never been off my finger day or night since I had it. There's *nothing* I wouldn't sooner lose than that scarab ring."

"Then let me help you. I never saw it fall."

Revel was on his knees too. They hunted in every direction. Finally Revel uttered a cry of triumph, holding the ring up in his hands.

"It had rolled into the extreme corner. But if it's as loose for you as that, you should certainly have it looked to by some good jeweler."

"Thanks awfully. But it isn't loose!" Mallory protested. "Look here. See! I can only just get it on."

He twisted it slowly onto his finger, Revel watching with interest.

"I don't understand it at all," he said good-humoredly. "However, it's found and that is the important point. I suppose there's no break in it? I once knew a jade ring to split clean through the band, without any cause apparently."

"Split? Why, that ring has lasted for ages and may last ages more. Not it! But thank you very heartily for this and for all you've done for me. I apologize for all the trouble I've given you, and all I can say is I'll do as much for you if ever you need it. The sea voyage and a rest is all I want to put me right."

"A very wise conclusion!" Revel said, smiling, "and I look forward to many pleasant hours on board. Now I shall take myself off, but to repeat what I was saying —I have my own methods and with Ahrun's help I think there's a prospect of success with that roll. I'll let you know the result when we meet on board. Indeed, if there were any way in which you could help I should call upon you before we sail."

Nothing could be franker and fairer. The two men shook hands cordially and Revel went off.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mallory looked at his watch—a quarter to eight—and deciding against dinner sat down to rest by the window. Five minutes later Conway came in.

"Not coming down to feed? What's gone wrong? You look as if"—he searched for a word—"as if you'd had a razzle-dazzle."

"So I have, in a way. Conway, what time was it when you went off?"

"Half past six. Why? I went off to see Achmet Bey and have another shot at the vault. Not that I believe in the papyrus, and of course I never hinted at such a thing, but I'd rather do it ourselves than be cut out by the Levantine gentleman. But look here! What's gone wrong?"

Mallory told his story and even in the telling realized that he was making an ass of himself in Conway's eyes.

"I can't hope to make you see how real it all was!" he said at last, stopping helplessly.

Next day of course the impression had weakened, it was becoming blurred in the strong light of common sense. He began to put it from him and be a little ashamed of the subsequent talk with Revel, who, by the way, came very kindly to ask after him next morning, but did not come up.

He was quite well then. He went with Conway to have a last try at Achmet Bey, it having occurred to him that an excuse for getting at the throne might be made on the ground that he was leaving for India and wished to make a drawing to submit to Sultan Mahmud Mirza of Mianpur. A good deal of capital might be made of that. A ruling prince who was an enthusiast for Egyptian antiquities would not be circumspect in the lacs of rupees he would offer the Egyptian government for such a treasure. It was on the cards that Achmet Bey might refuse to receive them, but there was the chance, if he smelled a heavy commission, that he might be accessible.

He did not refuse. They were ushered into the office of the white-bearded plausible director—semi-European in frock coat and red fez, entrenched behind his table with a secretary in attendance.

"You tackle him!" Conway had said. "I'm so sick of the sight of that oily smile and the everlasting obstacles that I shall go off like a bomb if I talk to him any more. It'll be as much as I can do to hold my tongue decently."

So Mallory was the spokesman in his impeccable French, and old Achmet Bey smiled impenetrably with his hands folded on the European waistcoat and the fullness thereof, while Mallory dilated on the reckless wealth of Sultan Mahmud Mirza. Let a guard be sent with them, let any precaution be taken, so only Mallory might sketch the throne before he sailed. And still Achmet smiled and said nothing.

The door opened and a card was brought in. It seemed to unloose his tongue.

"You will excuse me, gentlemen, but Mr. Revel wishes to enter our conference. I have already had a visit from him this morning on this subject. He placed your point of view very clearly before me and I am inclined to think a point may be stretched in consequence of his representations. Show the gentleman in."

He rose as the door opened and waddled to meet the arrival, bowing profoundly. Not thus had his dealings been with the explorers! That back had never bent earthward for them in the degree in which it now abased itself. It was very clear that whatever they might be, Revel was persona grata, a magnate in all ways to be conciliated.

At once he came to the point, addressing Achmet Bey with an easy superiority that he certainly took lying down. There was no need, he pointed out, to repeat his arguments of the morning. There was no question of Sultan Mahmud Mirza. That might or might not be, but could not effect the justice of the application of these two gentlemen.

"But I have agreed, effendi—I have agreed!" protested Achmet Bey, rubbing his fat hands. "They have but to descend with the custodian. It is just, it is undubitably just, and my government is a light of justice. Will it please you to descend with these distinguished gentlemen or to favor me with your company so agreeable?"

"Let that be as they please!" returned Revel with the utmost indifference.

What could they do but invite him to come along, thought Mallory. They owed the whole show to him, the roll itself, Achmet's consent, everything. He accepted with a careless smile, and the custodian and his satellite being summoned, they all descended to the vaults, leaving Achmet Bey to a comfortable idleness.

It is no exaggeration to say that Mallory's heart beat like a trip hammer when they stood on the cement floor amid the vast shadows of that mysterious place. The man switched on the electric lights and with startling suddenness all the strange contents leaped into being.

Mallory's whole being was concentrated on observation. Was this the way he had seen last night? Had he gone up by this alley between preposterous cat-headed goddesses, dog-headed gods, and blank stone faces gazing blandly into eternity? Painted mummy cases heaped on one another—did he remember these? Ha! What was that? —the red-granite Thothmes towering above the rest, with the wedge cut clean out of the brow. Now he remembered. This was the way.

The custodian turned off to the right. He rounded the great broken capitals of two pillars, he passed the statue of a basalt queen with the heavy wig of the later dynasties, and drew up before the throne!

Mallory caught his breath sharply. It was not on the left side of the room. It was not in any recess. In a word it was in an entirely different position from where he had seen it in his dream, for so even he himself must call it now.

"Has it been moved?" he asked the man with pretended indifference.

"Moved, excellency? No. Here it has stayed and will stay until a decision is made by the government." He switched on another light above the throne and it stood there in all its slender beauty.

Revel turned and addressed him.

"We wish to examine the ornaments at the back. We have permission from the authorities."

"Certainly, certainly, excellencies. Do what you will. Our duty compels us to remain, but do what you will."

Conway led the way to the back of the throne, the other two following. It screened them from the two men who remained in front talking idly to one another, and instantly Revel motioned Mallory forward.

He fixed his eyes with passionate eagerness on the great embossed disk, unheeding the noble designs of ibis and lion that decorated the whole shaft of the back with splendor. Now—now was the test! With unerring accuracy he put his finger on the pin that formed the center of the disk and the ivory began to slide. He flung a glance of triumph at Revel. Back, back it slipped

over the ibises—now the lions were hidden, now the palm trees—and a cavity in the ivory was before them. With the other two eagerly watching he dipped his arm up to the elbow in the hole and grasped a roll. Even Conway's stolidity was shaken. His face flamed with red as he bent over, with Revel craning above his shoulder. The latter had the presence of mind to grasp Conway and put his finger on his lip in a swift gesture. Then he began to talk in a high voice for the benefit of the men in front.

"This carving is of wonderful excellence. In my opinion it surpasses much of the work of the so-called best period of Egyptian art. What do you say, Mr. Conway?"

"I quite agree. I say, Mallory, sit down here and take a few notes of those ibises."

With a lightning gesture he caught the roll from Mallory and thrust it inside his coat, talking and laughing incessantly. Revel slipped the disk back and went round to the custodian.

"Switch on the lights and come round."

They came round and stood watching while Mallory, with shaking hands made notes rather than sketches. He was not equal to more. His brain was whirling again. How had he known the secret of the disk? And yet be wrong—wrong about the position of the throne? The other two stood chatting behind him and he heard not a word they said. Presently Revel stepped forward and in full sight of the custodian began to touch the disk as if in idle curiosity.

"Very singular. This moves!" he said in French.

"Careful! Careful, I entreat!" cried the man, moving forward, but too late, for the disk had slipped noiselessly back over the ibises and the cavity was open once more. Conway tumbled to Revel's idea in a moment. Mallory jumped up.

"Astonishing!" Conway said loudly. "It may be a receptacle for treasure. What should we do?"

"We should inform the director of the museum at once," Revel answered. He turned to the custodian. "Send one of your subordinates up for him and we will all wait here."

Hurrying feet, voices, questioning and replying, and scarcely ten minutes had gone by before Achmet Bey was beside them, puffing and almost speechless from his unwonted haste. He flung up his fat hands in astonishment as he saw the cavern and Revel with his cool correctitude put the story before him. The custodian corroborated it. The gentlemen had called him. He had seen the whole disk slide forward for the first time in ages and disclose the secret.

"It is I who should investigate!" said Achmet Bey grandly as he strode forward.

All made respectful way. He plunged a none-too-clean cuff and coat sleeve into the mystery, felt about with seeking fingers, his face growing longer and blanker, and finally drew out his hand again.

"Empty. The tomb robbers have been before us. May Allah have no mercy on their tombs and consider them not in the Day of Smiting."

"Tragic!" said Revel, looking as grave as befitted the occasion.

Achmet Bey examined the mechanism curiously, invited Mallory to make a drawing of it, and waited patiently while it was done. Then they all went upstairs together and the doors were locked behind them.

"We have shared a disappointment!" Achmet Bey said, with the luster of the smile a little dimmed as he bowed good-by.

"Let us however reflect that this may open the way to the search of other celebrated objects. It has at all events revealed to us that the Egyptians did not scruple to use them as hiding places," Revel suggested, beginning the ceremony of bows to authority with which the three departed.

On the steps he paused.

"That old fox may have us watched!" he said. "Let us part here and I will join you at Shepheard's in a couple of hours. Pray do not look at the papyrus until I come."

They promised and went off together, touched by his confidence, Conway all agog with excitement, Mallory desperately ill at ease. He flung himself down in a chair when they got back, entirely unable to join in Conway's songs of triumph. He hated the deception, the mystery, the whole business. They neither of them left the room until Revel's quick light step came along the passage outside.

"Now!" he said as he closed and locked the door. "If we had come away together he might have suspected. We're safe now."

Almost solemnly Conway put his hand in his inner breast pocket and drew out the roll. It was short and evidently there could be

but little on it, but its look of age was stupendous. He bent forward over the table and began to unroll it with the tenderest caution, for with the lapse of centuries and the hot dry air of the tombs these records may easily split and crack into ruin. The other two leaned over his shoulders.

Blank. Not a sign, not a character. Emptiness.

Conway straightened up first, and struck his fist on the table.

"Well—if that isn't—— I swear I'll never go exploring again. The whole thing has been one damned disappointment from beginning to end. Not a thing out of it but annoyance."

"On the whole," said Mallory quietly. "I'm not sorry it's turned out like this. We were trusted to go down in the vault and I consider we were in honor bound to report it if it had been anything valuable."

"I don't see it," cried Conway. "What? And let it get into their clutches like all the rest that we shall never touch again? Not me! What do you say, Mr. Revel?"

"It is not much use to give any opinion now," Revel said, critically examining the papyrus. "The secret of hidden writing was not known to the Egyptians, so far as we can tell, so this is useless. But I don't think you should feel as you do, Mr. Conway. You have added to knowledge. You have raised questions of the utmost interest, and your names have become known all over the world. And there's more to come—much more!" He smiled enigmatically.

"I want no more. I'm fed up with the whole business!" Conway said, reaching for his hat.

"One word before we part," Revel continued. "This must of course be kept a dead secret. My responsibility in the matter——"

They pledged themselves all round. Mallory could not but feel that Revel had done his utmost on their behalf. There was no more to be said.

CHAPTER IX.

He saw the Bassetts that evening. They asked him to dinner at the Continental and Sara Bassett exclaimed with pleasure when she saw how much better he looked. She was waiting alone in the lounge for him, all sympathy and kindness.

Venetia came gliding along the great room. He might have expected a trace of consciousness in her manner from the memory of their last talk at Abuksa; but there was none. All was simple, natural, friendly. No more. And whether to draw hope or fear from her attitude he could not tell. They went in to dinner talking as if they had all known each other for years.

Many plans were made during that delightful evening. He had thought with a horrid sense of loneliness that they would probably chuck him in Bombay when they went north to Mianpur and Kashmir. But fate had better things in store. He was crafty himself about it, angling with no small guile for an invitation.

"I'm told it's rather difficult for ladies traveling in India now," was the first fly he cast. "They say the people aren't nearly as civil as before the war and that there's trouble brewing." Sara did not rise to it, however.

"Ah, but we know India so well. Remember we always lived there until the last four years. Our old servant, Ramnath, will meet us at Bombay, and he knows all the ropes, and we speak Hindustani well—both of us."

"We simply leave everything to him and he runs it, engages our house boat in Kashmir, the ponies for camping. We never have to think of a thing. Though we live in London now we always feel Mianpur is our home in a sort of way," said Venetia. "I wonder if you'll see how lovely it is. It gets its name from the little bright-green parrots that are always flying about. I thrill at the thought of seeing it again."

He tried another tack. "My help wouldn't be much of a catch—such a tenderfoot as I am. I shall be lost myself twenty times over. You do very wisely to disdain my offers."

That fly took.

"But you must have a good servant." Sara laid down the everlasting knitting. "Come up to Pindi by the same train and then we can start you off there for Kashmir."

He subdued his delight into a decent gratitude but when Sara Bassett went up to get the Kashmir guide book he was to study he threw off the mask to Venetia.

"You knew how I wanted to go up with you. You knew I was only angling to be asked."

"I guessed," she admitted.

"And you did nothing, said nothing to help me?"

"You didn't need help," she said mischievously. "Already you know perfectly how to manage Sara. You get her on her weak point—the passion for mothering all the world. Never mind! I won't tell."

"Keep that benevolent neutrality and wait a little and you'll see where it will land us!" he said meaningly. He began to think this budding understanding between them was a very fascinating business, to be tasted and enjoyed in a leisurely fashion through every delightful fraction. He saw he had gone far enough now, and retired on a safer position.

The next meeting would be aboard.

As he strolled back to Shepheard's he met Revel, who turned with him.

"I never asked where you were staying," Mallory said, "but is this on your way home?"

"With a friend. He and I had some business to settle and it suited me better. I don't know how long I may be in India, you see."

They walked a few steps in silence.

"By the way, you never used your servant after all in that papyrus business. I thought you intended to."

"Ah, it turned out so simple that I had no need of Ahrun. I had been able to do a little stroke of business for the Egyptian government and you saw how it worked out. Ahrun is a different proposition."

"I gathered from your story at Abuksa that he was a very unusual person. You remember you said you saw that vision through his intervention."

Revel stopped and looked at him in astonishment.

"That was not my servant. That was Ibn ul Farid. You have mixed up the thing."

"May I ask who Ibn ul Farid is?"

"I told you. A Persian with very remarkable occult powers. He is a descendant of the ancient Persian Magians and carries on their strange traditions and powers. Do you remember how often the Magians are spoken of in the 'Arabian Nights' as magicians? No doubt the word magic comes from them."

"Has your servant any such powers?"

"You seem very curious about him. No, none. He has two relations connected with the museum. That was what I had thought of, but for the other short cut. But Ibn ul Farid is a very remarkable man."

"Tell me more about him, if you will."

"I hardly know how to begin. He has wonderful telepathic powers, can create illusions that would absolutely astonish you. Has much influence over the minds of men. If he should ever come your way I will ask him to show you some of his feats."

"Then—forgive my suggesting it—but how do you know your vision in the Khar Valley was not one of his illusions?"

"You forget that I know him very intimately and that he is perfectly frank with me as to his doings. Also you will admit that it worked out in fact about the hiding place in the throne."

"Certainly. But in failure also. How do you account for that?"

"I should think it self-evident that the original papyrus was stolen at some time or other. Who is to say when? It was a great disappointment, but let us hope it may be recovered some day."

Another pause. Then Mallory asked a question for which he himself could not account. It certainly was not suggested by anything that had been said.

"Is Ibn ul Farid coming to India?"

Revel naturally looked surprised.

"Not that I know of. But I have not asked his plans further than that I know he is returning to Azerbaijan. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. It just occurred to me."

Another pause. Then Revel said in a friendly way:

"If it would interest you to meet Ibn ul Farid before we sail, I think I could manage it. He speaks no English but I believe you would find it interesting."

Mallory agreed eagerly and with the feeling that he had been somewhat discourteous to a man whose own manners were irreproachable. They parted after Revel had arranged to call for him at Shepheard's next day at three.

To the end of his life Mallory would recall the interest of that extraordinary adventure.

He and Revel very soon left the streets he knew, which as a matter of fact were not many, and plunged into the Oriental section of the city with its narrow ways and the indefinable odors that the eastern end of the Mediterranean brings as a foretaste of the true Orient. Nothing but Arabic was

heard about them now, though some turbaned figures here and there were unintelligible even to the native Egyptians, and yet again, mingling with the mass of humanity were unmistakable Far Easterns, far more at home in their stolidity than Mallory or any European would ever be.

"They understand each other in a way we don't," Mallory said reflectively. "If ever they all join hands—and they may!—the day of the Aryan race is done, and the white man's empire will take a seat on the shelf with Assyria and Egypt."

"They may!" Revel agreed, leading on swiftly and looking straight before him. "Well, we shall see what Egypt does with her freedom. After all, Mr. Mallory, the white man has not done all that was hoped with his civilization. The life in big cities has drawbacks, and from the religious aspect——"

He shrugged his shoulders and said no more. They turned down a narrow side street and passing several large houses stood in front of one that had the air of an even more closed and shuttered secrecy than the rest. The windows looking into the silent street were covered with the most closely carved wooden lattices imaginable—a tracery of the greatest beauty and delicacy but so fine that it must have been as nearly impossible to see out as to see in. Evidently a very old house, the huge two-leaf doors were extraordinarily massive, ornamented with beautifully wrought iron bars and bolts, with a fine stone arch above them in intricate designs of palms and flowers.

Age, wealth, and secrecy—those were the ideas it suggested, and all were expressed in Revel's words, as he took the iron rod and set in motion a very large and jangling bell hung above.

"This is a very old house, a fine type of the rich merchant's abode, who desires to keep his concerns to himself and lives very retired. The owner's name is Sayyid Hasan. Ibn ul Farid is visiting him."

A Nubian opened the doors, flinging them wide with an air as if for honored guests, and they entered a courtyard so beautiful in the sudden transition from the grimy street that Mallory could hardly forbear a cry of astonishment.

Acacia trees stood about the marble-tiled pavements, and vines loaded with exquisite blossoms swung from one to the other, garlanding them with trails of lavish beauty. They were trees indeed, for the pavement had been laid down around them when the house was built, and birds of exquisite plumage flew about the branches, apparently as free as in the wild woods. As Mallory looked in astonishment, Revel, laughing, pointed upward, and the other saw that at the utmost height of the house an almost imperceptible netting closed the great courtyard in and gave the birds their freedom, with a reservation. Three fountains cooled the air, springing from marble pools of austere grace where the white nenuphars laid their ivory chalices on the crystal surface that was broken only by the falling plash of the water, and about them, forming loveliest recesses for languid hours of ease, were huge receptacles of marble with palms, tree ferns and every costliest exotic that money can buy. Magnificent rugs from Bokhara and Samarkand lay here and there, their subdued splendor showing up on the white marble, and low divans were beneath the trees. To one of these Revel motioned Mallory and addressed a few words to the Nubian who stood like an ebony statue to await his orders; he replied, salaaming deeply.

"He says his master cannot return for half an hour but that Ibn ul Farid will represent him. Pray be seated, Mr. Mallory, while I go for him."

Mallory obeyed. He looked at the white-clad Nubians standing as guards at the door where Revel had disappeared. Revel then might enter? But he was Western! Was he? What was he? Again who could tell? And who was Ibn ul Farid? Mystery again. He waited in a curious state of suspense while the white doves cooed above him.

Quiet voices drawing near and Revel came between the trees with a young man beside him in a long caftan of richly flowered silk, a white jubbah and a red girdle with a white turban wound about the tarboosh. The dress of the country, nothing more, but of the finest material, and suiting the background so admirably that he fell at once, as it were, into the picture, as even Revel's distinction, hampered by the ugly European dress, failed to do. His face was olive, clean-cut, with dark eyes, ambushed in the thickly set eyelashes of the Orient, languid in repose but singularly swift and far darting when aroused. His manner seemed dignified and courteous to Mallory as they were presented to each other and took their seats on

a low divan at a respectful distance apart. Revel interpreted so well that there was hardly more pause than in an ordinary conversation, and after some words had been exchanged Ibn ul Farid clapped his hands and thick black coffee and pomegranate sirup with sherbet were brought, and, following them chibouks for smoking—handsome pipes with jasmine sticks.

Ibn ul Farid clapped his hands and ordered the music to attend them, and much to Mallory's delight two Abyssinian women slaves came in, unveiled, each carrying a kanoon or dulcimer, and sat before them on the ground cross-legged. Their crimson-and-gold garments set off their dark features with a something more emphatic than beauty itself, and he could not take his eyes from them as they sang. The first, preluding to the sonorous strings, gave a love song:

"Like to the moon would she be were it not for
her raven locks,
Like to a star, save for her beauty spot fragrant as musk;
Her cheeks to the sun I would liken, save that,
unlike the sun,
She needs not to fear an eclipse, she needs
not to shrink from the dusk."

The other, with a little silver brazier before her on which she cast a dark powder from time to time, sang the praises of wine. Her face, seen through the delicate whirls of blue smoke rising from the brazier, had a strange, heavy-lidded sullen fascination from which he could not escape, with the guttural almost masculine tones of her strange voice in the unknown tongue still further to perplex the senses:

"Bring me the wine that may be called a melted
ruby in its cup,
Or like a scimitar unsheathed, in the sun's noonday light held up;
Bring me the cup, nor till 'tis drained shall my
hand drop or set it by;
Its sweetness falls as sleep's own balm steals
o'er the vigil-weary eye."

And as she finished she knelt and offered a cup of beaten gold with the rosy wine of her song mantling in it. With a glance at Revel to be sure that he transgressed no etiquette Mallory took it in both hands according to custom, and drained it, Revel and Ibn ul Farid refusing.

"Alhamdolillah! Praise to Allah, Lord of the three worlds!" said the latter with dignity, and, making a sign to them, the girls disappeared, leaving only the brazier with its spirals of blue and fragrant smoke behind them. But they had done their work. The music and the strong wine were tingling in Mallory's brain. He had not the keen balanced watch on his senses which he had before. Had that fragrant smoke anything to do with it also? Impossible, with the sunlight bright above them in the square of blue sky framed by the house! Still, he waited the next event with a fainter grip on reality than before.

CHAPTER X.

The minutes drifted on and finally Revel said gravely: "See, my friend, I have brought this Frankish gentleman to partake of your wisdom. Be pleased to honor us with an exhibition of such skill as Solomon the wise might have desired to behold!"

"Yes, by Allah!" returned Ibn ul Farid with composure. "What would he have? There is nothing within my power that is not open to the friend of my lord. Let him speak!"

Mallory appeared to consider, though he had in reality made up his mind long before. He looked up with deference but resolutely.

"I would know from the Master of Wisdom when was stolen the papyrus that was hidden in the throne of the Queen Nefert. And by whom?"

The wish transmitted to Ibn ul Farid he bowed, and sat a while gravely silent, his eyes fixed on the plash of the fountain. Revel, equally silent, apparently was wrapped in his own thoughts. The servants had all disappeared. Presently Ibn ul Farid rose and moving up the divan sat beside him and took his hand in his.

As with a flash instantly the courtyard, the trees, the fountains, Revel himself, all were gone. His eyes wide open, staring in amazement, saw a strange sight.

The tomb chamber of the Khar Valley, every detail of which was photographed on his mind, dark, silent, lit only by a flickering light that fell on the fair face of the queen as she sat there dimly beautiful. Two men in the immemorial undress of ancient Egypt, the cloth wrapped about the loins and legs, no more. Mallory could follow every movement as if he were one of them. The elder had a roll of papyrus in his hand. Furtively looking about them and listening, shielding the lamp as if in terror lest the

light should betray them, they crept round to the back of the throne—they slipped the ivory sun disk back, they withdrew a roll from the secret place, they substituted the other. Mallory saw the stealthy retreat without a word spoken, the heavy door swung back, barred, secured, sealed, and then—then—the vision thinned as darkness thins before the dawn.

"Extraordinary. Was it like that?" he said stupidly.

"Like what? You forget we did not see," Revel answered.

He described the vision as well as he could, they listening attentively. Ibn ul Farid took up the word:

"To the eye of wisdom the present and past are one. You have certainly seen a thing which took place."

"But how do you explain it? How can the past be recalled? If this is so the thing was stolen centuries ago."

"Nothing that ever existed is dead. It exists forever. It is as with a lost book. You find it and turn the page and read what you will in the future as in the past."

"But how is it done? What does it mean? What happened to me?"

"One portion of the brain is stimulated, another put to sleep and the veil is thus lifted. And as to the future, be it remembered that the soul of a man is a thing of eternity and casts its light before as behind it."

"But how did you do it?"

"By a secret wisdom aided externally by this smoke of a precious gum and by the wine and music. These lull the external senses and set the spirit free."

"I always thought it probable that papyrus was stolen when the tomb was first robbed," said Revel. "We know it now."

"Will you make me see more? Show me the place where I am going in India. Then, if it agrees with fact, I will believe."

Again the immobile silence of the two. Again Ibn ul Farid clasped his hands.

Now he saw a blue lake stretching farther than the eye could see, balustraded with marble as though for a great king's garden pleasance. Strange trees waved about it, trees of a more torrid sun. Far out in the blue and sparkling water were white palaces beautiful and dreamlike, built to all appearance on the very bosom of the water, floating like the white lotus flowers of the gods. A dream barge with high curved bow and stern glittering with gold, the rowers in garments of gold and scarlet, hovered near the latticed windows, that the veiled princesses might take their pleasure in the cool water world about them. Now very softly that scene dispersed and he saw instead snow mountains that dwarfed his utmost imagining, storming the very skies and guarding in their recesses a valley most beautiful —a land of rivers and forests and high secret passes where the bear and the snow leopard are lords, and above it the very airs of paradise. He saw it, he walked in it, and then remorselessly that too was gone, the snowy ramparts drifting away in wreaths of mist.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" cried Mallory, and sat silent for a minute lost in the memory.

"If you will tell us what you have seen, we may locate it," Revel reminded him.

He obeyed with eagerness.

"That is the water palace of Mianpur," said Revel. "You may feel certain that you will be there. For the last, it is the Valley of Kashmir. You will go there also. You will then be satisfied that this is truth."

Mallory reflected a minute.

"Yes, but these places are known to you. Have I unconsciously been put in touch with your brain? If so, it is wonderful but not wholly convincing. Is it possible that my own secret thought can be read and set before me here? Something unknown to any one but myself? There is no sort of belief I could refuse then."

Revel turned to Ibn ul Farid and spoke with him in his own language. At first he shook his head, but Revel persisted, eagerly now, and at last, throwing his hand out as if with a gesture of surrender, Ibn ul Farid evidently agreed. Through Revel he desired Mallory to lie back on the divan and folding his hands on his breast to compose himself in an attitude like death, and to abstract his mind completely from all external matters.

"Fix your thoughts on what you desire to see!" he commanded, and Mallory obeyed, finding it at first amazingly difficult to concentrate. The mind has a tendency to ramble, to spill over, as it were, in all directions. What he determined to think of, however, was the dugout where he had spent so many hours with Alphonse and Conway. That would indeed be a test since these men could know nothing of that closed chapter

in his eventful life. At last his mind was like an empty cup. Sight, hearing flowed into it. He heard the roar of the guns overhead. The corner where Alphonse used to lie on an old rug, smoking, smoking eternally, became visible. Conway was there with his long legs hoisted up before him on a box. It began to take shape, to form almost solidly. Alphonse—was that his voice? It was going to work—to be successful. He felt it. A strange power was sculpturing, painting the whole scene before his eyes. He saw, he heard, and even as this happened a stronger impulse shattered the picture and he saw instead—a woman.

Clear as in life Venetia Bassett was before him. She was alone in a room ceiled and paneled with beautifully carved wood—a small room, low, with a window that opened on a bright running river. A room—no! A cabin in some sort of house boat that vaguely recalled dead summers on the Thames; the window opened almost down to the smoothly gliding water. She was dressed in white. In her right hand she held a paper. Her face full of grief and scorn was turned to the man who stood before her: his face a blank to Mallory. Now he could hear her voice.

"If you have done this I loathe you, I despise you. Let me never see your face again."

There was no answer from the man. He turned and went away slowly with bowed shoulders and bent head as if crushed by some unbearable weight. A curtain fell behind him and the girl hid her face in her hands, trembling from head to foot.

It was gone.

Mallory sat up, his mind clear as daylight this time. He sprang back to real life instead of drifting. He stood up and looked at them. This was no place for a man among these Oriental enchantments. Well enough for a play, he loathed it directly a woman's name was brought into it—a name he respected and loved. Who could tell how much these men knew, what means they had of bedeviling the brain and forcing it to reveal its own sacred things? No—no more of this for him. He was on guard at once with every sense clear as bared steel.

"Most interesting!" he said coldly. "I am very much indebted to your friend, Mr. Revel, and what I thought of I saw—a dug-out in France. The mind is a curious thing and you have given me a wonderful demonstration of its powers." He looked at his watch.

"Later than I thought. I must be getting back. Are you coming? No? Then will you express to this gentleman my thanks for a most interesting afternoon? I am sorry not to have seen my host. Will you give him my acknowledgments for his hospitality?"

He made for the great gates, the other two attending him with the utmost courtesy. He gave a bakshish to the Nubian porter, and the wide leaves swung open and closing behind him shut in the green and sparkling paradise of the courtyard. He strode through the narrow jabbering streets flushed, furious with disgust at himself for having gone there, for having trafficked in these unwholesome byways.

The others turned slowly back into the shade of the trees.

"Allah be praised, he is a very good subject," the man who had been called Ibn ul Farid said calmly. "And having taken the impression of the ring last time it was easy to slip the duplicate upon his finger this time. He cannot know and the true one is now at your disposal, Benefactor of the Humble. Guard it as the apple of your eye. Great are its powers in inducing the trance and the sight. He spoke also while he saw. That is well. This ring is a priceless gem indeed."

"It is of great virtue and we shall need it with a greater than he. The plans are laid, Ahrun; the way is made and the goal in sight. Fortunate indeed was I to secure the ring."

"Certainly, O Dispenser of Bounty. Also we have learned that the Frankish woman is the mainspring of his heart and he who knows this secret rules the man. Praise be to Allah who has allotted to some wisdom, to other men folly."

"Allah be glorified," echoed Revel mechanically. "It is done—we have him now. Yet I noticed his manner changed when he awoke this last time, and as it were, suspicious and angry. We must risk nothing, for he is our eyes in the camp of the enemy. I will take Umar, not you, with me to India."

"On my head and eyes, O Master, let him never guess it was your will that moved him. Proceed very slowly and with caution, O Hope of the World, and he shall

be in your hand to guide as you will. The woman also."

"The woman is less than the dust in my sight," Revel said coolly. "In the great game what is a woman, and a Frankish woman! No, sharer of my wisdom, she is but a means to hold the man. I now depart, and you shall abide in this my house and be answerable for it until I return in joy. May the blessing of the most Merciful and Beneficent make fragrant your life! Great shall be your reward from the Lady and from me. She also works steadfastly to our ends even now."

CHAPTER XI.

They had drifted down the Suez Canal, not beautiful in itself save in its fine directness of purpose, but the palms and the blue pools of shadow in the desert, and the desert itself are so beautiful that with all their Egyptian experience, neither the Bassetts nor Mallory could leave the deck for a moment. They had had only a glimpse or two of Revel. He seemed to be up to his eyes in business in the fine cabin which he had to himself in the best part of the ship.

If the voyage did not bring Mallory any especial mental satisfaction it at least set him on his legs again and made a strong man of him. The morbid cloud rolled away and a good deal he had felt during the past three months began to seem rather sickly stuff. For one thing, he wondered why he had made such a fuss about Ibn ul Farid.

The day after they reached the great Raj Hotel in Bombay Revel said good-by for the time. He was called at once to Ahmadabad, and would then make his way to Mianpur where he hoped to meet them all again. He would be staying at the Palace on Mahmud Mirza's special invitation. He was sorry not to be able to stay in Bombay for the two days Mallory intended to be there for he could have shown him about a bit, but his business was imperative. The Bassetts went off the same day, and if there had been any thought of more definite speech in Mallory's mind before they parted it fell through. Love's thermometer registers changes no mercury can feel and he had an instinct that it was safer to wait.

So they left and he stayed on at the great caravansary, accustoming himself to this new world before he should be out of his depth altogether in its oceans of delight, for the Orient broke on him with a shock of wonder and startled pleasure that almost carried him off his feet.

It was three days after Revel had gone that he was passing the Hotel Carnatic. The heat was relaxing as the sun sank and the great glass lounge was thrown open to catch the sea breeze, the lights already lit under the palms. Consequently the people inside were brilliantly visible to passers-by and he looked up instinctively.

Singular! In the right-hand corner Revel was sitting in close talk with a man whose face was turned from the street. Revel was facing it full so it was impossible to be mistaken in spite of the astonishing fact that he was wearing a turban though the rest of his kit was European. It certainly altered his face considerably, bringing out an Oriental strain that was new and rather startling. He looked like the handsome long-eyed men who were at present difficult to distinguish, so alike, so romantic did they all seem to an unaccustomed eye. But Mallory was keen and retentive about faces. He knew his man at once. Had Revel meant to come back to Bombay, he wondered. No. He was going on to Mount Abu. He had been quite clear on that point. Now here he was. Mallory halted.

Certainly a man may change his plans, but yet—he was always being lulled into confidence about Revel, always being jolted out of it. Possibly there was an underlying distrust that never was quite asleep, do what he would. Why should he have made a mystery? He resolved he would walk in casually and let Revel know also casually that he had seen him. Up the steps he marched and straight to the office.

"Mr. Revel staying here?"

A copper-colored finger traveled down the list of guests; a beady black eye pursued the finger.

"Sartainly not, sar! There is noa gentalman off that name. Oah no!"

"But I saw him in the lounge."

"Noa, sar! He iss not."

"I will just walk in and look for myself. I saw him."

"Sartainly, sar."

The clerk drew back, but watched him with some curiosity.

He walked into the lounge. The two men were still there, the light was bright, there were not many people about. He walked straight to Revel and pulled up like a horse

on its haunches in sheer astonishment. For Revel, if it was Revel, brushed him with his eyes with the polite indifference of a stranger and went straight on with what he was saying.

Mallory began to doubt his own eyes. His certainty wavered. It must be—it couldn't—he turned on his heel and back to the office.

"Who is that gentleman in the lounge? There in the corner!" He pointed an impatient finger. The bored baboo smiled agreeably.

"There, sar? Yess. Hiss name is Ibn ul Farid. A gentleman from Persia via Cairo."

Mallory stared at him and without another word went down the steps and out into the gathering dusk, for the sun had dropped like a shot bird. What to make of it he could not tell for the life of him. He stood outside secure that he could not be seen in the shadows and stared in. Then, as the situation grew clearer in his brain, he halted once more. Up the steps he went again.

"Can you tell me who the gentleman was who was talking with the first one?"

"Sartainly, sar. That is Sir Gobind Srinavastri."

Mallory emerged, reflecting deeply. He knew that name—who did not? A wealthy merchant, his firm specializing in the magnificent gold brocades of India, the kincob—as it is called—which the Indian princes wear when, like birds of paradise, they glitter at state functions. Curiously enough his name had been mentioned on board the *Akbar,* for Venetia Bassett, describing a durbar at Delhi, spoke of the splendid princes and added:

"And I have a dress of the very same. Pure woven gold. The begam gave it to me and it is guaranteed to last three hundred years, which will certainly see me out. It's the best of all for it came from the great kincob people, Srinavastri."

"Who's that?" Revel had asked. "Never heard of him."

"Oh, every one who knows India has heard of him. Very rich, very charitable. He was knighted because of the big hospital he built at Mianpur. Sir Gobind Srinavastri."

"A Hindu then?"

"Of course, and very bigoted. Won't look at a Mohammedan. We went over the hospital at Mianpur."

"Strange I should never have heard of him."

"Yes, but then you see he only mixes with his own people. You might be at Mianpur a year and never see him. I believe he lives at Satispur, where he has a palace."

Mallory recalled all this now. Odd, for he could take his oath that the two men talking eagerly and with heads so close together in the lounge were anything but strangers. Why should Revel have denied that he knew a man held in such high respect in India? If his denial were true how came they to be on such intimate terms the day after landing in Bombay? Why should Srinavastri be hand and glove with a Mohammedan like Ibn ul Farid? And why, most of all, should Revel be masquerading as Ibn ul Farid?

These thoughts occupied him a good deal during his solitary dinner, and escorted him to the smoking room where he sat looking out upon the lights of the Apollo Bandar, more than a little irked by them. Suddenly a light figure passed between them and his unseeing eyes, and Revel was drawing up a chair beside him. Instinctively Mallory hitched his back, the white of his eye showing a little as a dog's on his guard shows. Revel was perfectly easy and good-humored.

"I felt I owed you a little explanation of what must have seemed very odd to you just now, so I ran round on the chance of catching you before you were off to Poona."

"I need no explanations," Mallory said stiffly. "If a man cuts one, one doesn't seek his further acquaintance. I really think we needn't discuss it."

"For my own sake you owe me the opportunity. I value your good opinion and can't forfeit it for nothing. I thought you had left for Poona yesterday morning——"

"That was obvious."

"It's a part of my explanation. I know no one in Bombay and it allowed me to meet Sir Gobind Srinavastri in the character of a man for whom, although he is a Mohammedan and Sir Gobind a Hindu, Sir Gobind has the highest respect."

A pause. Mallory kept a frigid silence but was listening with all his ears. Revel went on.

"The Srinavastri firm has had great business dealings with a firm which employed Ibn ul Farid as an intermediary. It was impossible for Ibn ul Farid to come to India

and I undertook to see him instead, but as he entirely refuses to meet any Mohammedans but Ibn ul Farid, for whom he has a personal respect, and will have nothing to do with Europeans, I was obliged to use Ibn ul Farid's name at the hotel, and you will see that your coming up to me at the moment would have been most unfortunate. In the hurry of the moment I was able to think of no better plan than to do as I did. This explanation is due to you, but also to myself. I detested the necessity, and apologize."

Mallory reflected. Nothing could be franker than Revel's manner, and he had spoken with the utmost earnestness. But there was an unpleasant scent of intrigue about the whole business for all that.

"Do I understand that Sir Gobind believed you to be a man you are not?"

"That was an unpleasant necessity of the position."

"Surely it will be uncomfortable for you, to say the least of it, if you come across him later in India?"

"Not at all. He knows the fact already. There never was a thought of concealing it after the interview. He would not have seen me had not the Persian firm arranged his meeting with Ibn ul Farid. Nothing was said and he took me for granted. Directly the business was done I explained who I was. I should have done so anyhow, but your dropping in as you did clinched the matter. I saw the position was at the mercy of chance."

A pause. Mallory burned to ask how the revelation was taken but would say nothing. Revel went on instantly:

"He was quite pleasant about it; said even an old man's prejudices were not quite so bigoted as all that came to and that if any other matters arose while I was in India he would see me in view of the circumstances. The thing being done he accepted it. Then I came away to you. Have I made myself clear?"

Mallory felt he could raise no legitimate objection. After all, in business dealings with Orientals you must accommodate yourself to prejudices which seem very unreasonable to the average Western, and there was no question as to the esteem Sir Gobind was held in by the British government. He thought Revel had certainly cleared up the situation to a great extent. He was just about to speak when one of the servants brought a note in for Revel and handed it with all due ceremony and salaam.

"Excuse me!" he said and opened and read it, immediately afterward putting it in Mallory's rather unwilling hand.

"It's from Sir Gobind and in his rather ineffective English. I should like you to read it."

DEAR SIR: Our interview. I omitted to speak that the sum half lac rupees creditable from my firm be paid usual interest through respected Ibn ul Farid fourth day of approaching month. Kindly inform him.

GOBIND SRINAVASTRI.

"Thank you," said Mallory and handed it back. "You have certainly explained matters and there is no more to be said. I did not need to read the note, though I appreciate your motive in giving it to me. Of course I shall say nothing about this to any one. I regard it as confidential."

"Thank you. That will be better. Srinavastri is a very peculiar man. Utterly loyal to the government of India, one of its strongest supporters, but as bigoted a Hindu as ever stepped and held away from Europeans by every caste prejudice imaginable. His theory of India is the absolute government of the country by England until the natives have evolved about a century further than they are now, but the natives and British to be in water-tight compartments as far as any social, religious or racial mixing up goes. Personally I rather hold with his view. The two peoples can't mix."

"I must suspend judgment until I know a little of the country."

The talk became general then. Revel deplored the changed attitude of both the Hindus and Mohammedans to Europeans. It was all since the war, of course, and owing to the senseless agitation being carried on by men who knew no more of Europe than they did of Mars. Knowing India he advised Mallory to be courteous but very guarded with any Orientals he might happen to meet.

"The country is like a powder magazine just now—all sorts of explosive stuff lying about. As far as pleasure goes I shouldn't have come here now—nothing but business brought me. And if I had had anything to do with Miss Bassett and her sister I should have advised putting off their trip. Women are in the way unless all is smooth sailing. Still, they know the country, and with care matters may improve, for men like

Srinavastri have immense influence. But for the present the good old days are gone."

And so on. He stayed an hour or more and then went off pleasantly, looking a very striking and handsome young Oriental in his turban. He sometimes wore it in India, he said, when his work lay among Orientals and it made them feel more at home with him.

"And I like it myself. I'm not ashamed to confess that there is a Mianpur princess a long way back in my family history. A most romantic tale."

It all seemed clear enough when Mallory got to bed, having instructed his Indian servant as to the next day's start for Poona.

CHAPTER XII.

Mianpur. He had broken the journey at Delhi, and Agra, and turned a few more picture leaves in the wonder book of India, and now before him was one of even more startling beauty. For he had arrived the night before at the rest house in the little city of Mianpur.

A wonderful place indeed and none the less so because the city was small. Its autocrat had decided it should be; would not hear of growth and crowd and squalor near his own royal palaces, and therefore the things by which a city lives transacted themselves in the huge ant heap of the town of Sellore a few miles distant and all about its precincts lay a lovely quietude of Old World Indian beauty.

There was a bazaar where all the many-colored merchandise of the Orient was sold in stalls that might have come from some theater where the beauty of the Orient had been studied by observant artists and the squalor omitted.

"Theatrically beautiful," was indeed the first phrase that occurred to Mallory as he lounged along the narrow streets sheltered from the sunshine that lay hard and brilliant in the open places outside them. He was looking up then at the mighty mosque where Mahmud Mirza himself worshiped.

The people passed him in crowds, but though a dark face here and there turned in Mallory's direction, as a whole they ignored him. They went their way and expected him to go his, and though there was no open hostility there was thunder in the air. Exactly as Revel had warned him—all was changed since the war. Still he rejoiced that he had come. It was true India—the India of the pictures and dreams of long ago.

The rest house was uncomfortable enough, the beds apparently stuffed with boulders, and the dinner last night had been a fowl whose haggard bosom and sinewy limbs were discouraging in the extreme. But it was worth it a thousand times over, and also there was Venetia! He had not seen her yet. A remnant of good sense counseled him not to thrust himself upon them too soon, to meet them accidentally and then act according to his reception. He had a kind of hope that they might be sightseeing this exquisite morning and their paths cross.

Nothing doing. He wandered about until tiffin time, supremely blessed, but for the lingering anxiety that kept him on the watch at every turn, and then went back, satiated with light and color to the remnants of the haggard fowl and some rocky cheese washed down with the first-rate beer that is a matter of course in India.

A colonel Gifford was at the table, the only other occupant of the bungalow, a pleasant-looking man of about forty-five, apparently in a more communicative mood than he had been the night before.

"Seeing the world?" he asked, lighting his cigar after tiffin when they had both spread themselves out to rest in the long wicker chairs. The rest house was on the edge of the city and only a noiseless barefooted traffic went by in the soft khaki dust.

Mallory too was communicative. They had discovered a common acquaintance and, for another thing, he liked the look of the man, a keen worn face, very frank and good-humored, the kind of man you could know all about in ten minutes if you were observant, open as the day. Gifford, too—a good old English name!

"Saw you going about the city. Ever been here before?"

"Never. Only out from Egypt a month or so. Wonderful place, isn't it?"

"The longer you stay here the more you'll think so. You see this is just a bit of the real old India, kept like a curio in a cabinet. That's why Mahmud Mirza won't allow the railway within twenty miles, and the number of tourists allowed in the city is fixed at four a month. Wonderful man, Mahmud. He was specially granted the title of sultan by our government at Lord Cheri-

ton's instance in view of his Mogul descent and his people's loyalty in the Mutiny days. I was detailed to look after him when he was a boy at the Princes' College, and I often come to see him. Generally I stop at the palace, but he has some fellow there now with whom he's quite a bit taken up, I believe."

"And what is he like personally and what does he do with himself? I saw the archway of his palace to-day. Magnificent! Like a frowning old fortress."

"Ah, you should see the inside. I'll get you a chit. He's a fine fellow in his way. A devout Mohammedan, never perfectly at home with the infidel. Looks the sultan to the life, dark, tall, with the look of great descent these people have. Educated in England and at Ajmere and speaks English well."

"It must be rather hard for a man like that to be in tutelage to us," Mallory said meditatively. "I suppose there's a resident here who tells him exactly what to do?"

"Well, he's called a commissioner. Natives call him the Kumpsioner Sahib. But there never has been any difficulty. His predecessor was a tower of strength to us in the bad time."

"You've been a long time in India, colonel, I take it. What's your view of the feeling here now? Any risk of the Mutiny business again?"

The colonel looked round cautiously and slightly raised his voice: "Risk? Oh, no, no. Little flurries on the surface. No more. Yes, I've been in India more or less all my life. It runs in my family. We all stick out here. You get to like the life and find it a bit dull at home. Besides, things there are changed since the war. I was discussing it with that young fellow who's at the palace now—he seems to know his Europe pretty well and more than a bit about Asia. I should say his head was screwed on the right way."

"Young fellow? You don't by any chance mean Revel?"

"That's his name. A very much all-there specimen. He lives at the palace and is very much with Mahmud Mirza. As much as an outsider can be with a pukka—real—royalty. Do you know him?"

"Why, yes, rather well in a way. Do tell me what you know and think of him."

"What I know is nothing. He's very attractive, and I'm told by the diwan—minister—that he knows exactly how to please Mahmud Mirza."

"As how?"

"Oh, he's great on Egyptian antiquities, and that's rather a hobby in the palace. By the way, that ought to get you in. Revel is said to have a far-away strain of the Mianpur blood in him too, and Oriental learning and tastes. Mahmud Mirza's mother, the begam, is a Persian princess, and he thinks so much of his blood that a drop of it makes a kind of kinship whoever the owner may be. I hear that the begam, a very clever and wonderful old lady, has accorded audiences to Revel—veiled, of course, but still sociable."

"By George! What an interesting time he must have," Mallory said enviously.

"I should say! Make interest with him, if you know him, and you may get a look in. By the way—those ladies at the guest house. They can do anything with the begam. Bassett, their name is. Their uncle, Lord Cheriton, was commissioner here, and a close friend of Mahmud Mirza's father, as well as his own. Now if you got to know them——"

"I have the good luck to know them too," Mallory said with reserve.

"Why, you're in luck's way indeed. You should see more than ninety-nine out of a hundred. Especially in view of your Egyptian discoveries. I prophesy you'll hear from his highness before long."

"Will you be my sponsor?"

"Certainly. And as I'm just idling here as I often do, I shall have plenty of time at your disposal. Would you like to stroll to the Hathi Bagh Gardens to-day?"

The talk took a wider range after that and Mallory picked up a lot of interesting knowledge from the colonel, who knew his own India like a book. Only his own. India is not one book, but a library, and one that it would take many lifetimes to master. They were sitting much at their ease when a tramp of horses was heard, and at a gay speed a gallant cavalcade came by, led by a princely-looking man who rode as though part of his horse—a very centaur. His quick dark eyes swept over Colonel Gifford and his companion and he pulled up instantly, halting the whole cavalcade. At his left hand rode Revel. Instantly the colonel was on his feet saluting and Mallory knew that he saw the ruler of Mianpur undistinguished by any splendor except the glori-

ous emerald that clasped his turban, and the perfect horses that formed his train. He beckoned to Gifford.

"Ah, Colonel Sahib. You here and not at my guest house? Is that friendly? When do you come to see me?"

"At your highness' pleasure. The guest house is occupied by ladies and an old campaigner like myself does better here."

"Come this evening. Who is this gentleman?"

Mallory sprang to Gifford's side and was presented in due form as the discoverer of the Egyptian treasures which had startled the world. Revel nodded cordially in the background.

"I consider your visit an honor to my dominions," said Mahmud Mirza, "and I beg you will come with Colonel Gifford to the palace when he visits me this evening. We have a few antiquities there, but nothing to compare with the interest of yours. We are off to the polo ground now. Will not you two gentlemen follow and see a chukker? Bring horses."

He motioned to an aid-de-camp who rode back hell for leather along the way they had come while the sultan and his suite swept on, as gallant and chivalrous a picture as eye could see, the guard of cavalrymen with pennons fluttering at their lance heads, and one and all riding like the wind.

"By George, that's a fine sight. It carries one back to the Middle Ages. I feel like a dowdy anachronism," cried Mallory, craning out to catch the last brilliant flare of color as they took the corner.

"Not bad, and the polo better still. They play the best game in India here. Worth coming from Europe to see it. I never saw such ponies anywhere."

And Mallory was ready to agree when, mounted on black Arabs, they took up their post of vantage and the game began. A splendid sight indeed both for skill and fire, Mahmud Mirza easily first in both. Mallory was by no means a despicable hand at polo himself and would have given his ears to dash into the scrimmage but even he was doubtful of holding his own with these perfect cavaliers to whom life and limb seemed matters of no account.

At the end of the first chukker, Revel, who was not playing, drew up and greeted Mallory warmly.

"I've been here ten days," he said, "and having a very good time. You came yesterday? Yes, fine sight, isn't it? He plays sometimes at night with a luminous ball as the Emperor Akbar used to do. That's even better. Each man carries a light, and it's really nerve-shaking to watch."

There was more idle talk in the intervals for speech was impossible in the soft thunder of the ponies' hoofs and the frantic excitement of the win and lose. When it was done the sultan—apparently as cool as a cucumber, not a fold of his turban awry, got on his horse again and rode up to the two Englishmen.

"Great game, Mahmud Mirza Sahib," said the colonel. "The ponies seem even better this year than last."

"You can hardly say that of their masters, colonel—we all grow a little older," returned the ruler, looking the very picture of handsome manhood in its prime. "No doubt Mallory Sahib has seen much better work at Ranelagh. But we do our best. You will both dine at the palace to-night."

He waved a careless hand and he and his train clattered and jingled off, the other two riding slowly back far behind the golden dust cloud their swift passage raised as they went.

Mallory was immensely impressed as they entered the frowning fortress gate of the palace in the velvet dark lit up by countless torches and the less romantic glare of the electric light. He knew his India so little at that time that he was startled when they were ushered with Revel into a fine European dining room furnished with old oak paneling and sideboards in the best manor-house fashion, the great carved chairs decorated with Mahmud Mirza's cipher in dim gold, and heavy brocaded curtains over the long windows. There were great portraits of departed rulers, not perhaps of the highest artistic merit, in huge gilt frames on the walls, and over the great oak mantel two spirited pictures of the king-emperor and queen-empress in full state costume, each surmounted by an imperial crown. But for the motionless Indian servants in white and gold the scene might easily have been some Jacobean hall in England.

Still stranger, the host's chair at the head of the table was empty and remained so.

"He never eats with Europeans," said Revel, replying to Mallory's look. "He comes in afterward and I am deputed to do the honors."

He did them very well, and the dinner

was perfectly well served, the plate especially being magnificent and the wines of the best.

Revel and Gifford between them extended his knowledge of Indian ways in general and Mianpur in particular, and Mallory absorbed it with the utmost interest. They all rose as the coffee came in and Mahmud Mirza followed with his chief of staff, a fine venerable-looking man who spoke no English.

Polite questions and replies, and the host standing, raised his glass to the king-emperor's health with due response from his guests, then led the way to a library which still further carried out the illusion of seventeenth-century England.

"But, colonel, I want to see the gorgeous East," said Mallory aside. "I've seen all this in Sussex. Is all the palace like this?"

"Not a bit of it! Wait till you see the cut-glass bedsteads and armchairs and the gold divans and—— Yes, your highness, Mr. Mallory certainly hopes for your permission to see the throne room and so forth."

But the royal eyes were fixed on Mallory's ring.

"The little I know about Egypt tells me that is a wonderful ring," he said. Mallory immediately drew it off and put it in his hand.

"'Thou endest the night!'" translated Revel, standing at his shoulder. "And the singular thing is that it matches my ring even to the inscription, except for the heart beneath it. There is not another scarab known with this inscription."

Mahmud Mirza compared the two.

"This is very surprising!" he said. "Have either of them occult powers? It is certain that some of these rings were worn with that view."

Revel answered gravely.

"Mine certainly has, your highness. Of Mallory Sahib's I know nothing."

He took the two in his hand and held them while he talked, giving a description of other famous scarabs, then returned Mallory's, who slipped it upon his finger, Mahmud Mirza asking that he might be informed if ever it should be for sale, a suggestion that Mallory negatived instantly.

They were shown the Egyptian treasures after this—a fine gallery set apart for them, and filled with the stern images of gods and pharaohs and all the objects that had been their delight in life and solace in death. It seemed a strange taste for an Indian ruler, but there were family reasons for it—his Persian mother being, as he told Mallory, a direct descendant of the Persian King Darius who ruled in Egypt. He pointed to several rings and vases which had come down from him and were the starting point of his collection. Darius had adopted the religion of Egypt, he said, and some strange secrets of its wisdom were preserved in his family. Revel Sahib had been able to give him the history of some of these objects and he hoped for even more light from Mallory. His account of the discovery of the body of the Queen Nefert would be of the utmost interest.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mallory came away, musing deeply. He seemed to have got into a world of wonders, where many strange things might be—whether hoped or dreaded he scarcely knew. Colonel Gifford guided him through the guarded palace gate, dark and mysteriously shadowed in the blaze of the full moon, and said:

"Come this way, for one of the most wonderful sights in India."

He guided him down a little street, now hushed for the night, and so to a flight of broad and very ancient stone steps. Presently they stood beside a great lake flooded with moonlight, balustraded with marble. Above it on one side rose the dark and solemn walls of the great palace they had just left, and far, far out in the mystic water were white marble palaces floating as if asleep upon its shining bosom—exquisitely beautiful and unreal, ghost palaces, dream glories, to be seen in wordless delight.

But a shudder that was more than delight shook Mallory.

"I have seen them before," he said in his heart. "In a courtyard in Cairo."

The sudden recognition added the last touch of weird enchantment to the strange world in which he now had his being.

It was next morning before setting out on his morning's walk that it occurred to him to ask the colonel about Srinavastri and his hospital. What did he know of him? Mallory had never lost his feeling of curiosity about that strange meeting with Revel at the Carnatic in Bombay.

"Oh—old Gobind Srinavastri! Quite a well-known character. Enormously rich and very charitable in his own way. Has given

away lacs of rupees. A Hindu of the old type, as bigoted as he can be, and regards the Mohammedans one and all as children of Shaitan. He will have nothing to do with them. Just as well too. That hatred between the Hindu and Mohammedan is the great buttress of our power in India. Divide and rule, you know."

"Does Srinavastri make no exceptions?" Mallory was turning the Carnatic business over in his mind.

"None. And his caste stands in the way also. I must say the Mohammedans repay the compliment with interest. They detest and despise the Hindus."

"You don't think then he would be likely to do business personally with a Moslem?"

"Not he! Some low-caste clerk would run it."

"Very odd," said Mallory, lost in thought.

"Not a bit odd if you consider the difference of religion, history, politics, everything. I often think the Hindu has never forgotten the fact that the Mohammedans conquered India and ruled it under the Mogul emperors until we stepped in."

"I didn't quite mean that," said Mallory. Naturally he could not explain.

He walked slowly out into the khaki-colored road with the lovely minarets and domes of the city cutting the hyacinth sky with lines of beauty. He was thinking of Revel. Like most healthy-minded men he detested everything that savored of mystery, and it began to seem that nothing but mystery had dogged his steps ever since that meeting with Revel at Abuksa. He went over it in his thoughts—very carefully. The ring, Revel's story of the papyrus, his vision of the museum vaults, the empty papyrus, the courtyard and Ibn ul Farid, Gobind Srinavastri. It totted up into considerable puzzledom, yet taken separately every point could be explained satisfactorily—if one allowed for some Oriental skill in hypnotism, or whatever you chose to call it, and possibly a little economy of truth, to put it mildly. It was as if a mesh so fine as to be scarcely perceptible were delicately winding itself about his feet. But what should hinder him from breaking through it, going straight off and never seeing or hearing of Revel again?

Venetia. Whatever meshed and tangled him had tangled the sisters also. If he felt the slightest distrust, would it be the part of a man to leave those two women within reach of a danger that he himself fought shy of? Certainly not.

He walked slowly along the road under the palms and tamarind trees, for the city was beautifully wooded, and the Hoti River, now a little shrunk by the summer, flowed through it under stone bridges finely arched. Before him rose the principal mosque—the Char Minar, with its magnificent arcades opening into the interior. The building was so singular that it arrested him at once. From the four slender minarets at the corners of the building sprang mighty arches supporting a roof on which was built a small and exquisite mosque sacred to Mahmud Mirza's private worship—an extraordinary and beautiful feat of architecture rising in the majesty of centuries from the swarming street.

And as he stood looking at it with delight footsteps came along the road behind him and he heard Venetia's voice. She was speaking to her sister and had not seen him. How had he ever doubted? He turned and went to meet them, his heart rejoicing within him.

She flushed delicately, but then she was one of the women who flush at any emotion, and the pale glow was gone in a moment and left her smiling and composed.

"So here you are!" cried Sara. "I thought you must be about due. Do tell us about your wanderings. Come back with us and lunch and then we shall have time."

Of course he accepted, and they strolled back through the great parklike gardens which are one of the glories of Mianpur.

They sat a while on a marble bench sheltered from the heat and exchanged adventures, and keenly as he watched he could not detect anything more than a little reserve in Venetia's manner. Revel was spoken of and naturally; they had met him several times in Mianpur and the old begam, Mahmud Mirza's mother, had spoken of him when they visited her in the zenana.

"She's a really wonderful old lady!" said Sara Bassett. "I have known her almost since I was a child. She knows everything that goes on in every part of that vast rabbit warren and uses her tongue like a whiplash to keep them all in order. She has more influence with Mahmud Mirza than any one and is his chief adviser, they say."

"I thought these Mohammedan princes treated their womenfolk more as dolls than anything else."

"Some may—not Mahmud Mirza. He is descended from the great Mogul emperors of India and they were never too proud to consult their women. Besides—you should see the begam! Never was any one less like a doll. She has wonderful long black hair and fierce black eyebrows."

"And a black mustache!" added Venetia. "A most alarming old lady, and hates all foreigners. She was a Persian princess. Of course we don't count as foreigners. She loves us. But it's entirely against her principles."

"Then why does she see you?"

"Because our uncle was commissioner here once. He was a great friend of her husband's—Mahmud Mirza's father—and did him some important services, not the least of which was that he got our government to grant him a salute of twenty-one guns. That counts, you know."

"But what did she say about Revel?" asked Mallory.

"She has seen him several times and thoroughly enjoyed a good gossip with him. Veiled, of course, in a sort of a way. But as she truly says—if at her age she mayn't enjoy herself, when may she? Sara speaks Hindustani quite well enough to enjoy her, and I am not bad at it myself."

"She admires Mr. Revel very much," Sara put in. "She says he is a pearl in the eye of beauty, a sword in the eye of men." She warned him to go out with his eyes on the ground, lest he should steal the hearts of those who were peeping at him from every corner. Quaint, isn't it? We go there again next week to see her jewels. She's very proud of them."

Mallory laughed, and then as a thought struck him:

"Mahmud Mirza is not unfriendly to the British rule, is he?"

"Oh, dear no! Strictly correct and on the best terms with the authorities. He's a striking-looking man, isn't he?"

When Mallory came away after that delightful afternoon all thought of leaving Mianpur had vanished. Venetia had made it clear that she liked to see him, that his company was pleasant to her. He dismissed any thought of Revel as nonsense. When Sara invited him to come to tea next day and hear their adventures with the begam, Venetia had smiled and said nothing—but it was sufficient. He knew he would be welcome.

He found a letter from Conway when he got back to the rest house. After compliments, as the Arabs say, he dashed into his grievances. Things were still dragging along—the British and Egyptian governments fighting interminably over the find. He wrote in part:

> I believe that if Queen Nefert had survived they would have torn her in pieces between them. I'll never go exploring again if I have to sweep a crossing for my living. There's a rumor flying over Cairo now that the real papyrus was stolen from the throne in the museum and was sent to India. Ask Revel if he has heard anything. And they say that a Persian has declared it contained not only the history of Queen Nefert's love affair with an Egyptian king, but a prophecy about the Muscovians collaring India. Did you ever hear such rot? Isn't that Cairo all over?

There was more, but that is all that matters. Mallory read it carelessly at first, then closely. Revel! Was his mind never to be at ease about Revel? It recalled that horrid affair at Shepheard's, his dream of the museum, his fainting fit, Revel's presence. Perhaps it was because of this that he slept badly that night.

And so a week went by and his friendship with the colonel grew and throve. He had never seen a man he liked better. And his understanding with Venetia trembled on the edge of paradise.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a very curious and characteristic room in which the begam received Sara and Venetia a week later—a large cool hall with closely latticed windows open to the faint breeze that blew off the lake, and furnished with great divans covered with exquisite Persian and Indian brocades and cushions stiff with gold and embroideries. But before each divan stood an ordinary round table covered with a European cloth of the most ordinary fringed tapestry and on all these tables and in every available corner were European clocks ticking so loudly as to form quite an accompaniment to the begam's remarks. There were cuckoo clocks, mechanical clocks where marionette figures danced in and out at the quarters, there was a fascinating clock where Time with his scythe mowed down each hour as it showed its innocent head in the shape of a flower, and there were erections of gold and crystal that filled the air with silvery chimes the more frequent because every clock went

at its own sweet will and kept up no sort of connection with the rest.

"It is the sole duty of one slave to wind them," announced the begam with becoming pride as Sara admired. "Be seated, delights of my heart!" She pointed to two glittering cut-glass armchairs, decorated with pineapple knobs of dazzling brilliance and cushioned with gold and blue brocade. The air was heavy with perfumes burning in golden vessels.

The old lady was short and immensely stout and as she sat embedded in cushions a splendid robe of silk and a short coat of mulberry satin flowered with gold seemed quite inadequate to contain her overflowing outlines. She wore a curious cap of gold and jewels stiffened into a kind of peaked diadem in front, a gold-gauze veil flowing over her abundant gray-streaked hair which fell in two thick tails braided with jewels below her waist—a romantic dress, no doubt, for a young beauty but scarcely suited to the begam's years. Her ponderous face was full of shrewdness and humor, and the black brows could frown or smile with an astonishingly quick transition from one mood to the other. She had risen and salaamed charmingly as the two sisters were ushered in, for the moment a great princess.

"You are welcome, Miss Sahibs—a thousand times welcome!" she cried in a hearty guttural that told of years of good living. "Here, in the seclusion of the zenana, talk is as refreshing to the soul as roses to the nose. Be seated in these two armchairs and allow Laili to put on these pearl slippers that your feet may rest. Is it possible you walked across the courtyards? Such little feet and to walk so far! Very wonderful are the women of the Feringis."

Cigarettes were offered in approved European fashion, while the begam enjoyed her own hooka like a man, inhaling the scented smoke with the utmost enjoyment. It did not however in the least interrupt her flow of talk. Sara and Venetia who knew her ways settled themselves back comfortably in their glittering seats and prepared to be amused.

"And the king-emperor is well and the empress? God be praised. It is the power of God! And so you come again to see the old woman, Miss Sahib. It makes my face to shine to have your society and that of the beautiful Miss Sahib who is grown indeed a consumer of hearts. It is known to Allah that if my son sees such beauty the ladies of his palace will please him no more!"

This was of course to be received only as a flower of speech. Venetia then tendered an offering, a splendid box of European candies, for the begam's sweet tooth was known to all her world. She threw up her hands in exaggerated astonishment.

"In the name of the most Merciful and Compassionate, what a gift! May your condescension never decrease! Wah, Wah! It is accepted. Laili, call Gulbadan Begam" —Queen Rose-body—"that she also may savor this honey of delight."

The young wife of Mahmud Mirza was here ushered in with some ceremony which however soon collapsed into ease and she curled up on the divan, devouring candies and listening with large-eyed interest. A lovely girl, black-haired as night, with a mouth like a pomegranate bud and hands and feet delicate and small as a fairy's. Almost a child to look at, but for the stormy dark eyes with their hidden world of passion and pain.

The jewels were presently brought in—the famous emeralds known to the connoisseurs of all the capitals, great table emeralds, lakes of pure green set flat in heavily chased gold, in the embossed pendant the largest, an inch every way. The pigeons' blood rubies from Burma came next, and the mighty diamond known as The Glory of the Universe. Venetia, who had seen them before—for the jewels were a favorite amusement of the zenana—handled them reverently, though it must be owned that their splendors almost paled before the glass knobs of the chair she sat in, cunningly illuminated by small hidden electric lights at the back.

The ancient jewels in the marvelously wrought settings were really the most interesting, especially as the begam threw in romantic histories attaching to every one of them.

"And this," she said finally, poising in the air a great chain of strung black opals, "came from the Great Emperor—the Conqueror of the World, he who ruled in Muscovia two hundred and fifty years since. May the Peace be upon him! He sent an embassy to the Mogul emperors, the forefathers of my son, with precious jewels from the Ural Mountains, and this was the least of them. The rest are in the palace treas-

ury. Is it not beautiful, Miss Sahib? But it is an evil thing."

Beautiful indeed, but ominous, Venetia thought. Laili put it about Sara's neck that it might be the better seen, and all exclaimed in delight.

"Jewels remain when empires vanish," said the shrewd old lady. "Love also! Therefore secure jewels, Miss Sahib, as I have done, to comfort your old age. In Muscovia now the base-born rule, and the emperors are no more. Have you heard talk of this new beauty who pulls the heart-strings of Orsinoff, who rides Muscovia with whip and bit? They tell me she is the wonder of the age and none knows whence she comes. Have you not heard?"

Venetia saw the younger begam alert, her eyes brilliant in a moment.

"No. Pray tell us. Your highness has all the knowledge! Can there be beauty more beautiful than the Lady Rose-body?" she said, indicating the young wife crouching on the divan.

"Thu!" cried the begam, spitting on the ground. "She is but as the handmaiden of the Muscovia beauty who is the moon of the world and burner of hearts. But what should a Miss Sahib know of the loveliness that melts the hearts of men like water! Lamb of my heart, you are young and foolish!"

Venetia digested the rebuke while Sara implored the old lady to continue, which she did with immense relish.

"Orsinoff—may his face be blackened!—was plundering a palace of one of the princes four months since—I have it from Inayet Khan, who came down the passes a month past—and there in the deserted palace, seated alone, he found this girl and took her to be his. Her hair lay on the ground as she sat, and her face was heart-shaped, and her great eyes were lakes of blackness and the beauty of her mouth was like the flower of the rose apple, and her teeth more white and even than the pearls on the knees of my daughter. Tall she was and graceful as a swaying willow. And before Orsinoff, whom all view with terror, she neither abased her eyes nor feared, but met him like a queen."

"It sounds like a romance of the 'Arabian Nights,'" said Sara, enjoying the old lady's gusto.

"Not Scheherazade herself told such a tale!" was the rejoinder. "But hear further. He married her, for her pride bent to necessity and this is the way of women, but, as is also their way, she only stooped to conquer, and it is the word of Inayet Khan and of all who know that the man is as a child in her hands and is but the wax she presses with her own image for a seal. Therefore it is she and she only that rules Muscovia."

"She must be a woman nearly as clever as yourself, begam!"

The old lady chuckled consumedly at this.

"A few things I know, a few things I have seen, and the hearts of men are not unknown to me. But though I was a comely girl I had not the sword of this woman's beauty in my hand. When they oppose her will she has but to smile and—Ya Allah! —it is done. This, Miss Sahib, is a very great power over the very enemies of Orsinoff. She has thus drawn the teeth and cut the claws and they follow her like tame cats. Would I were young and beautiful again! There is no joy like power! Out on the women who cannot enchant their husbands!" She cast a vindictive glance at Gulbadan.

"Before your highness all tremble!" said Venetia politely. "What would you have more?"

"A Miss Sahib cannot tell what I would have more!" cried the begam, who invariably put Venetia in her right place, worlds below that of a wife and mother. "Her day will come and then she will understand. But to resume: The marvel is that none knows this woman's name. She said no more than that she was a companion to the princess they had killed, and since her people were all dead why speak their perished name? Natalia—that is what they call her, and Inayet Khan reports that Orsinoff himself knows no more. But since Inayet Khan knows I love to hear and to tell, he brought for my acceptance a—how do you say it?—a sun picture of the beauty, that my eyes may feed and be satisfied. Bring it hither, Laili."

Laili, a slim brown creature robed in crimson and green, fled obedient and in a moment a fine photograph of unusual size was in Sara's hand. Venetia leaned over her as she unwrapped it from the silk it had traveled in to the begam's hands. They expected a corpulent café-chantant type of beauty at best, dark-browed and sensuous. Both stared in astonishment. In a great

chair, richly carved with the dead symbols of imperial power—doubtless a possession of the ruined dynasty Orsinoff had succeeded—sat a young woman, pale, with large calm eyes fixed on some thought beyond the reach of the artist who had pictured her. Her long hair, unbound, fell in two solemn rivers of blackness to the ground on either side of her marble face. The curled lashes shadowed the eyes with heavy darkness, her beautiful mouth was firm and sad as Destiny; the hands resting lightly on the arms of the chair were exquisitely fragile and fine. She wore a simply flowing dress of some Eastern stuff, clasped at the bosom with an Egyptian scarab set between the wide-spread wings of the Egyptian Mother-Goddess Mut—familiar to all who know the art of Egypt. No picture was ever more innocent of adornment. None ever more arresting. Underneath was written in a clear small handwriting: "Natalia."

"Wonderful!" said Sara at length. "I never saw a more exquisite face. Sad to a degree, but no wonder. There is black tragedy in that woman's life. It is written all over her face!"

"Did I not say so!" cried the begam. "But what beauty? This is a woman indeed! If all women were like her no single one would hold the sword of destruction in her hand. As to this one, she can let loose the hordes of Muscovia upon the world to-morrow if she so wills. Beauty like this is mischief incarnate."

"Is her influence on Orsinoff said to be good or bad, highness?" asked Venetia. She could not take her eyes from the face, exquisite but heart-moving in its tragic calm. Even while she spoke her eyes were fixed on it.

"Inayet Khan reports that the talk is of great events stirring, so that men hold their breath, but as yet none know what her share in it may be. Coffee, Laili, and my offerings for the Miss Sahibs."

This was the signal for departure. The thick black coffee was brought on a gold tray, the perfect cups set each like a jewel in gold filigree, and to each visitor was given a gold bottle of attar of roses, the cover set with small turquoises and garnets. Profuse thanks were given and accepted and the begam actually rose and waddled a few steps toward the door in their honor, and still Venetia paused:

"The Miss Sahib has a wish unsatisfied. Let her speak and it is done. Blessings of Allah; we are not so poor but we can gratify a friend!" said the begam graciously. "Fetch again the tray of trinkets, Laili, that the Miss Sahib may choose!"

"Highness, it is not that. Far from it," Venetia said earnestly. "Your generosity is bottomless as the ocean. It is—if my prayer may be heard—that I may make a picture of that beautiful face. The sun pictures do not give the tints of lip and cheek and the face is but a dead rose. May I do this as a gift for your highness? I have a little skill with the brush."

"Excellent! Excellent!" cried the begam, clapping her hands. "Wrap it up, Laili, in a covering to protect it, and give it to the Miss Sahib. Now depart in the peace of Allah, guests of my son, and in His safety return shortly to bless mine eyes."

Amid profuse adieus they departed.

"She's a dear old thing!" said Sara, looking kindly at the perfume bottle as they sank into chairs in the guest house. "But I really think half an hour is as much as I can stand in a general way. Did you ever see such jewels? Those emeralds!"

"Wonderful. But this photograph and the story were what I found most thrilling. What a face! What can be the history behind it? Did you notice Gulbadan's look of jealousy? Poor little thing. Lucky the beauty is not here!"

She had unwrapped the photograph and was looking at it again.

"Where's your magnifying glass, Sara? I want to see her scarab better. It looks to me like the one Uncle Cheriton gave the museum. I expect it was among the imperial treasures. I like those wonderful narrow outspread wings. Are they diamonds?"

The glass was found and Venetia studied the portrait. Suddenly she laid it down.

"Sara! Unless I'm a perfect idiot that scarab is the same as Ken Mallory's. I see a heart and though I can't read the hieroglyphs I think they look very much like the others. Let us send for him."

They did and two hours later he came, eager as a boy because he had been summoned before the appointed meeting. They were sitting on the softly shaded veranda that overhung an arm of the marble tank, and the west was blushing before the sunsetting, the lotus flowers dreaming in the rosy water.

"This doesn't mean, I hope, that you don't want me to-morrow," he began. "I waited outside the palace gates in hopes of catching you as you came out from the zenana, and I don't know now how I missed you."

"Really? No, of course we want you to-morrow, but Venetia has something to show you and she never can wait."

He turned with interest.

"A photograph," she said. "But though the woman is a beauty, that isn't the point. She's wearing a scarab which strikes me as very like your ring. Look! Inayet Khan brought the picture to the begam from Muscovia."

She put it in his hand and sat watching him triumphantly. Indeed she thought herself exceedingly clever to have spotted the likeness and expected nothing but praise and astonishment. The astonishment was hers, however. Mallory went dead white; the picture slid from his hand. He stooped and picked it up mechanically. Silence.

"It is some one he knows and cares for!" was the horrid thought that flashed through Venetia's mind. With rather a forced smile, she said slowly: "Don't you admire her? I never saw a more beautiful woman. Sara thinks so too."

Sara looked keenly at him. No mysteries for her where Venetia was concerned!

"Do you know her?" she asked curtly.

He found voice at last, but not his usual one. It sounded strained and odd.

"Know her? You won't believe what I'm going to say, for I can't believe it myself. This is the Queen Nefert as I saw her in the tomb chamber. Then she was dead. Now she is alive. That is all."

"Good heavens! Impossible!" cried Sara. "It's one of those amazing likenesses, but surely——"

"Of course it's no more." Mallory was recovering himself. "But a more astounding likeness I never saw. It isn't only the likeness. The whole *effect* is the same, if you know what I mean. I often wished you could have seen what we saw. Now you know. Only the jewels are gone."

"The scarab!" Venetia reminded him. He caught up the magnifying glass now and looked eagerly at the picture. Then at his ring.

"Thou endest the night!" he read almost in a whisper, and laid the glass down. Silence again. Presently:

"Good God! What is a man to think? A perfect duplicate."

Neither of them disturbed his thoughts for a few moments, if indeed he could be said to think, so confused was his brain. It must surely be illusion, a dream that would vanish at the touch of reality. At last he roused himself.

"How did you get it? Forgive my amazement and tell me the story. I suppose quite an ordinary one and this Natalia is just some new actress. Perhaps in the eternal round of being the same face must recur sometimes. One would like to know the facts."

Venetia told him all they had heard from the begam and he listened with ever-growing amazement. Then, bethinking himself, he pulled out his notebook and showed them the rough duplicate of the sketch Conway had made of the dead queen. Though very imperfect it left Venetia and Sara silent with astonishment. The coincidence of likeness and attitude was enough, but taken with the scarab it was overwhelming.

"You are sure—*sure* of the scarab?" asked Venetia searchingly. "How would it be to send for Mr. Revel? He knows them both so well. And then there is his own."

Mallory revolved this rapidly. There could be no concealment. Revel in the palace, in touch with the begam, would certainly see the photograph if he had not seen it already. As well sound him as not. On the other hand he wished to do nothing that would bring Revel into the company of the Bassetts. Whether there was jealousy or no at the bottom of this he could not tell, but there was a deeper instinct than any jealousy that cried "Beware!" and he would not thwart it.

"That's a good suggestion. I haven't met him for a week and I want him for another reason," he said, rising. "I'll see him and you shall hear everything that happens. There may be nothing to it, but it's curious certainly, and you never can tell. I'll take the utmost care of the picture, Miss Venetia." He had quite recovered his composure now.

"For goodness' sake, do!" she said laughing. "The begam will have me bowstrung if anything happens to it, and besides I want to copy it."

Mallory went off, and straight to the palace guardhouse to ask if Revel could be seen. A fine old ressaldar was on duty,

who knew a few words of English and told him that Revel Sahib had gone boating on the lake with Inayet Khan.

"If it pleases you a boat shall be sent."

"No, no. Ask him to come to the rest house as soon as it is his pleasure."

And the stately old man salaamed and saluted. Inayet Khan! Then certainly Revel would have the latest news from Muscovia.

CHAPTER XV.

It was nine o'clock that night when Revel rode up through the glorious moonlight and dismounted by the bungalow, tethering his horse to the gatepost. India had mysteriously Orientalized the man, though his dress was scrupulously European, and he looked a slim and splendid young Eastern as he strode up, spurred, to the veranda. Mallory, watching from behind the Buginvillæa, noted this and was subtly glad. It set him farther and farther from Venetia. That dark-browed beauty was the mark of a division that cut into the very soul of things.

He rose and went out to meet the guest and led him to the veranda where the long chairs and the long drinks were in readiness. Colonel Gifford was spending the evening with Mahmud Mirza to discuss a tiger-shooting expedition at the Hizar hunting palace, and they had the place to themselves.

Revel lit the proffered cigar and apologized with all his usual courtesy.

"I'm so sorry to have delayed you but I could not get away until after dinner. Mahmud Mirza wanted me even then to stay and discuss the hunting business. What is it, Mr. Mallory?"

"Have you seen this photograph?" He pulled the lamp nearer Revel's elbow.

"Certainly. The begam showed it to me. It is this woman who seems to be coming rapidly into the front of Muscovian politics. Handsome woman, don't you think so? She has only been heard of lately."

"Very. But what interests me is this. Look here!" He laid Conway's sketch in Revel's hand. The latter regarded it calmly.

"You mean—oh, I see! Yes, the pose is very much the same. How very odd? Has that sketch been reproduced anywhere?"

"Nowhere. But it is much more than the pose. The likeness is perfect."

"You don't say so! That is very remarkable. But come, Mr. Mallory, the beautiful Natalia must have seen that sketch somewhere and posed accordingly. She saw the likeness. Women are quick in that way."

"I tell you," Mallory repeated obstinately, "it has *not* been reproduced. She could not have seen it any more than she can have shaped her face into the likeness. But there's more to it than that. Have you examined the scarab?"

"No—beyond thinking it a handsome ornament set in those wings of Mut."

"Look at it now." He pushed the magnifying glass across the table. Revel scrutinized the photograph keenly and curiously.

"'Thou endest the night,'" he read aloud. "And I see the heart. I own this is a very strange coincidence. We shall have to revise our opinion as to the rarity of this scarab design. We now know of three."

Mallory was about to exclaim but checked himself resolutely.

"Could you tell me," he asked composedly, "what is known of this woman?"

With equal composure Revel repeated the begam's story.

"I believe no more is known," he added. "The ignorant Muscovians declare that she has some charm which makes her irresistibly beautiful. Inayet Khan told me she harangues the troops and with an eloquence that no one can resist. She speaks three European languages perfectly."

"Does no one know where she comes from?"

"They say not. She was found by Orsinoff in Prince Zouroff's palace on the Volga when it was plundered. Every one else was dead or fled. Orsinoff may know, but no one is likely to ask him."

"Is it known at all what she is driving at with Orsinoff in public affairs?"

Revel laughed lightly.

"Oh, nothing of any consequence, I gather. The usual hot-air stuff about Muscovia ruling the world and imposing her codes on all the rest of the world. Nothing in it at all. A woman as pretty as that may say what she pleases." He flicked the ash off his cigar and looked at his watch.

"I wonder," Mallory said thoughtfully, "if it strikes you as strangely as it does me that a woman with the face of the Queen Nefert should also carry her scarab?"

"Did you ever know for certain it belonged to the queen?" Revel countered neatly.

"No—no! But the place where I found it certainly suggested the idea."

"The place?" But Mallory was silent. That was not for Revel's ear. The latter rose to go.

"If you want me no more, I will get back to Mahmud Mirza. I believe he intends to ask you to be one of the hunting party."

"Very good of him. But before you go—do you think the situation is worse or better in India?"

"Better. Infinitely better. There is growing up again the warm kindly feeling toward the British government. Of course the personal liking for men who work the machinery in India has never died out, but the other is coming back too. I hear a great deal at the palace and can answer for that. After all, why should it not? These people appreciate justice and care for them as well as any one else, and they know what they owe to your government."

"Your? And what is yours, Mr. Revel?"

"Mine?" The clear dark eyes looked straight into his. "My grandmother was Persian, my mother Greek, my father English. How do you define me?" He turned laughing away, and Mallory could scarcely press the question.

Yet once more he detained him. This time to speak of Conway's letter. He read the passage about the lost papyrus aloud, casting keen glances at Revel to see how he took it. With becoming interest, nothing more.

"Cairo is always a hotbed of gossip. It may not be a bad guess as to the contents of the papyrus. I have always believed it contained the queen's story. As to Muscovia, that is obviously inspired by the horrors going on there now. There is nothing in that. The idea of the papyrus being in India is as reasonable as any other and easily might be true. But I see no evidence for it, do you?"

Mallory, baffled as always, admitted he saw none. Could Revel name any one in India likely to be interested?

"I could name dozens. This is the land of occult beliefs and superstitions, and, as an antiquity, no doubt Mahmud Mirza himself would covet it. But I have heard not a word at the palace. I'll keep my ears open however and you shall know if I hear anything at all. Remember me to Mr. Conway."

That was all. A minute later and his horse was cantering down the road. He turned and waved his hand as he went.

Mallory sat there in the moonlight. He had much to think of.

It was near midnight when Colonel Gifford came in from the palace, looking tired and depressed. He flung himself into the chair by Mallory. His manner was so marked that Mallory presently roused himself from his own thoughts and began to wonder whether the colonel also had his anxieties, and if so whether he might venture to question or sympathize. He tried the ice cautiously first:

"A touch of sun, colonel? You don't look as chirpy as usual to-night. Or was the dinner dull?"

"No—all as usual. I'm quite fit, thank you. But——"

"But what? Anything I can do?"

"I wonder!" said Gifford, and was silent. His sensible, resolute face looked dark and overcast, and Mallory studied it curiously for a moment. He liked the colonel—an honest straightforward fellow. You knew where you were with him.

After a while Gifford broke silence, but with a curious preliminary. He hitched his chair nearer to Mallory's and he spoke French. To say the latter was astonished is to put it mildly, especially as the colonel's French was not such as it is a delight either to speak or to hear, though very correct. Each sentence involved thought and trouble.

"Two things have happened to-night which have rather startled me. Can I speak to you in confidence? I have a reason for wishing to."

"Certainly. Absolute. I give you my word."

"I was inclined to speak before, but I did not know you well enough. Even now I hardly know. You are real English, aren't you?"

"Certainly." Mallory was lost in astonishment.

"Then—well, I had better begin at the beginning. Mahmud Mirza has always been most loyal, and though there has been some bad trouble from agitation in his dominions he has always done his best to suppress it. The home authorities feel they can count on Mianpur, and he has told me he is consulted on almost every important step that is taken out here. One felt one could talk without reservation before him. Of course

we have a commissioner here and he knows all that goes on. Sir Edward Fairfax. He had a bad accident in the jungle a year ago and went back to England to recover and a deputy, known as the 'Dipty Sahib' by the people, is doing his work. To tell the truth the Dipty Sahib, Kincaid, is a fool and the worst sort—a conceited one. No doubt they thought Mianpur such a safe place that any one could do the routine. I thought so too. Now I am not sure." He spoke with a tense preoccupation utterly unlike himself.

"Why?" Mallory was profoundly interested.

"First, I don't like Revel. Where has he come from? Why has he such influence with Mahmud Mirza? I've never seen a European or a semi-European—whatever he is—living at the palace before, or received by the begam. If you knew the way things are done here you would appreciate this point." The very man was changed as he spoke. His air was authority.

Mallory was tense with listening now. Revel's name was "rats" to a terrier. But the colonel! That was what he could not understand.

"And Revel is intimate with Inayet Khan, Mahmud Mirza's distant cousin. And Inayet Khan I would trust as far as I could throw him—no farther.

"Inayet Khan has been in Muscovia lately, the second or third trip within eighteen months. The reasons given are excellent, *if* they are the true ones. But you may say, this is all suspicion, no more. Well—to-night I was waiting for Mahmud Mirza and I overheard two men talking. They did not see me—I was in one of the bay windows overlooking the lake—and they spoke of course in their own tongue. To summarize. Mahmud Mirza has more or less lost his heart to the portrait of the Muscovia beauty who is supposed to lead Orsinoff by the nose, and Inayet Khan's last errand was to make overtures. Now that woman——"

"Yes, yes!" cried Mallory. He had the sense of being on the verge of some vast and awful discovery, something that would fuse all the mysteries and present them as a connected whole. He could scarcely endure the colonel's painstaking French. "Go on, for God's sake!" he said.

"That woman is a danger to the world. She has urged Orsinoff on to all the cruelties and madnesses he has perpetrated, and now—if she should come here—there will be big trouble in India."

"But they say Orsinoff is madly in love with her. Do you suppose Mahmud Mirza could get her? And if so—he has a wife already."

"Several!" said Gifford with grim humor, "and one more or less scarcely counts. The point in such cases is—who has the influence? That and that only. And as to Orsinoff's life—do you think that is worth an hour's purchase if this woman wants to get rid of him? They say Barikoff is her creature and he has been wanting to step into the other man's shoes for the last two years. Long before she came."

"I see. I see."

"I heard more—but this part I am not sure of. The two men spoke of a paper which predicts that this woman should return from a previous incarnation and bring ruin to Europe and our empire, but India and the Orient are to triumph because of her and grow great. A new order of things, you see! Of course this seems nonsense to you, but remember reincarnation is the commonplace of India. If that woman has been able to get that story believed here there is *nothing* she may not do and we are in for big trouble."

"Of what sort?" the other man asked, his thoughts racing. A paper—Revel—the lost papyrus. He could scarcely concentrate enough to ask the question.

"A general rising. The 1857 mutiny will be a fool to it, especially if Muscovia is in the game also. It may mean the end of everything out here. However—the second thing is that as I came away I swear I saw old Gobind Srinavastri in the library in talk with the prime minister."

"But that must be impossible. You said yourself——"

"I know I did, but I saw it. Now if that be so it means that the most bigoted, fanatical, wealthiest Hindu is in touch with the Mohammedan party, and in secret. I don't think I need explain what that means, and especially in the present temper of the people. Now the question is—what am I to do? How am I to know? I would give all I'm worth for some one who could tell me what the women in the palace are thinking—the begam, and Mahmud Mirza's young wife. It might save the empire! As I said before, Kincaid, the Dipty Sahib, is a fool.

He will start the birds too soon. Oh, for real knowledge! I trust Mahmud utterly, yet——"

"Keep it to ourselves and watch!" suggested Mallory. "And look here, colonel—I know something of that paper you speak of. If you can in any way enable me to lay hands on it we may know a great deal more than we know now."

In the talk that followed the two men grew to trust and understand each other well and the uncertainties cleared up into a determination to watch in silence for a time and compare notes. The chief question in Mallory's mind was whether it would be well to induce the Bassetts to leave Mianpur in case there were any possibility of a rising, and on this he consulted the colonel. He advised against it for the present.

"Do nothing, say nothing yet. I cannot and will not believe that Mahmud Mirza would do anything against his salt in a case of that kind, and remember the begam knows and likes the Bassetts. I think they are probably safer here than they would be now in any part of India I know of, and we are here to protect them. But keep them away from Revel. I distrust that gentleman entirely. If only we could know what is going on in the palace!"

"Would you stay on here indefinitely then?"

"For the present, yes. If things are coming to a head there may be deadly danger in the thousands of miles between us and Bombay."

So they parted for the night, little guessing how soon the avalanche would be upon them.

It was perhaps a result of Mallory's disturbed state of mind that he went off next morning to see Venetia. The excuse was that he must tell her of his meeting with Revel, the truth being that he was desperately in need of the peace and sunshine her presence always brought with it.

Sara had gone out for a stroll, and Venetia was sitting in the veranda, already at work with the photograph of Natalia before her. She laid her brushes down as Mallory came up and looked up in his face, her eyes brimming with light and pleasure.

"Well—I have been longing to hear? What happened? Is it the same scarab?"

"Yes. You were perfectly right. But there was nothing more. It's a mystery. Don't talk of it. This is the first time I've found you alone for ages and I won't waste a minute. Talk to me—let me look at you."

His tone said much more than his words. He put his hand out beseechingly, moved beyond himself suddenly and irresistibly. With the same impulse she laid hers in it, and so they sat for a moment, wrapped in the new wonder of love and beyond all need of speech.

"You love me!" he said at last, not questioning but asserting, in a kind of wonder of quietude, and without any word she smiled as he put his arms about her and drew her to his breast. She lay against his shoulder with closed eyes, lost in an inward dream of bliss, looking neither backward nor forward, utterly content.

CHAPTER XVI.

The minutes drifted by. It had seemed a long time since they spoke but at last they touched the lower level of words again in the sweet give and take of lovers, retracing together all the steps of knowledge and understanding that had brought them to the exquisite revelation. At last he said:

"Venetia, now you are all mine, my wife to be, I want to talk to you seriously and with the certainty that what I say won't even reach Sara unless I agree. I know I can trust you, darling."

As briefly as possible he told her the story of what had happened at Shepheard's, and added to that Conway's letter, and what Colonel Gifford had told him of Revel's influence with Mahmud Mirza. With his fears of a general rising he would not trouble her. He spoke of the thing merely as a thing to be watched lest it might one day shape itself into a danger. He felt her grasp tighten on his hand as he talked.

"It is your first confidence to your wife," she said, "and she won't fail you. I quite understand. You want the papyrus. You distrust Mr. Revel. I distrust him myself. There is something inhuman under all his beauty and courtesy, something that says 'Beware!' every time I talk to him. I think he's at the bottom of the loss of the papyrus and that he is using it with Mahmud Mirza in some way we don't understand. Now, what can I do to help? Remember we are intimate in the palace."

Till that moment it had never occurred to Mallory as possible that she should help in any way. He wanted to secure her

against any friendliness with Revel which could possibly reveal the precautions he and Colonel Gifford might take. But help? No, he had not considered that. It flashed on him that a woman of her clear mental power and unusual position with the begam might be much more than a looker on. A man could do nothing in that vast intricacy.

"You would like to help me, darling? Then I believe you could."

She rippled into delight at once, eager and attentive. "Tell me exactly," she said, and settled herself to listen.

He spoke now to her as frankly as Colonel Gifford had done to him. He told her of the fear of a general rising, and a combination of the Mohammedan and Hindu interests, reserving, of course, the points that Gifford had given him in confidence, and mentioning neither the "Dipty Sahib" nor Srinavastri. Indeed it was also better in every way that they should have her unbiased observations. He asked her earnestly whether she thought it better she and Sara should retreat to Bombay instantly while the way was still open, since Gifford believed the blow might fall at any moment.

"I, of course, shall stay here with Gifford and the few English in Mianpur, for the government must have people it can depend upon, and with all my heart I should rejoice to know my darling was safe at Bombay," he said, looking at her wistfully. Her answering smile was full of gayety and courage.

"What! Go and leave you here if there were danger! You don't think me such a miserable craven as that? No. Tell me what you think I can do and then I'll tell you my own ideas."

It amounted to this. To visit the begam as usual and learn if possible whether anything was known of the papyrus, for Mallory believed that prediction might throw light on any plans made in Mianpur. Still more would it be necessary to learn whether anything further were known of Natalia and any negotiations between her and Mahmud Mirza. The begam was an unguarded talker. Her volubility might drop invaluable hints as to Revel's influence with her son, the chain of intrigue with Muscovia, and so on.

"I could do that," Venetia said slowly. "She thinks of me as a child. You may trust me, Ken. I will be wise. I know her well. I can do it better than Sara. She is so outspoken and believes every one to be as honest as she is. I won't say one word to her. But when the danger comes near don't be afraid to tell me. The begam would protect us, and I have no fear. In the Mutiny year Mahmud Mirza's grandfather sheltered many English refugees here, and it is their pride.

"You see," she went on earnestly, "this is work that only a woman can do. A man hasn't even a look in in the intrigues of these palaces, and don't you think I must be thankful and proud that my knowledge of India may be useful now to the country? There's this, too. I have liked Mahmud Mirza and the begam ever since I can remember, and have really an affection for poor little Gulbadan. I shall simply rejoice if I can prove they are innocent of any plotting at all. I quite think they may be."

Mallory shook his head. Where Revel had influence trouble would follow inevitably. He told her so.

They sat for half an hour more, and then Sara came in, and all the story must be told again to her and the happiness redoubled in her delight.

"You know I just saw from the first what was coming and if I hadn't approved—well, you would never have seen us again!" she said. "Venetia is all I have and her safety is more to me than my own. She will be safe with you."

Those words of perfect confidence were ringing in Mallory's ears as he went away.

He told the colonel the events of the morning and besought his counsel as to whether the ladies should be sent at once to Bombay, and whether, if they stayed, Venetia's help should be accepted.

"We are just engaged," he ended, "and I know you'll understand how I feel about it all."

For all answer the colonel drew a letter from his pocket and laid it in Mallory's hand. It was very brief and he read it with the utmost astonishment, for it seemed to have no reference to anything he had said:

DEAR COLONEL: The young man you kindly recommended for the position of secretary to Mr. Dalrymple writes to say he is unable to take it on account of serious illness. It is a great disappointment, especially as time presses and Mr. D. leaves India shortly. If you can think of any one else please write at once. It is urgent. In haste, very truly yours,

H. D. WISE.

"But this——"

"I see I must take you into my full con-

fidence now. I am here on secret service. That note is from a man—a link in the chain—at Fyzapur. It is the agreed signal that they are on the eve of a dangerous rising there. Now, that answers one part of your question. You will see for yourself that if the Fyzapur district is up the women cannot travel to Bombay. I fully agree with Miss Venetia Bassett. I think whatever Mahmud Mirza may do that Englishwomen and especially Lord Cheriton's nieces are safe with him. The begam also. The last sentence in that note—'If you can think of any one else,' et cetera—means 'Send us all intelligence possible. Great events at hand.' I leave you to say whether Miss Bassett may not be able to do the government priceless service. As to danger—let her write nothing, speak no word of importance to any one but you. Your engagement will cover that, and I see no danger. Mohammedans are disposed to take women as pretty chattering dolls. Let that be her rôle."

They talked for an hour, discussing the matter from every point of view, but that was the first and last conclusion. Nothing was to be said by any of them as to the Fyzapur rising even when it took place. Perfect confidence and ignorance must be their keynotes, and much could be judged from what was allowed to reach them.

Mallory learned much in that hour of what the secret service meant and how far it threw its tentacles; and the more he heard the more he admired its choice of the colonel. The easy transparence and good nature of his manner, his perfect knowledge of things Indian and command of at least three languages of the peninsula armed him at every point, and all the more because the native world at large gave him credit only for speaking Hindustani and was therefore likely to be careless before him in other tongues.

"But I, of course, could have done nothing with the women," he ended, "and very much more important gratitude than mine will be due to Miss Venetia Bassett for even her intention. It is an invaluable public service. One word before we part. If Mahmud Mirza should press you to take up your quarters at the guest house, refuse. Say it is not etiquette in view of your engagement. That always appeals to the Oriental. You and I must be together, but not too much. Only at the dak-bungalow or the palace."

So they parted and Mallory went on to his tiffin. The secret-service announcement had hardly startled him. He had himself begun to put two and two together and to keep his eyes open.

It was with a trembling heart that Venetia walked into the begam's reception room beside the unsuspecting Sara a day later, and it was almost a relief to find that the begam was not present and that only Gulbadan Begam was to entertain them. Laili brought a message with profound salaams to the effect that the begam had eaten too freely of a dish of pilau with pistachio nuts the night before, and that if the elder Miss Sahib would visit her in her bedchamber and advise some noble medicine that would remove the weight—comparable only to that of mountains—which lay upon her chest, her heart would be dilated and her eyes enlightened. Gulbadan Begam would meanwhile solace the younger Miss Sahib with sweetmeats and a hearing of the new instrument which shouted like a man or a woman through a silver trumpet according to the desire of the hearers.

Sara immediately followed the messenger, well used to the begam's touching faith in "Europe medicines," and her own knowledge of their use, and the two girls were left together, with only Zaynab, Gulbadan's devoted foster mother, in attendance.

The girl looked the part of the fair Persian to perfection that day in her trousers of dark green and gold and coat of mulberry silk embroidered with golden flowers. She wore about her neck the magnificent peacock in gold and jewels with outspread tail which Venetia knew as a famous jewel of the house, and in this splendid setting though she glowed darkly beautiful like a velvet damask rose hiding in leaves of shadowy green her eyes were heavy and languid, her mouth sullen. She pointed silently to the glass armchair, but Venetia sat down beside her on a cushion of the divan and asked whether her head ached, that being a frequent result of the sickly sweet stuff eaten all day in the zenana.

"It is my heart that aches," was the only reply vouchsafed, and Gulbadan drew her hand away from any possible contact. Humoring her like a child, old Zaynab her foster mother set the gramophone going, and very strange it was in those rooms sacred to women to hear a raucous man's voice shouting "My Pickaninny Love." It did

not shout for long. In a sudden fury Gulbadan sprang at the braying trumpet and flung the whole thing on the ground. Silence.

"It is broken, the devil's voice. I am glad —I am glad!" she cried, stamping and glaring at Zaynab.

"So am I," said Venetia calmly. Her serenity fell like cold water on Gulbadan's rage. She pulled off her long gloves, and took off her hat, the girl staring at her half in envy, half in a kind of fascination. She could never understand the foreign women —they were strong with strengths of which she knew nothing, their sorrows and joys incomprehensible. Venetia saw clearly the poor child was suffering either in mind or body, and she took the little slim brown hand and pressed it kindly. Instantly Gulbadan flung herself on her knees at Venetia's feet and burying her face in her lap sobbed wildly—great rending sobs which seemed to tear their way out of her slender body, bruising and torturing it as they came. Venetia looked in alarm over her head at Zaynab, who shook hers sadly.

"It is not naughtiness, Miss Sahib. My child is gentle as the blessed Lady Fatmeh. But it is the lot of a woman to suffer, and she suffers."

Venetia laid her hand tenderly on the lovely dark head and the quiet touch seemed to soothe the girl. The sobs grew quieter and ceased presently with a convulsive trembling that ran through her whole body.

"Forgive me, Miss Sahib," she said brokenly. "I suffer. Oh, that I could die and be at rest! But how should you understand, who love no man. Wise indeed are you to keep your heart locked and sealed, for if it passes from one's own breast——" She sobbed again, then raised her heavy dark eyes brimming with tears.

"You have seen me in my glory and happiness. Three years ago I was married and the Paradise of Allah was not so glorious to me as this palace. And now what am I? —a childless wife, a wife forgotten. Pity me, lady whose heart is still cold and secure."

Of course Venetia had before this known that the root of Gulbadan's tragedy would one day be her childless state. That is the curse of woman in India and doubly so in a royal house. She had had three years' grace as the only wife. Now—it needed no words to explain the miserable future of the woman who loves her husband and sees her day done.

"You are so young. Indeed, indeed all will be well yet. Have patience."

"Patience?" She laughed bitterly, then went on. "No, it is finished for me. If you pity me, Miss Sahib, and I know your heart is gentle, pray to your gods for me that I may die and be forgotten. In a few days comes the new wife and then I shall see his face no more. And once he loved me as the heart of his heart!"

"The new wife? Do you mean he will dare to divorce you because you have no children?"

"He could do that, for our law allows it," said Gulbadan somberly, "but my people are great in the land. No, Miss Sahib. Our law permits a man to have four wives. I shall be forgotten. That is all. He loves me no more."

She said it with such a fury of concentrated bitterness that Venetia stared at her in dismay. Here was a wound beyond all healing, and no word occurred to her that did not seem insultingly inadequate. She put her arm round the slim shoulders and was silent. Suddenly the torrent broke forth again.

"And if it had been a woman of my own people perhaps I might have borne it, for surely in her heart would she have known that her day too might pass as mine. But this is a woman of a race I never saw, of a tongue I never heard, and their beauty lasts when they are old women and ours is all withered and gone. It is sorcery. I know it!"

"Who is she?" asked Venetia, so bewildered by the suddenness of the whole thing that she had no time to consider. "Is she English?"

"No, no, Miss Sahib. For your sake and your sister's I trust the English. This is a woman from Muscovia. Her husband died a few weeks ago and they kept it secret and now when she should be weeping for him she takes my lord from me. An accursed woman! You saw her picture and did not know."

With a flash, knowledge and certainty shot through Venetia—a horror also that the poor girl should run the risk of betraying her husband's secrets. What dark and dreadful fate might befall her if that were guessed!

"Highness, you should not tell me this.

I cannot listen," she said earnestly. "If your husband had wished it known he would have spoken himself. Let us speak of it never again!"

The girl rose instantly to her feet and with a tragic look at Venetia as of one utterly forsaken walked out of the room. Zaynab delayed.

"You are right, Miss Sahib, a thousand times right. It is great danger that my bird should speak. A woman must take what Allah sends her and endure and there is no other way. Shall I call Laili?"

Laili brought word that the begam would now see the Miss Sahib, and Venetia was escorted with pomp to the state bedroom whither the begam had herself conveyed from a less ceremonious and more comfortable resort when visitors were expected.

"Surely my heart is dilated already by the welcome company of my friends," cried the begam. "It is not for nothing that I held this lovely one in my arms when she was but a month in the world. And now I hear that she takes to herself a husband! Ah, it was time, my heart's delight. And the fortunate one—your lord—is he worthy of such a jewel. Highborn? A soldier? With riches and beauty?"

Assurances were tendered that all was satisfactory, and most cordially received.

"How should it be otherwise!" cried the old lady. "Your uncle, who was indeed your father in spirit, was a great lord. May the protection of Allah encircle his tomb! And now, beloved of my soul, rejoice with me also. My son, the Sword of the Faith, chooses a wife!"

She looked at them brightly, triumphantly, and both were of course far too well skilled in Indian ways to make any inconvenient comment. Sara who knew and guessed nothing beneath the surface was as friendly and sympathetic as could be desired, and Venetia did her best to follow suit.

"Doubtless a daughter of a great house who will strengthen the power of Mianpur, if that were possible," said Sara. "Is it permitted to ask the name of the favored lady?"

The begam surveyed them with exultation.

"Her name, oh, friends of my soul, is Shirin—which in your noble language signifies Sweet, and she is distantly allied to me, being of royal Persian blood. She travels even now through Afghanistan, and arrives next week, when the marriage will be celebrated. It is as though I received a daughter to my old arms."

Her eye on them was as keen as a parrot's. Sara met it with perfect innocence, Venetia with what passed very well for it.

"And Gulbadan Begam?" she asked, gathering her courage.

"Thu!" cried the old lady, spitting on the ground with huge scorn. "What is she? A useless childless woman that never should have entered the palace. Still, she knows her duty and is prepared to meet Shirin like a sister. It is the will of Allah."

She closed her eyes devoutly for a moment, then dived her hand beneath the uncomfortable but gorgeous pillow of stiff gold brocade.

"Here is the portrait of Shirin Begam. Scarce can my son eat or sleep for looking on her beauty which indeed resembles the immortal houris of the paradise. What is your thought?"

"Beautiful indeed," said Sara, regarding the small water-color picture with as much admiration as voice and gesture could express. It represented a pretty almond-eyed girl of the languid Persian type who could be commended without untruth. No more.

"Two most beautiful ladies has your highness shown us this time and the last!" added Sara. "Varied are the gifts of heaven in that two should be so lovely and so unlike."

"The other is indeed beautiful, but of her we know nothing," the begam replied gravely. "This is our daughter, the pillar of our house."

CHAPTER XVII.

When she laid it before Mallory next day as they sat in the gardens it was very clear to them both that the news was important and that the Europeans in Mianpur were to know nothing of the origin of Mahmud Mirza's new wife.

In their deep pity for the forsaken Gulbadan it was resolved that though Gifford must know the facts he need know nothing of the person who had revealed them to Venetia. That secret, wrung out of agony, should remain one, as far as they were concerned.

"She shall tell me nothing more," said Venetia. "I mean to stop her instantly,

whatever we lose." And Mallory agreed. It had been settled between him and Colonel Gifford that any talks they held should be in the gardens, and when Venetia had gone he waited about for him to pass, getting out the papers which were to be the pretext for the talk.

He came, quiet and cheerful as usual, but evidently with much to say, and plunged into it straightway.

"Orsinoff was murdered a month ago and they've kept it dark. The woman Natalia is supposed to have done it. I've just heard through the secret service. Keep it dead dark."

"I will indeed," said Mallory, and told Venetia's story. Gifford's eyebrows drew together.

"Then she's coming. Look out for trouble. They're foisting this woman on Mahmud Mirza—some plot of Revel's—for he loves his wife, whatever the old lady may say. You see how it all fits in? The begam's ruse about the pictures was childish, for I can't see how they hope to hide for long where she comes from. Probably she knew too what I have just heard that the rising in Fyzapur is begun. We have arrested the man who is supposed to be the leader, but that's no good now. Ah, if we could only lay our hand upon the man who is the mainspring of it all—the man who is the bond between the people in Europe and here!"

"Is it known who he is?"

"Certainly. A young man—a very wealthy one, believed in India to have extraordinary occult powers. He was last seen in Cairo. His name is Ibn ul Farid."

Mallory recoiled as if he had been shot.

"I know him. I've seen him. In Cairo."

Nothing could shake the colonel's outward composure. He never moved an eyelash.

"Be quiet—control yourself," he said in his usual quiet voice. "This is most important. Hold hard! Here comes one of Mahmud Mirza's jemadars."

The officer saluted as he passed, with the strictest punctilio, and it served better than anything else to recall Mallory to the instant needs of the situation. His careless manner matched Gifford's as he spoke again.

"I was a fool. Yes—Revel made me known to him in Cairo and he gave me a taste of his art."

"Go on. Miss nothing," Gifford threw in. "We can walk here safely for about twenty minutes more, and then I go to the palace. There's a review in the grounds."

Without a minute's loss of time Mallory detailed the scene in the courtyard in Cairo, describing Ibn ul Farid's appearance, his manner, his words—everything.

"Had he been mentioned before by Revel?"

"Certainly."

"Tell me every word about that."

Mallory began with the first meeting at Abuksa and the story of the revelation that the papyrus was hidden in the throne. He went on to his fainting fit at Shepheard's, his extraordinary dream of the museum vaults, the visit later with Revel and the finding of the empty papyrus. When he had finished with the meeting at the Carnatic and Revel's assumption of Ibn ul Farid's name for the purpose of meeting with Srinavastri, the chain he laid before Gifford was complete as far as he could make it.

"You've forgotten nothing?"

"Nothing. What do you deduce?"

"Firstly, that that papyrus is the key of the situation as far as you are concerned. It's evidently been of vital importance to their plans and therefore it's of the same importance to us to collar it. You were hocussed—or rather hypnotized at Shepheard's. Now, let's think that out. How did they do it? Had you anything on connected with the papyrus in any way?"

"Nothing. By George, yes, though. This ring—this scarab." He held the ring under Gifford's eyes. "But what's the connection?"

"Why, in the Orient far more than in the West, though it's known there too, an object connected with the subject is used for suggestion. That first visit of Revel's to Abuksa was made to find out if you had anything Ibn ul Farid could use in that way. He found out you had. Then came the scene at Shepheard's. They used your mind and ring as a mirror, saw where the papyrus was hid and one or both went off while you were unconscious and secured it. You say you missed the ring when you woke?"

"Certainly. Revel gave it back to me."

"You see? Pretty clear, I think. I wonder if it's the right ring or a fake. Let me look."

In deep anxiety Mallory pulled it off, and

first Gifford, then he, looked it over keenly. Impossible to be sure. That must be kept for later investigation. Gifford went on:

"The visions at the Cairo house were of course to get you under the spell again and make you talk. They were searching and tabulating your mind. I needn't tell you, of course, that once done, hypnotism or suggestion opens the way to further mastery by the hypnotizer. You must be careful never to allow such a thing again."

No need for caution there, Mallory told him. He had made that resolve long ago.

"Yes—but it's very quickly done, you know. I've seen a man hold up a glittering object and the other fellow go off as if he were shot. Be on your guard."

They walked a minute in silence, then Gifford went on:

"From what you say there seems a kind of mystery about Revel's servant. I suppose Ibn ul Farid is not passing himself off in that way?"

"I don't know. How should I? Heavens, what a fool I've been."

"Very far from that," the colonel said heartily. "You've given me some of the most useful information I ever had in my life. Now we must get hold of the papyrus, as I said before. I'd wager a hundred to one Revel has it in the palace and we shall never know why until we get it. Don't change a hair in your manner to him. He's the nucleus of the plot, and something in that papyrus is being used in India. Mahmud Mirza is as loyal a man as breathes, and if Ibn ul Farid were here I should suspect that this influence Revel has gained over him is based on some of their occult tricks. I don't suspect Mahmud Mirza but I fear they may use and then discard him. Possibly murder him. I wish we could get the papyrus!"

He strode away whistling carelessly. It seemed to Mallory that everything that had happened was falling now into a harmony of event and consequence. It would never be in Revel's power to deceive him any more. Henceforth it would be an equal encounter of wits.

It may be said, however, that neither he nor Gifford knew all the cards in Revel's hand.

A month later the city was en fête for Mahmud Mirza's marriage. The bride had reached the palace in the night, escorted by a guard of honor from Balkh and the bazaar was ringing with stories of her beauty and grace, the Hindus as keen as the Mohammedans. Sara and Venetia had a special invitation from the begam that when the marriage was over they might be presented to the bride, now described as Shirin Begam, daughter of Sultan Husain Mirza. All was excitement and pleasure, and as the poor Gulbadan did not appear there was no jarring note to mar the triumph.

Beneath the surface things were very different. News came in to the colonel of sporadic risings from various parts of India. As a bonfire may blow its sparks abroad and kindle new flames, so it seemed that the Fyzapur outbreak had given the signal. There was nothing to alarm the most timid in the Indian papers nor yet in such English papers as reached them, but, as Gifford explained, the government were in absolute control there and not a word was published but under the censorship. In reality the women and children were all being got into safety as far as possible and troops pouring in at Bombay and Karachi.

"Should I warn Miss Sara Bassett?" Mallory asked Gifford.

"What use? The way out of Mianpur is closed. Her anxieties will begin soon enough, and the less they are believed to know the safer they will be. You are asked to Mahmud Mirza's wedding reception, I suppose!"

Not only Mallory, but all the Mianpur world, including the "Dipty Sahib" Kincaid, were at that gorgeous reception in the palace gardens, where Mahmud Mirza received them standing in a tent of the utmost splendor, surrounded by his staff, his breast covered with orders including the Indian Constellation. A very kingly figure, though both Gifford and Mallory noticed that his eyes were haggard and brilliant and he looked ill and weary. He accepted their congratulations with perfect graciousness, and according to Eastern etiquette no allusion whatever was made to the bride; they referred simply to a joyful event in his highness' household. Revel stood at Mahmud Mirza's shoulder and the two Europeans observed how often the latter glanced at him as if at a prompter as the little talk went on.

Revel was cordiality itself. Sugary sweet champagne was served in which the guests drank their salaams to the bridegroom and the ceremony closed with the usual "God

Save the King" rendered by the palace band.

"I would give more than a little to see the bride and know what underlies all this show," said the colonel as they came away together. "Men—soldiers—are trickling quietly away out of the city and joining the enemy forces at Fyzapur. This state is so far off the beaten track that they can hold it with comparatively few men, and send off the rest where they are more needed. I am not afraid of the loyalty of the ruling princes. The fear is that men like Revel—who I believe to be agents of the Muscovia people—may worm in and get the reins. If so the lives of men like Mahmud Mirza will be no safer than our own. There is an ominous stirring in the bazaar. The next event will be an invitation to us all to put ourselves under Mahmud Mirza's protection. I heard this morning that the mails are no longer safe and only verbal messages will reach me. Things are going badly for us at Fyzapur."

"Will any native be found loyal and brave enough to risk his life as a messenger?"

"Thousands. They did in the Mutiny. They will now. When you were at Delhi didn't you see the monument commemorating the gallantry of those who fought and died there with us? There were natives in the gallant little band that blew up the Kashmir Gate. I shall send and receive news regularly. When do your friends visit the bride?"

"In four days. Is it safe?" Mallory's face was pale with anxiety. Those days and their suspense were wearing enough, but every hour of them added to his love and reverence for Venetia. It did not surprise him later when Sara, who of course knew nothing of the hidden terrors, said to him one day:

"I always did think Venetia the dearest, happiest girl in the world, but she seems happier and brighter than ever now. I can't tell you, Ken, how grateful I am to you for that. You know what I've always felt about her."

Yes, he certainly knew that, but grateful? Would Sara be particularly grateful to him if she guessed the weight of anxiety he had forced Venetia to share with him? "The lives of the English people in Mianpur may depend very much on your courage and observation"—that was the message he had carried to her from Colonel Gifford, a heavy burden for such young shoulders, though she received it with a smile. Sitting with her hand in his she would talk of none but happy things, the good days to come when all the troubles were over. And then just as he was going she would lay her velvet-soft cheek to his and say earnestly:

"Ken, I don't forget my trust. No, not for a minute," her bright eyes shining like two stars in clouds.

She saw him before she went to the palace to visit the bride. Sara was putting the last touches to an imposing toilette and the lovers had a moment together.

"Ken, supposing she isn't the woman of the picture—what shall you think then? And supposing she is, will it mean that the troubles begin here at once? Will you come over to-morrow morning? I don't like you to be walking about at night now the bazaar is so much disturbed. Promise me not to."

"As far as I can, sweetheart, but I don't know what may be necessary and I am absolutely at Gifford's disposal. You mustn't grudge me my share."

"That's the only part I don't like!" she sighed, and as Sara came in the sigh vanished in a smile and the closest watcher could have seen no trouble in the summer blue of her eyes.

The begam received them with her usual blending of pomp with somewhat down-at-heel comfort. It was never possible to forget she was a great lady, but it was also impossible not to feel sometimes that it was greatness tempered by such manners as made it extremely human.

"Praise be to Allah, we meet this day in joy," she cried, motioning them to the glass armchairs. "May the blessing of the Prophet and the twelve Imaums be upon it! But now I shall nurse a grandson on my knees, and my friends rejoice in my joy!"

"The joy of a friend is better than our own joy!" said Sara. "And in token thereof have we not brought a mean offering totally unworthy of the bride of the son of our friend? May it be accepted!"

"May your condescension increase!" cried the begam, curious as a child to see what the silk-wrapped box might contain. "Laili, summon here my daughter the bride, and inform her that the two English ladies peerless as the sun in beauty, generous as our ancestor Babar the Conqueror, are here with a noble gift for her satisfaction. Haste!"

Her look as Laili fled away was peculiar —even Sara noticed it. Venetia at once made up her mind as to the result of the mission and was therefore not in the least surprised when Laili returned breathless and unsuccessful. She spoke rapidly with the begam in Persian, and the latter threw up her hands in a most expressive gesture.

"Compassion of Allah, what a misfortune! Well is it said that every light has its shadow. Here is my bride, and but this morning did she say to me that her whole soul panted to behold my two moons of delight and hear their mellifluous voices. And now has she been eating too many sweetmeats and her head aches to bursting nor can she raise it. May your favor and forgiveness be upon her!"

They both sympathized, Sara sincerely, for she knew the habits of the zenana too well to feel any surprise at the statement.

"Carry in this box to the women of Shirin Begam," ordered the old lady. "But my little lambs, tell me what it contains and so shall my heart be at peace, for surely a closed box is a mote in the eye of curiosity until the lid is raised."

She was gratified with a peep at the really beautiful smelling bottle of gold, the stoppers set with pearls and coral, which Sara had spared from her treasures, and then Venetia cautiously intruded a question:

"The world has heard of the beauty of the begam herself when she was a bride. Is her new daughter as lovely?"

The delighted old lady broke into a flood of reminiscence and comparison. Her daughter-in-law was a Peri, a houri, but she herself had certainly had hair that touched the ground, whereas the bride's did not reach her knees. "Still, her beauty is comparable only to the full moon and the sweetness of her voice to honey. She—but what is this, Laili?" For Laili, called by some mysterious signal to the door, returned with a deep obeisance and a missive bound with silk, which the begam tore open and read at once. She flung it on the divan and began to weep loudly and demonstratively.

"Ya Allah, who can say what a day shall bring forth? Surely He raises and abases and who shall question. Favored of my soul, these words are from my son, the Sword of the Faith. He says: 'Say to the ladies, the nieces of the great Kumpsioner Sahib whom we loved, that there is danger. There is a rising among the low persons of the bazaars, and it is necessary until these are dealt with, that the two ladies should abide under the protection of my mother the Shah Begam, and there shall they be entertained in safety and magnificence, and when the danger is past they shall depart in peace and gratitude.' It is an order!"

"Do you mean that we are not to leave here now?" asked Venetia, her very lips blanching at the thought of this sudden separation from Mallory. Could any one have guessed, have suspected that she was watching and was this the means taken to cut off information? She stood up.

"Your highness, we must go. It is impossible I should stay here. You know that Mallory Sahib and I are betrothed and if there is any danger I cannot be separated from him. He will protect my sister and me. Sara, come! We must go at once."

Sara, utterly perplexed for the moment, looked from Venetia to the begam in consternation and said nothing. The begam wrung her hands:

"Ya Allah, what are we to do with her? Verily love is a fever in the young, and even the aged are not exempt. Miss Sahib—lamb of my heart, my son must be obeyed! The gates are closed and none may leave or enter without his seal. Would he say there were danger if there were not? The scoundrels of the bazaar have broken loose, and it can but be a day or more before they are restrained."

"I will go to Mallory Sahib!" Venetia repeated immovably.

"My own dear, have you considered?" Sara entreated in English. "You know how kind and loyal these people have always been. If they say it is unsafe, do you suppose Ken would wish you to run into danger? Be patient."

"Sara, you don't understand. You don't know. I must go. I will. You must stay here if you will, but I shall go."

"Run, Laili, run! and have word sent to Mahmud Mirza Sultan that the young Miss Sahib is run as mad as Mejnoon and declares she will not stay in safety, no, not if they massacre her in the bazaar. Represent to him that all her talk is of Mallory Sahib and his danger, and ask his commands." She turned to Sara:

"Friend of my soul, vein of my heart, quiet your sister until Mahmud Mirza shall have spoken. I will depart a moment and leave you to reason with her. Inscrutable

are the judgments of the All-seeing. Attend me, Laili!"

She waddled off and the two were left together. Sara put her arm about Venetia and tried to draw her to her breast, but she was cold and unresponsive as marble, her thoughts fixed in sternest concentration. It was not her own danger nor even Sara's that occupied her mind.

"Hush, Sara, don't talk for a minute. I want to think," she said, and stared over her sister's shoulder at the window. How could she get word to Mallory? How would this affect his plans and Gifford's? Her deadly fear was lest her dropping out might affect the whole chain of communication. And yet—if that could be held intact there might be opportunities for knowledge in the palace that she could never get elsewhere. How should she know?

"Sara," she said so suddenly that Sara started back. "I should not mind staying here if you think it best, if I could know what has happened to Ken. Do you suppose Mahmud Mirza would see us for a moment? That would set my mind at rest."

"He might," Sara said doubtfully. "Of course we have always known him. Who should we ask?"

Oddly enough, though Sara had invariably led hitherto it was Venetia who was taking command now. At the moment it seemed quite natural. Neither of them realized the strangeness of it. She thought a moment, then clapped her hands to call one of the zenana women. It was Laili's younger sister Aziza who ran in. They knew her well.

"I desire that word be sent to his highness Mahmud Mirza Sultan that the nieces of his friend thank him for his hospitality and desire to speak with him that they may ask a question." Venetia spoke with a kind of stern gravity. Aziza, listening with the wondering eyes of some little woodland creature, salaamed and ran off to seek the begam and lay this new and startling development before her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Meanwhile, Gifford and Mallory at the rest house were considering a message written in faultless English and brought by a guard of Mahmud Mirza's sowars—gallant figures on their reined-up black horses, the little pennons fluttering on their lances. It was from the diwan—the minister whom they had often seen in attendance—and conveyed the intimation of danger and promise of safety in the palace. The Miss Sahibs were already under the Begam Shah's protection, and if any other European ladies were in the Mianpur principality they would be brought in. Kincaid Sahib had also been notified but had preferred to retire to Sellore, much against the advice of the Mianpur court.

The two men spoke French in discussing it:

"What is your opinion? Are we most useful inside or outside?" Mallory asked.

"Inside," the colonel replied promptly. "All my information is that there is no real danger yet in Mianpur. Revel is pulling the strings and has frightened Mahmud Mirza with his responsibilities for European lives. He and the new wife are plotting for all they are worth, and they want to make us prisoners in the palace so that we shall not know what goes on. They will send us to the summer palace in the lake on pretense of greater safety. Easy to row guard there, you know, and we shall not be able to see the Muscovia lady. We are all as right as rain unless Revel and the woman bedevil Mahmud Mirza body and soul. But my diagnosis is that, as they are out to make India a Muscovian community, Mahmud and the other ruling princes will have as short a shrift as they can devise, and then of course, we are in the deuce of a tight place."

"But," asked Mallory, "can you carry on there? Can you get information when you're interned in the middle of the lake? And are there other English in the State?"

Colonel Gifford smiled a little.

"I was prepared for this some time ago. Moreover—do you suppose that if they lay a finger on Mahmud Mirza we shall not have partisans all over Mianpur to avenge him? Even then I don't give up hope altogether. India can never be Muscovian. We shall have a fearful catastrophe no doubt, but the people will come to their senses as a man does after a debauch on drugs. Revel and his allies are drugging the country into madness now. No, there are no other English in Mianpur."

"Will it be possible for us to see the ladies?"

"I think so. That was allowed when

Mahmud's predecessor sheltered our folk before. Now—are you content? I must write."

Mallory agreed and the message was written and dispatched, half the guard remaining with two led horses to conduct them to the palace. They hurried through their packing and then rode off, noticing as they went that though the selling stalls were closed there was hardly any one about and not a sign of disturbance in the city.

They were received in the great reception room by the diwan, a stout elderly man with a stubbly black beard, who looked thoroughly disturbed and uneasy. He salaamed profusely and seemed to hesitate in introducing the subject.

"I beg to represent," said Gifford, very erect and on strict service, "that we have come to place ourselves under your master's august protection according to his counsel. It is now proper that we should have the reasons for his proposal."

There was the note of authority veiled in the courtesy of the little speech. The diwan certainly could not be surprised by it, but he hesitated painfully.

"On general lines, Colonel Sahib," he said at last, "it is known to you that there is a deplorable tension in the public mind. His highness cannot guard you and the ladies as he wishes in the town and therefore he has had preparations made in the Farhat Bakhsh Palace for your honorable reception."

"The Lake Palace? We thank his highness. We understand the ladies are with her highness the Begam Shah now."

"Certainly, Colonel Sahib, and they will also be provided for together with yourselves in the Farhat Bakhsh."

Mallory had an enormous feeling of relief in hearing this. To be under the same roof with Venetia, possibly to see her walking in the little lovely rose garden all shaded with trees which had been made on the tiny island—he felt he could endure anything while that was possible.

"The ladies desired to see my master, for the information startled them," the diwan went on, "but he judged it would be more agreeable if he communicated with them through the sahibs."

"No doubt, no doubt," the colonel agreed. "Then may we expect to see his highness now?"

"Unfortunately he slept ill and is indisposed. I beg to represent the pleasure is only postponed. If——"

An almost noiseless step interrupted him and starting violently the minister turned to meet Revel. Mallory thought he had never seen him look so handsome, so cool and unembarrassed.

"I have just heard what has happened," he said gravely. "If you gentlemen are inconvenienced in any way by such a hurried move, all I have is at your disposal. His highness has commissioned me to see that everything is done for your comfort."

"Do I understand that you represent his highness?" asked the colonel amiably.

"By no means. But he imagined that being a European I should be more likely to understand your requirements. You have only to name them as far as possibilities go."

"We are very grateful. When do we embark for the Farhat Bakhsh?"

"In half an hour, I believe. The ladies go in the same boat. You will wish that?"

"Certainly. One other matter—does his highness insure us free communication by mail and otherwise with the outer world?"

"As far as his powers go. But you are aware that the Fyzapur State is in a very disturbed condition, and on the southern border Chilanbad is impassable with roving bands of dacoits. It is almost impossible to get things through now. For the last two days he has been trying and has failed."

"It is most unfortunate," the colonel said in a tone of annoyance very natural in the circumstances, "for I wish to communicate with my relatives and lawyer, but after all, if his highness is in the same predicament we should not complain. Well, Mr. Revel, we are ready when the boat is."

Revel went away and they were left once more with the diwan. The little podgy man walked up and down the room evidently perturbed beyond all bounds of Oriental etiquette. Gifford followed him.

"Kwaja Hussein!" he said, "I have known you for many years and have ever found in you the heart of honesty and the tongue of truth. Has Revel Sahib authority here or has he not?"

"Do not ask me, Huzoor. It is not for the servant to speak when the master is silent. But I fear for my master. Very greatly do I fear."

He escaped without another word and Gifford resumed his French as he strolled

to the window with an air of ease that would have deceived any listener.

"You see, Mallory? Mischief's afoot. Remember now, in case we are separated—but we shall not be yet—that the papyrus is the point, and all Miss Venetia can hear through the women is invaluable. The view from this window is unrivaled, is it not?"

Mallory answered, little suspecting that through a grille contrived in the ornament over the great door watchers on the floor above could observe every one in the reception room at their ease. A pair of eyes, dark and beautiful, strained to see his every movement and each detail of his face. A voice he had never heard murmured, "Thou endest the night," in a kind of fierce rapture, while white fingers clasped over an amethyst scarab he would have recognized very readily.

"Bored?" asked the colonel coming back to him.

"Well, just a bit!" he admitted. "Don't like the wait between the acts."

The colonel chuckled under his mustache.

"You may come to be thankful for even that, Mallory Sahib," he said.

In half an hour's time there was spectacle enough to content the greediest, for as they walked down the courtyard which opened to the lake a very striking scene met his eyes. The sunset was burning on the water in a splendor of gold and rose, and on its fiery reaches a mile away lay the white marble palace, flushed like an Alp with the sun's last kiss. It looked as unreal, as visionary as the palace of a dream. The Sleeping Beauty might have awaited her lover beneath those exquisite cupolas—the Queen of Fairyland have embarked in the magnificent barge curved high and golden with fretted carving at bow and stern, its rowers glittering in gold and crimson above their gilded oars and its canopy and curtains of rose dragon brocade from China.

But it was not the splendor that struck Mallory dumb. It was that he had seen it all before—in a courtyard in Cairo.

Sara and Venetia, very quiet and controlled, were sitting hidden under the canopy as the men stepped on board. They said nothing but it was not difficult to understand the look of relief as they appeared. Mallory set the time at once by greeting them in French, touching Venetia's hand furtively as he spoke. It was good to be near her again.

"Are we prisoners or guests? I can't quite make out," said Sara. "I interviewed the begam before we started, but as she was alternately weeping and devouring Turkish Delight I made very little headway. My sister was much more enterprising. She demanded to see our host but was told he was ill."

"So were we," said Mallory. "Isn't this the most unexpected turn of fortune? Never mind—so long as we're together. Colonel Gifford says there's nothing to fear."

Venetia looked into his eyes.

"I wasn't afraid in the ordinary way, Ken. I was only afraid of not being able to see you."

He understood the double meaning of her words and so did Colonel Gifford. They knew they had a fearless ally in her.

It was a very strange experience when they landed at the lovely marble pier of the Farhat Bakhsh and crossed a lacework bridge to the rose garden. Seen from there across the water the palace of Mianpur loomed dark and threatening like a thundercloud overhanging the town. The lights were beginning to be lit, especially the large one on the western tower known as the Moon of the Shah that was always kept burning when Mahmud Mirza was in residence. They stood a moment or two looking back and then turned to the palace, Venetia following with Mallory to the Hathi Pol—the Elephant Gate—where several officers of the household waited to receive them. The women were led to the zenana and given into the care of two of the begam's ladies, the men to their rooms looking sheer over the water, the windows only about twelve feet above it; and having seen these they were taken to the Painted Hall, a beautiful little chamber of carved marble, white, blue and veined with gray, the effect being marvelously delicate and refined.

"Here," said the ressaldar who escorted them, "the Madam Sahibs will also sit when it pleases them. They have indeed a divan room of their own, but it may be their pleasure to come hither."

Mahmud Mirza had certainly left them nothing to complain of in their accommodation as far as lay in his power.

It lessened the difficulties for them very much that they spoke Hindustani perfectly, and even a few words of Persian. Mallory envied that power and was trying to make up leeway himself with the colonel's help.

Two quiet weeks followed—another wait between the acts, and it was impossible to guess what was happening in the beautiful city across the lake. It might have been another planet for all they knew—all, that is, except Gifford. It was on the last day as Mallory and he were smoking in the rose garden that he said laconically:

"What would you make of the message I have had this morning? Any good at guessing riddles?"

He paused a moment, then added:

"This did service once in Indian history, but my informants of course have altered the numbers. 'A great pearl has been dissolved, two gold mohurs have been lost, and of the silver and copper coins are vanished ten.' Is that decipherable?"

"Not to me. I know a gold mohur means a coin."

"It means simply this. Mahmud Mirza has been murdered with two of his ministers and ten of the minor officials."

The colonel was leaning on the marble balustrade looking down into the placid water that lapped against it. With a violent effort Mallory repressed a start of horror. He glanced furtively over his shoulder. No one was in sight but the rosebushes and hibiscus might hide a listener.

"Go on," he said in a stifled voice.

"Not much more to tell. I have been expecting this, as you know. It means that Revel and the woman are in the saddle, and what their next move will be, who can tell! I wish we knew who that woman is. It might throw some light on her future doings. Does she belong, I wonder, to one of the small states that has such wrongs to avenge on the greater powers! Is she Armenian, Muscovian, what?"

"If I told you what I think, you would say I was a raving lunatic. You would never trust me with a secret again."

"My dear fellow, in the secret service what most men call lunacies are the mainsprings of great events. I shall laugh at nothing you say. It may be of vital consequence at this terrible time. For I must tell you that the nawab at Fyzapur has also been murdered with his ministers and two other ruling princes. You will see that the Muscovians are breaking up all the loyalties which might help the British Raj. This is steadily spreading throughout the land. Now, light your cigar and chat, as it were, but tell me."

Mallory sat on top of the balustrade, his long legs swinging carelessly as he talked. The sound of the water was like a kiss against the marble, the faintest breeze breathed in their faces ineffably sweet with rose perfume as Mallory's grim tale unfolded itself, from point to point, and Gifford listened, yawning now and then and flinging rose petals into the lake, but with the bright of his eye fixed intently on Mallory.

"And this was the prophecy Alphonse had copied: 'The great white people'—of Atlantis—'shall put on again the garment of flesh, and their sinews shall be iron and their strength terrible. They shall dwell in a cold land of the North and come out from it like locusts and run over the earth with wings and wheels, and the nations shall tremble and abase themselves, and the sign shall be that the dead Queen Nefert, she whose body lies in the land of Egypt, shall return from the land of the dead. She shall glory in her beauty. She shall live and triumph.' "

"Interesting. Go on!" said the colonel, feeling for another cigar.

"Then there were the hieroglyphics we found with the body. Walworth read them for us: 'The Queen Nefert. She went down to the grave with scorn and loathing. With scorn and loathing shall she return. Break not down the door. Cast not down the stone lest she arise and come very terrible in hatred. In the same form shall she come and her sign is war and terror.' Then there was a curse on those who break the seal. And we broke it."

"Go on. Give me every point," said the quiet voice. "Light a cigarette. Let's look as casual as we can."

Mallory gave every point, conscious all the time that it sounded far more like a fairy tale than sober information for the secret service. He ended almost despairingly.

"Do you think there's anything in reincarnation, Gifford? I never gave it a thought until all this, but after all the greater part of the world believes it, and if it were true——"

" 'The geography of that country is written only by those who have never visited it,' " Gifford quoted. "How can we know? But I'll go as far as this—I have found it more than once a very sufficient working hypothesis in India. Let us work on it

now. Tell me—do you associate Revel with this woman's past?"

"Ah, we must wait for the papyrus to tell us that. I do associate him with it of late, but I have no reason for it as yet. But hush—here's Venetia. Must we tell her about Mahmud Mirza?"

"No—no. She'll know it soon enough. We want to keep their hope and courage going."

She came, walking leisurely and daintily under her white sun umbrella lined with pink.

For a few minutes she spoke of the view of the city, the flowers, anything. Then quietly:

"The begam is coming here to-day and the women have a rumor that Mahmud Mirza is ill. Doesn't it seem strange she should come away when he is ill? I believe he is dead. Sara and I remember when the other son Ahmad Mirza died and it was hidden for a fortnight. There is something mysterious about this. It looks ominous to me."

Mallory looked at Gifford with a kind of triumph. His face said, "Trust her altogether. She will not fail." Gifford responded at once. He was too good a judge of human stuff to be mistaken either in man or woman, given the opportunity of judging. With brevity and simplicity he told her all he knew.

"You can't be too guarded, Miss Venetia. The begam will not know, but, for your life, watch any hints she lets drop about Revel. That may be her salvation as well as our own. And, of all things, win Gulbadan Begam's confidence. Don't scruple, for you will probably save her life if we are armed with knowledge. At present I should say it is scarcely worth an hour's purchase, with that devil in the palace. Gulbadan's jealousy will have kept her alert."

"If it is dangerous for her to do this, even now I forbid it," Mallory interposed. "Is it fair—is it fair, I ask you, now we have come to this, to put a woman in the post of danger? I never guessed it would be a service of blood and ruin like this when it began."

"My dear fellow, when I said Gulbadan's life was not worth an hour's purchase I might have said the same of Miss Venetia's and all our lives and of the British Raj in India. She is a brave woman and being a woman can do what we cannot. She is fighting for her life and for us all. Let her judge."

"Ken agrees with you absolutely, Colonel Gifford, and so do I," Venetia answered with her fearless smile. "I shall be thankful for this chance of helping, to the last day of my life, whether it comes to-morrow or fifty years hence. And so will he. Now, walk about with me a little and then I will go in. Sara has a bad headache."

CHAPTER XIX.

In the afternoon they saw the state barges put off, and the begam came attended by Laili and her favorite ladies. A few were left at the palace to serve Shirin Begam, she told Venetia. Always voluble, she was so hurried and flurried by the sudden removal that at first she was scarcely coherent, but after a while she settled down into comfort and gossip, and the most hospitable satisfaction that Venetia and her sister were at the Farhat Bakhsh.

"For indeed, lamb of my soul, the scoundrels of the city are very insolent persons, and it is credibly told me that they have plundered the guest house and murdered the keeper. Therefore it is understood by you that my son, the Sword of the Faith, judged wisely in sheltering you and your sister here. Great is his wisdom!"

"Great indeed!" Venetia repeated, sick at heart to see the poor mother in ignorance of her loss and ruin. "May God be good to him in all his comings and goings!"

"It is certain that He will!" the begam said proudly, "for it is noticeable that the worthy are under the Protection. But seat yourself by me and tell me of your sister. A pain in the temples, her head like a coal of fire. What words are these, my child? Ya Allah, this must not be neglected! Run, Laili, fly for the prescription that the doctor gave me when I ailed at Sikanderbagh. Lose not a moment in foolish chatter according to thy wont!"

Laili, who little deserved this rebuke, darted off like a hare and in less than five minutes the precious paper was in the begam's hand.

She looked triumphantly at Venetia.

"Maryan Khanam whose skill is known shall compound the medicine and fear not but you see the face of the Miss Sahib shining with health the morn's morrow. Run, Laili, give this to Maryan Khanam

and desire that she be speedy. And now, to talk, Heart's Delight."

Venetia had but to listen as it poured on —a torrent of the little affairs of the zenana —and indeed her attention wandered until a name arrested it.

"And the wise exult not in the morning, but when the day is done, and had I known what now I know I had not given my chain of opals to Shirin Begam."

"And why not, highness?"

The old lady lowered her voice and glanced about her. For the moment they were practically alone, for Laili was preparing her pipe at the end of the hall and the newly arrived ladies were all making arrangements for their own and their mistress' comfort.

"Lamb of my soul, the Frankish women are not as the women of Hind. To them one may speak and it is as if a stone were dropped in a well—it goes no farther. To you then I say thus—Shirin Begam unveiled her face this day to a man, to Revel Sahib, for she received him in the Garden Pavilion hall and there spoke with him with only one woman in attendance, Hamada Khanam —may her countenance be cold before Allah!—and this lasted for half an hour, and Laili brought me word."

The eyes she fixed on Venetia were round with horror and indeed Venetia knew it must have been a terrible shock for the begam.

"It is very strange, O mother!" was all she dared to say.

"It is so strange that if my son hear it he has the right to pack her back to her own people—or worse," said the begam ominously.

"But surely a lady of your highness' own family would not act so amiss!" Venetia ventured cautiously.

"Of my own family, girl—thu!" cried the begam, spitting in disgust and totally forgetting her former assertion. "It is foolishness to anoint a rat's head with oil of jasmine, and to treat an infidel as one of the princes is no less folly. She is——"

But Laili approached with the pipe and the begam, receiving it, made a gesture of understanding common to all countries. She winked unroyally but peremptorily. Laili withdrew to the window.

With all the air of indifference she could muster Venetia attempted a step farther.

"Has your highness known who this Revel Sahib is? Surely his honor and worth must be high if Shirin Begam thus honors him, and has he not been as the right hand of the Sultan Mahmud Mirza?"

Again the begam lowered her voice:

"O Moon of the World, surely it is known to you that Revel Sahib is a mighty magician, comparable only to Solomon the Wise. Great seeings has he shown my son of his wealth and advancement even to heights I name not, and who can resist the power of the evil spirits? Have not I myself seen wonders at the hands of Revel Sahib—such things as caused my heart to burn within me for pride! The future is as an open page before him."

The fear and awe in her face were so great, the superstition of the Oriental vibrant and conquering, that Venetia to recall her to herself recited the great Moslem formula: "There is no power save in God the Supreme, the Compassionate," and it calmed the old woman, who devoutly repeated it after her.

"True, O young and wise, most true. Yet the heart of my son was swayed like a creeper in the wind. Revel Sahib and this woman Shirin—but what do I, a talkative old woman, wasting the time of the Consumer of Hearts that would be sitting by her sister or talking with her lord to be? Go, my child, in the protection of Allah, and may the medicine bring health to the sister who is even as your mother."

Venetia rose obedient at the signal of dismissal and asked but one question more.

"Gulbadan Begam, your highness? Is she also come?"

"She is come, but sits silent. I bethink me that I was hasty with the child. This at least I know. She would be hewn in pieces ere she would show her face to Revel Sahib or any man. Talk with her, lamb of my soul, and bid her be comforted. Tell her a man's heart may make a day's journey and yet return to his home."

This was an unheard-of concession from the begam and it touched Venetia inexpressibly, knowing that the royal heart she spoke of had set out on the journey, longer than that to any woman, from which there is no return.

"Indeed I will see her," she said warmly. "Now, this minute, if I may."

"Run, Laili, conduct the Miss Sahib to Gulbadan Begam."

Venetia could never forget the scene that

followed. Laili brought her through devious passages to a small room of purest marble, with a long window jealously latticed with marble trellises of sea-foam beauty, looking toward the city and the dark palace over a mile and more of water, with the evening rising like mist from its hushed surface. Lights were lit in the palace. It glittered like a constellation, and above it shone on the western tower the great light—Moon of the Shah—which denoted the presence of Mahmud Mirza in his city. Gulbadan Begam sat, darkly beautiful, on a pile of cushions, a dim lamp burning at her elbow, her head pressed against the lattice, her eyes steadfastly fixed on the far-away light that spoke of her lord. She neither turned nor moved when Venetia entered and Laili made a frightened little salaam and vanished. No lady was in attendance. The young begam sat absolutely alone.

There was silence for a minute, and then gathering her failing courage, for grief is more terrible than sovereignty, Venetia advanced very softly and knelt on a cushion by the girl, and still she neither spoke nor moved, and the minutes went by.

Suddenly, as they watched, the brilliant light, the Moon of the Shah, was extinguished, and from the city came the sound of a great multitude mixed with wailing of women, and as this happened the young queen threw her head backward and covered her face with her hands.

"My sister, my sister!" cried Venetia, all the founts of pity broken up and pouring from her eyes.

It was some minutes before Gulbadan spoke, and then with a cruel self-control more touching than any demonstration. She held Venetia's hand in a tight cold clasp all the while.

"My sister, strengthen me. Weaken me not with tears, for my task is before me. What now you see I knew yesterday, and have endured alone but for my foster mother Zaynab—may Allah approve her, for she is a good woman. And now, since it is not possible for me to see Gifford Sahib and Mallory Sahib, will my sister be my tongue and my heart and bear my words to them?"

Her eyes were burning into Venetia's with a fearful earnestness, her grip strengthened until it hurt.

"What you tell me I will faithfully repeat."

"Then bend your ear while I whisper."

They sat cheek to cheek as the passionate whisper went on.

"This man, this woman, have murdered my lord. For this reason she came. They are brother and sister and of all things most evil, and because the people about him were faithful, and therefore Revel Sahib could not slay him, he brought the woman that my lord might trust her and die. But this is not all, for my lord's heart was mine, but Revel Sahib made him see this woman in waking dreams and visions until her beauty so possessed him that he could dream of nothing else waking or sleeping. And in these visions also he showed him how he might be Emperor of India and of the world, so that he should be called World Conqueror, like his forefather Aurungzeb. It is a great and fearful magic, Miss Sahib, and he does it through the power of a certain ring shaped like a beetle and full of enchantments, for when that ring is on the hand of any man or woman they must see as Revel Sahib wills. And they are lying visions."

She paused for a moment, shaking from head to foot as if her slight frame could not sustain the weight of the passion that poured through. Venetia, trembling also, clung to her. Presently she composed herself and went on:

"Thus, by these two, all power was taken from my lord, and the diwan saw it and could do nothing, for what are men to fight against the evil spirits? And all my lord's soldiers were sent forth to slay and murder in Fyzapur and throughout the provinces, and there is a great fire kindled in India and it is the work of these two."

Again a tense silence, and over the water came the sound of the multitude like the cry of a wild beast that seeks its prey; and close at hand in the Palace of the Lake where they sat arose a piercing cry of the lamentation of women.

"At last his mother knows," said Gulbadan somberly. "I had thought when an only child died the very winds would carry the news to a mother. But no—she did not know until they put out the light as they had put out the light of his life. The love of a wife is more. But, speak for me, beloved lady, all I have said, and tell them this; that while these two live the world goes down to hell. Let them slay them as they would slay the foul fiend. This is my

word. I have spoken. Now leave me to my anguish."

Venetia still clung to her, and kissed the cold cheek.

"My sister, have comfort. Shall not death restore what death has taken?"

Gulbadan did not hear. Her mind was weary miles away beside a dead man in the palace of Mianpur. Once more she roused herself.

"Yes, and add this also to my words. They have a charm, very ancient, written on a paper whereof I have not seen the like, and this also they use for the bewilderment of men. Let it be burned with them!"

She spoke with a cold concentration that was fearful in its intensity, then drew her hand away and turned once more to the practice. Again the dreadful silence. It lasted so long that at last Venetia broke it.

"One last word. Where do they hide that paper?"

"Revel Sahib wears it about his neck." The voice seemed to come from a great distance. Her thoughts were already out of reach. There was no more to be done or said.

At the door she met Zayrab, white as a sheeted ghost, standing on guard.

"She should not be alone!" Venetia said, the tears falling from her eyes. "Oh, go to her and do not leave her for one moment. The water is too near."

The curtain fell across the doorway, and she saw them no more, but as she passed alone along the passages she heard the sound of bitter weeping from the rooms of the mother.

Food was brought to the party of three in the Painted Hall as usual, but it was hurriedly eaten, for the news of the catastrophe was now spread openly through the Lake Palace and grief and fear were in every face. Sara too was worse and Venetia anxious to be with her, yet felt she must not lose a moment in giving the fateful message of Gulbadan Begam.

They went out into the veranda afterward to watch the path of glory on the water that led to the tragic city with its dead, and there the colonel considerately left them and strolled down, a black figure, to the balustrades that overhung the lake, while Venetia in the fewest, barest words told her story, trembling lest even the leaves should be listeners, and then glided away to her post in the upper rooms.

Mallory immediately went down to the colonel. He listened with the utmost attention to the story, making a few laconic comments here and there, and when it was finished stood a moment considering.

"This clears up a good deal, Mallory. I think it is clear now that your ring was stolen in Cairo and that they use it for the purpose of hypnosis. He gave it back to you after the museum business, no doubt, but it was taken again while they had you under the influence in that house in Cairo. You know the Indian superstition of the Doubles. A pair of amulets is made exactly alike and the wearer of the one is called the Giver, and the wearer of the other the Taker, and neither can act without the other. They took your ring from you there to use on Mahmud Mirza in conjunction with Revel's. What you are now wearing is a fake. Knowing this I don't fear they can hypnotize you any more, unless indeed he gets the real ring back to you now Mahmud Mirza is done for."

"But why should he want me—what good can I be?"

"A renegade Englishman—one who knows things they cannot know, may always be useful," returned Gifford gravely. "Be on your guard—especially against the woman."

"You don't think she will be seen openly?"

"Certainly. Now for my news. The whole peninsula is breaking into flame and at Cawnpore and Meerut the horrors of 1857 have been repeated. Muscovia is pulling the strings and the loyal princes are all either slaughtered or marked for death. The Hindus have united with the Moslems and officers from Muscovia are leading them. In Mianpur Srinavastri is Revel's right-hand man, finding huge sums of money, and behind him is a man named Pir Khan, a Sayyad—a descendant of the Prophet—and he is preaching a Holy War in which all parties and beliefs can unite. If indeed your wild fancy were true, you let loose a scourge worse than Attila upon the world when you opened that tomb."

Mallory clenched his hand.

"If I did I'll close it again, colonel. He shall not find me the fool he has always made me. Gulbadan Begam is right. The death of those two devils is the only remedy."

"They will not be easy to get at. But make your plan—that can do no harm.

Now for another matter. All our lives are pretty uncertain. I think you should give the ladies this little packet and tell them a few grains on the tongue will put them painlessly and swiftly beyond the reach of danger. It is an easier way than shooting. You had better have some too, in case you are disarmed. Otherwise you and I would naturally prefer shot or steel. And another thing. You should know how I communicate in case I go first. Swimmers brave the crocodiles and bring news under my window. The password here or on land is the old Thug password: *Ali Khan bhai salaam*—'The Peace to Ali Khan My Brother.' Now I must dispatch my message."

When they parted the way was straight before them as far as human foresight could straighten it—but the unreckonable, the unforeseen was upon them.

Next morning he gave Venetia the packet and the instructions, his lips set and white, and yet half disbelieving in the reality of the horror that was upon them. She accepted it without any show of emotion that could weaken either of them—even smiling a little.

"I will take care of it and I know it will make your mind easier that we have it," was all she said, and then turned to another subject. "Sara is worse this morning. I fear she is very ill. I wish we had a doctor. The begam is prostrate, Laili tells me. I pity her with all my heart. As for Gulbadan——"

Her look finished the sentence. Gulbadan still sat by the window. Zaynab had moistened her lips with milk, but still she neither spoke nor moved, looking steadfastly toward the city.

Toward two o'clock in the afternoon the two men watching saw the state barges putting out once more from the Palace of Mianpur.

Revel? Shirin? It was a moment of strained suspense, and when Venetia left them to return to Sara her hand was hovering over the packet in her bosom and the men knew it might well be they should never meet again.

CHAPTER XX.

Colonel Gifford shut up his glasses and turned to Mallory.

"They will have landed in ten minutes."

"Yes. Have you formed any idea of what is likely to happen?"

"To a certain extent. I was watching then for a signal from the city. They have murdered Kincaid, the deputy commissioner. Revel is on board and Shirin Begam, as the natives call her. And I had word a while ago that all is over at Fyzapur and the Muscovian party in power. In Satispur also. Srinavastri has pulled the strings there for them. There is a heavy account piling up against these gentlemen. Our government will pay it off one day. But not yet."

The colonel caught his sad fixed look and answered it:

"Don't fret about Miss Venetia, boy. Her courage is of a finer quality than any woman's I've ever known, and she has the means of safe and swift deliverance for her sister and herself. Need one so bitterly regret a thing like that even for the people one loves? Death lays an ungentle hand on us sooner or later. What I have given her is a gentle one. Besides, hope is not over. We don't know what Revel's plans are. The women's lives may be essential to them. A man doesn't want to damn himself unnecessarily. The whole world would ring with it if he injured them."

Who could tell what Revel might do? Mallory shook his head and did not speak. The silent barge was drawing close to the pier. One last word Gifford uttered as they turned to meet it.

"Revel is Ibn ul Farid. The man in Cairo was only a fake—a nobody. Revel is the man, but keep his identity to yourself and remember that if in any way you can rid the world of him you will have rid it of a monster that deserves hell as well as death. That is my own fixed determination, and if I snuff out I leave it to you."

Mallory put out his hand quietly and gripped the colonel's. It was the seal of a covenant that needed no seal. But Fate has her own secrets.

The boat was at the pier. They stood watching as the rowers tossed oars in a salute, and the curtains of the canopy parted, and Revel came out, leading a woman. Revel! But at first they doubted and with reason, for he was dressed in a uniform unknown to either of them except by name, a red uniform frogged and decorated with silver, and a cap of the same, of the German type, with the peak pulled forward over his eyes. A sword by his side.

"Muscovia," said the colonel serenely. Mallory nodded.

The woman was dressed as a native lady and the veil thrown over her head hid her face completely. She walked with a light strong step beside Revel along the pier where a guard had formed up, and behind them followed four men evidently acting as a staff. Mallory recognized three of them as officers he had seen in attendance on Mahmud Mirza. Now they wore the alien uniform and apparently without shame. The group advanced toward the two men who waited there so silently.

Revel leaned lightly on his sword as he spoke.

"You're my prisoners—the women also," he said. "You expected that."

"Certainly," the colonel agreed. "We have no means of resistance, but you know what you will have to answer for to our government."

Revel put that aside, smiling, as a matter of no importance.

"What are your intentions as regards the ladies?" Mallory demanded.

"No decision has yet been come to," was the answer. "For yourself—you are under arrest. You are responsible for them, Azaf Khan."

"Will you have the goodness to tell me what government, what power you represent?" the colonel said calmly, and with a touch of contempt.

"The Free Brotherhood, the principles which, starting in Muscovia, have overflowed the world. Against this there is no appeal. They are supreme at this moment in eight of the principalities, and the British are being driven into the sea in Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta and Madras."

The veiled woman stood rigidly by his side while he spoke. Revel turned to Azaf Khan.

"Take them to their rooms. They overhang the water on the west side. See that boats row guard there night and day."

They were led off without any further notice. It was a respite, however short, and already the colonel's brain was busy with plans for the future. It would not cut off his communication, for he had foreseen all possibilities and though the swimming messages must cease he had a complete code of signals with the city. His first concern was to transmit these new developments. As to Revel's words, he discounted a good deal. The government in India is like a majestic oak. The attention concentrates on the splendor and strength of the waving branches, but none save those in the secret know how far and deep the massive roots go below the surface, gripping into the very rock. He almost smiled as he thought of Revel's assertion. In a way Revel seemed to him a very poor creature, even as men despise the writhing cobra, though his fang is death.

The guard led them into their two communicating rooms, dropped the curtains before the entrance and stationed sentries in the corridor outside.

Revel and the veiled woman walked slowly through the rose garden.

"So that is he!" she said in Persian, and her voice was sweet as dropping honey. "Send him a dream to-night, Ibn ul Farid, my brother, that shall make him desire me, for he shall be mine. I swear it by this new-fangled Allah of the Moslems."

Revel looked at her keenly.

"He *is* yours, my sister. I have bedeviled him with dreams already in Cairo so that he knows not truth from falsehood. Was it not through him we have the papyrus and the story of Nefert the Queen? And we have made your beauty like to her beauty that he might believe and be ruined. Very cunning have I been in the service."

"Forget not also to commend Ibrahim the Jew for his fabrication of the scarab," she said, touching the scarab on her breast set in the outspread wings of Mut. "It was a mind, a great and mighty mind that compelled the dead queen of the ancient land into our service and made her our slave. But now, O brother, O wise one, what is your heart's desire?"

"Power. Conquering and to conquer!" he said sternly. "To raise Asia against the West and trample it under our feet and to set free the delights and glories of the ancient days, to rule the world once more and flood it with love and color and pomp and music. Down with these gray dull nations that toil for gold and know not its use when they have it! Down with the weeping saints, the martyred ascetics, and up once more with the days when men were great indeed with the peoples forgotten below them. Fear not, my sister, we will let loose the armies of Asia on the West, and very greatly shall we triumph."

"It is a noble dream, my brother," the soft voice returned from beneath the veil. "But what woman shall sit beside the Em-

peror of Asia? What is life without love? Is it the Western woman?"

"What? With her cold frank eyes and the ice in her veins for blood? No, my sister. She is my hold on the Englishman, nothing more. It is Gulbadan, the wife of the dead fool. I have seen her eyes like wells of night, and her mouth of crushed roses, and for every stroke I gave him I counted a kiss from her. I go to her now."

"What—and he so lately dead? Brother, it will make trouble! These veiled women must——"

"Must obey their masters, my sister. But what thought is in your mind?" For she had sighed.

"A strange one. We have taken the dead queen to serve our end. But suppose in the endless mystery it were true—that I were she, and you Mersekt. What then?"

"How should it be true? Dead is dead. Her dust is blown about the desert, and you live. We have stolen her name. That is all."

"Are we so very certain, my brother, that dead is dead? How if she works even now in my blood? How if her story drives us on, and we are the tools of the dead and not their masters? How if Destiny sits in the dark of that tomb and laughs at us?"

"It is a sickly fancy, my sister—the shadow cast by the dying faiths that we shall bury indeed. Go in and rest and prepare for what is to come. It is known to you how we have planned this thing from the beginning, choosing what tools we thought best, and what is there more to say? We might as easily have chosen others."

"Could we?" she said dreamily. "That is what I would know. The dead man—when he unveiled my face he said: 'Surely in the beginning of time the One, the Absolute, made us one, and strange are the ways that brought us together and there is no man that can change what is decreed.' This he said, and it may be that unbelief is a folly even as is belief."

Revel looked at her impatiently: "Truly women are the fools of words. Since it is known to you how I tracked down the Englishman and learned the story of the queen and brought you from Persia into Muscovia and clothed you in it as in a robe, what more is there to believe or say? Have done with such folly!"

"There is this to say," she answered obstinately. "What threw you in his way? Why is my face like to her face? And why is the world all heaving like a sea in storm even as it was in her day, so that we may work her will? Belief? I know not what I believe or doubt. I say only, this thing is strange and beyond me. But if it were true, beware, and yet again, beware, for our day is short."

He laughed impatiently. "My sister, you are not yourself. Go in and rest."

He took her by the hand and led her ceremoniously into the palace to the wonderful suite of white rooms set apart for the favorite of the king. Already the second barge had brought her women, and the slaves and attendants of the old begam were in waiting.

To Gulbadan Begam crouching by her lattice and looking always toward the dark palace of the city, her foster mother Zaynab brought word of all that had been said and done, and having finished her story she added, stammering and trembling:

"And my child, my queen, my darling, this new ruler whom we called Revel Sahib, but who now has another name, desires to speak with you."

"He cannot speak with me," she answered, looking away over the water. "Let him speak with my mother if he must break into our grief."

"Alas, my daughter, it is you—you only."

"And why? Has he not killed my lord? Would he kill me also? But if it be this he is welcome indeed."

There was a pause, and the woman said in a veiled voice very low and breathless: "My child, it is not anger but love."

Gulbadan turned a speechless look upon her, then fixed her eyes once more on the darkening water and the dim palace. Presently the lights sprang into being and starred it all over and only the Moon of the Shah was unlit.

The silence was so deep that Zaynab believed her mistress had forgotten in the stupor of grief. She laid a hand timidly on her arm and spoke once more:

"Child of my bosom, the man desires you very greatly. If you refuse it is death, as I well believe. Consider, therefore. In the name of the Merciful, consider!"

"Death is my heart's desire."

There was another long silence and Zaynab could not see the hidden face. Then Gulbadan roused herself to speak, but still with face averted.

"Speak to me, my mother. This horrible thing is true?"

"It is true. He would enter now."

For a veiled woman, especially of rank, the very suggestion was outrage. Another heavy silence. Gulbadan covered her face with her hands and remained so long, a bowed and speechless figure of woe, that at length her foster mother in terror lest the blow had stricken her to death laid a hand on her arm pleadingly and forced her to look up.

"My daughter, my queen, may I be your sacrifice! I will die at the door sooner than he shall break the curtain of a Mogul princess. Do not fear. There are loyal hearts still to rally about the wife of their king."

She raised her head slowly.

"I am no wife. I am a miserable widow and my life is worthless as the dust of the desert. Draw the curtain that I may see no more the place where I was glad and make beautiful my hair and eyes that I may please my new master. The time for weeping is done."

The woman stood staring and terrified as she rose, stretching her arms upward as if to shake off a weight of grief. At her order Zaynab summoned two of the women attendants, and they unloosed the silk-soft coils of black hair until it fell about her like the veils of night. Choosing among the stores of splendor they garmented her in supple silver cloth, with the great rubies her husband had given her burning on her breast. They braided her hair with pearls and it hung below her knees, and they darkened her heavy eyelids until the dangerous long eyes shone like stars in clouds, and her cheeks were like burning roses; and Zaynab, drawing back said:

"Never have I seen my queen so beautiful, no, not even on the day of her marriage."

"That day is forgotten. Let me see myself, then veil me, and dismiss the women and send for the man."

Zaynab led her before the great glass set in a gold frame enriched with pearls, and the princess stood looking at her own beautiful image as if it had been a picture, with eyes of cold judgment.

"Paint my lips. Crimson, like a rose of Shiraz. Put the silver tassels on the ends of my braids of hair. Bring the veil of Dakka muslin seeded with pearls and put it upon my head. And my anklets. Now it is enough. I am content."

The women who had robed her looked with horror at her as they withdrew. That a woman widowed but a few hours should be dragged off shrieking by the conqueror they could understand, but that she should dress herself out to win his heart made her viler in their eyes than any outcast.

"And now," she said, turning to Zaynab, "I am ready."

But the faithful woman judged her better than the others had done. She caught her by the wrist, and then flinging herself on the ground clasped her knees.

"Have pity on yourself, my queen. Have pity on the woman in whose bosom you lay and smiled as you will never smile again. It is too much. It is too hard for you. His fate will find him elsewhere in field or chamber, but never in the arms of a Mogul queen. He the infidel dog, the scum of the people. Take death from his hand, not love."

"Be at peace, my nurse, and help me as one woman may another, for in Allah is no help at all. I have prayed, I have besought, for the poor I have made offerings and have kept all the precepts, and what is come but death and dishonor. And as for death, it is not difficult; but listen——"

She stopped a moment as if to collect her thoughts, and went on swiftly.

"In the old days there was a gallant rajah of the Hindu people, and he had a wife most beautiful and desirable and of a great courage, and like me a curtained woman. So his enemies took him and tortured him. And as the sun set he lay dead in the cage where they had killed him. Then that evening to the tent where sat the enemy prince drinking among his lords, came a dancing girl, beautiful and shameless, and demanded admittance that she might sing and dance before them. So it was allowed, and before those lords she danced the bee dance:

"If my love loved me he should be a bee,
I the yellow jasmine, love the honey of me.

"Not a step, not a motion of that dance did she miss and they gazed on her enraptured, and most of all the prince. And when his lords were gone he demanded that she should enter his zenana, and she smiled. And when he bowed to kiss her, she flashed a dagger from her breast and stabbed him and as he wallowed at her feet choked with

wicked blood, she cut his head from his neck, and with this terrible thing in her hand she came to her own people in the night and they took her husband's body and she entered the fire with him and they were burned together. And to this day her people tell of her great deed. Now, my mother, if this could be done by a Hindu princess what shall not be expected from one of the Mogul blood? And there is more too —matters that you know not. Send to me the younger Miss Sahib, the fair and good, for I would speak with her."

CHAPTER XXI.

If anything could have amazed Venetia further it would have been the sight that struck her eyes when she followed Zaynab and entered the chamber of Gulbadan. She had known her for many a day, but yet the woman who met her now was a stranger. Gone was the crouching girl sullen or grieving, a creature of most changeable moods, uncertain of herself and others, subjected alike by her husband and the begam. The woman who took her hand and drew her to a seat beside her was clothed like a great queen, composed and stately, her voice had the ring of command and assurance, her beautiful mouth was firm, her speech calm.

"We have gone through much, Miss Sahib, since I saw you. It has made your beauty pale. The elder Miss Sahib, has the sickness left her?"

"She is not well," said Venetia mournfully, "and you, Gulbadan Begam, you have suffered also. My heart has wept for you and for my friend."

"Better are old friends than new. But for me, I weep no more. I go on a long journey soon. Presently I return to my own people."

It appeared very natural to Venetia. She knew the begam had been more of a despot than a mother to the girl, and for a childless widow there is little place at an Indian court. She was glad to hear it, knowing that Gulbadan had been an only daughter of the court at Gondwana. She would at least be sheltered and loved there, for her mother was still living.

"Pleasant is the road that leads home, my sister," she said softly.

"My sister, yes," returned the young begam and was silent. Presently she began again.

"My beautiful sister, we have for many years been friends. I came here a child of nine and for nine years your face has been dear to me though I have not many words because the Shah Begam —may her name be great!—has so many.

"But before I depart, there is a thing I would say. Mallory Sahib is a good man. I have seen him through the curtains, and I know. Gifford Sahib also, a true friend of my lord. My sister, the danger is great. What can I do as a gift to my friends before I go? Speak with me, heart open."

Venetia rushed at the opportunity.

"My sister, there is that paper of which you yourself have spoken, saying that it holds the plotting of these alien people who have struck down the mighty. You have said that Revel Sahib carries it in his breast. If in the palace there are any still faithful to you, could it be that you could gain this for your friends? I know not. But that paper is all our hope."

"What I can, I will do," said the princess slowly. "If it be much my sister will rejoice, if little she will forgive. And now we part. But, remember this, beloved lady whose heart is high and whose words are truth. If what you hear of me is hateful, still believe I am true. If they tell you I am vile, say this in your soul: 'Still I believe.' You swear this to me?"

"I swear," Venetia said solemnly. "But as for the paper, put yourself in no danger. No life is more precious than yours and Mallory Sahib would die sooner than you should risk a hair of your head. And there are happy days before you, my sister."

"Many," the princess agreed gravely. "And very certainly the jackals who now defile the lair of the tiger will be driven out in shame and confusion. Farewell. Go in the peace of Allah."

With the same calm she laid her cheek against Venetia's, then drawing apart, clapped her hands for Zaynab and stood watching while the heavy curtain was lifted. Venetia turned then and saw her standing, a very lonely and beautiful figure in her splendid dress. She waved her hand and they had parted.

With her mind full of doubts and fears she looked forward to the time of the evening meal that she might consult Mallory and Gifford. Sara had been too ill to take any interest in affairs, and in any case was to be kept in ignorance of the undercur-

rents, and it was a very great burden to bear alone. But, when she entered the Painted Hall it was empty but for the servants and when in deadly anxiety she questioned them a blank wall of ignorance opposed her everywhere. They did not know. Were the sahibs still in the palace? They did not know. Had they left any message for her? They could not tell. This was the worst blow, and but for the utter need to keep herself well and strong since all now must fall on her she could not have touched a morsel.

To add to her terrors, when the meal was finished and she was rising to go back to Sara the great curtain was drawn aside, a man entered and she found herself alone with Revel. The breath was almost dashed from her lips by astonishment when she saw him in the uniform that all Europe knew and dreaded.

"I am glad of the opportunity of a word with you, Miss Bassett. There are one or two matters really necessary to be discussed. Pray be seated."

It would not do to show any fear. No, she must be ordinary and natural and of course appear to expect the treatment they had always had from him. She sat down quietly.

"Thank you. I have not seen you for some time and so much has happened since then."

"Yes, the death of Mahmud Mirza. A painful necessity. The state of Mianpur is now ruled by my sister, his widow, Shirin Begam. She is anxious to take you under her protection, for, as you know, the whole country is terribly disturbed."

"It is very considerate of her and I beg you will convey my thanks. But I hope for the protection of my future husband, and my countryman, Colonel Gifford."

"Unfortunately," Revel said inflexibly, "both those gentlemen have been discovered plotting against the government represented by my sister and they are to be deported. You and your sister will remain under the protection of Shirin Begam."

"Deported? And where? Then my sister and I demand to be deported with them."

"That is impossible. The journey they are to undertake is to Kashmir, whose ruler remains constant to the British government. But the way lies through fearfully disturbed country and is quite unfit for ladies."

Venetia's quick wit at once saw it was of no use contesting and arguing at this point, especially as she did not believe a word he said. She sighed a little, and said gravely:

"You make me very anxious. But I know you will do whatever is possible. As for Shirin Begam, it is a great honor, but if we remain here may it not be with our old friends the Shah Begam and Gulbadan Begam?"

With the utmost difficulty she repressed her start of amazement when he replied, looking full in her eyes:

"The Shah Begam, who has behaved in such an extraordinary way that she cannot be in her right senses, is to be sent to the Gukserai."

He had undervalued her knowledge of history and custom, and Venetia heard and shivered inwardly. She knew the evil reputation of that little palace in the jungle. Its history was long and tragic, for in the troubled centuries of the Mogul reign in India it was there that the deposed rulers of Mianpur had always been imprisoned, and they had never once emerged alive.

With a great effort she controlled her face and voice.

"Gulbadan Begam——" she began.

"Gulbadan Begam is to become my wife," he said, still looking coldly and steadily in her eyes.

"But——" She was on the point of crying out against the hideousness of the thing when his cool stare arrested and froze the words on her lips.

She rose trembling.

"Mr. Revel, I must go to my sister. I feel sure that when you have considered you will see it is desirable that we should leave with Mr. Mallory and Colonel Gifford, who are our natural protectors. There is no danger we would not face with them rather than remain here without them. I don't know Shirin Begam——"

"Who speaks of me. I am here!" said a soft voice at her elbow, and turning hurriedly she saw a slender veiled figure beside her. She had entered so noiselessly that neither of them had noticed her coming, and Revel turned as sharply as Venetia.

She slid into a chair with the kind of limp grace that some tall slender women have, especially those of the Oriental strain, and the veiled eyes looked up at Venetia, appraising her from head to foot even while

the voice sounded like the sighing of angels. Angels, for instance, who speak Hindustani perfectly but with a slight foreign accent.

"My brother tells me that the dangers outside the city make it impossible for you to leave us, Miss Sahib. I will do my utmost to see that you have all you need. Ask for what you desire and your wishes shall be obeyed."

"Your brother has probably told you, your highness, that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Mallory. You will understand therefore how impossible it is that I should be happy where he is not and——"

Suddenly she stopped. It was terrible pleading to that veiled face and Revel's impassive stare behind it. A sudden hopelessness made any words seem useless. They died on her lips. She gave up the battle for the moment.

"May I go to my sister?" was all she could say.

"*May* you?" Revel's voice was suavity itself. "It is we who are at your command."

She moved slowly away in a kind of terror that weakened her very knees. The veiled figure made a graceful salutation with head and hands, and Revel held the curtain aside for her to pass out. It was a horrible travesty of their former relations.

Before she went in to Sara she stopped a while outside to steady her face and voice. The terror had struck into her very veins.

From the wing of the palace where the men were imprisoned Mallory watched every evening to see the light spring up in the rooms he knew for Venetia's, but never a word or a sign from her reached him and he never dared attempt a signal lest it should bring danger on her. A silence like death had fallen between them, except that sometimes the colonel received a mysterious word to the effect that Sara was well again and that the sisters had nothing to complain of as to any lack of care and attention. He heard also that in the dead of night the old begam had been conveyed away to the Gukserai, the lonely palace in the woods, which explained the sound of muffled oars they heard one midnight when all the world was still. Mallory wondered if Venetia had heard it also and guessed its dreadful significance. The colonel had now taught him his code, so that he too could read when cloths of various colors hung out by daytime in certain windows of the city, and he knew what it meant when Ismail, the clouter of shoes, worked late with a couple of lamps to aid his failing eyes. He knew how to send in return the messages which told exactly what word must be sent to the outer world from the city, how the troops of Mahmud Mirza had been marched and railed to other states and strangers drafted in who were absolutely at the bidding of Revel and Shirin Begam. And he knew exactly which among the palace servants responded to the salutation of "The Peace to Ali Khan My Brother" and could therefore be trusted. And the day was very near at hand when this knowledge would be necessary.

It was about a fortnight later when two important items reached them. The Shah Begam, shortly after reaching the Gukserai, had been seized with an attack of cholera and was dead. Colonel Gifford had given her a month's lease of life, but the murderers were swifter than his guess, and, as he said, nothing could show better their fearlessness of any public opinion. Public opinion indeed existed no longer in the city of Mianpur, whatever it might do in the outer parts of the State, for the alien troops held the people down and used and abused them as they pleased. Still, when the marriage of Gulbadan Begam to himself was announced, Revel apparently thought it as well it should be celebrated in the Lake Palace. The people would hear less, see less there and the thing be done more quietly.

"I doubt," said the colonel in his precise French to Mallory, "whether that poor girl's life will be much longer than the Shah Begam's. He is marrying her simply because she was Mahmud Mirza's cousin and her people have a claim on the Mianpur throne. You see, it will conciliate the Mianpur people, for they hold by the old stock. But when he has secured that right as her husband I should be sorry to predict what will happen."

"The whole business is so ghastly that one almost begins to have the feeling about life that one had in the war. There seems no hope of relief or help, no light at all on the horizon," Mallory said, looking despairingly at Venetia's distant window.

"There's a sort of light in holding on to the end," the colonel said reflectively. "I should like to put the job through if possible. All my training has prepared me for this kind of thing, though we none of us guessed exactly the shape it would take. But I doubt if I shall see it through. The

slightest slip in one of my colleagues and Revel will know my business. Then——"

He slightly shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER XXII.

So the preparations for the marriage went on and neither Venetia nor the men heard a word of the bride. In the city decent men and women shuddered when they spoke of her, so foul a traitress did they think her to the memory of her noble husband.

Perhaps Gifford did not understand Revel's feelings entirely. Even his cold nature must have been warmed a little by thoughts of the beauty of the girl, for it is certain that he was reported to be restless and excited as he had never been before. The jewels of the Shah Begam were brought to the Lake Palace and many of them sent to Gulbadan, and the tidings ran round the palace and reached even the prisoners that she had received them with delight and profuse thanks to the new lover.

"Women are extraordinary creatures," said the colonel. "What do you think of one who forgets her husband in a month—a very noble fellow too, at that, and is not only prepared to hand herself over to the man who murdered him, like the *Lady Anne* in Shakespeare's play, but also to rejoice over the spoils of his poor old mother. What do you deduce from that, Mallory?"

"Why, that Shakespeare knew an incredible side of women's natures. What else? She must either be utterly vile or utterly brainless. You can't make more of it than that."

"As a matter of fact, I think I can," Gifford answered, staring out over the lake through his field glasses. "As I said before, women are extraordinary creatures. Have you ever seen a Mohammedan marriage? The Mullahs come to-morrow, I hear, to perform the Nika. I wonder what religion Revel favors among his many accomplishments!"

No more was said, for a red cloth was hanging from more than one window in the city and they were soon absorbed in question and answer.

The news of the marriage was a shock under which even Venetia's faith might have staggered at first, but for her meeting with Gulbadan. Of the begam's death she knew nothing. That news was for none of the prisoners, and she had no informants as Gifford had, which perhaps was as well for her and for Sara, for the mere knowledge that she was doomed to the Gukserai Palace overshadowed the sisters like a cloud.

The day of the marriage dawned in cloudless beauty. The air was heavy with perfume from the rose garden and the garlands that made the zenana beautiful with scent and color, but all was kept so quiet, so secret that none of the prisoners but Gifford and Mallory knew the great day was come. They knew also that it would be announced publicly in the city next day. As far as Sara and Venetia could remember afterward, there was no sound or sign to mark the day off from any other unless it were a little more hurry than usual of feet and voices from the women's quarters so close to theirs. So the day wore on and the night came soft and lucent with moon and stars reflected in glory in the water.

Venetia sat by the window long after Sara slept, drawing tranquillity from the tranquil beauty. She sat there late and long, then drawing the curtain open between her room and Sara's she crept beneath her mosquito net and slept deep and sound. It was a night of peace even for prisoners and captives.

Afterward she could never be certain at what hour she woke to the sound of a long and frightful cry. She flung herself half out of bed, sitting upright, the cold perspiration on her forehead and her heart racing. Something that had been pushed into her breast dropped on the ground beside her, and even the light noise of its falling turned her sick with fear—a flat envelope, very thin, bound with a twist of floss silk and stained in one part with a red stain. It was daylight, full daylight, and Sara's voice was calling fretfully from the next room.

"The noise they make! Those women are impossible. What is it, Venetia? Do come."

"Presently. Wait a minute, Sara!" It was a muffled voice that answered her, for thought and reason had come back to Venetia now and she saw the instant need for secrecy. She passed another ribbon through the loop, and slung the paper about her neck, hiding it securely, then ran to the room where the huge earthenware tub stood that served as her cistern and plunged her face in cold water and shook the drops out of her hair and eyes, and so, white but

clear-eyed and clear-headed, she went in and stood by her sister.

"Was that a cry, Sara? I was sound asleep and something waked me."

"I suppose they let something drop. What o'clock is it? I forgot to wind my watch."

Venetia would have looked, but suddenly there was a rush and hurry of feet and men's voices speaking. Men? In the zenana? Impossible! They both listened, every sense concentrated into hearing.

"Somebody must be ill!" Sara said at last. "It may be the doctor. They let him feel their pulses through the curtains. I hope it's Gulbadan. She deserves it."

Again they waited, and nothing more happened, and at last the terror faded away into the normal and at the appointed time the woman came to attend them, and food was brought and Sara sitting by the window yawned and knitted alternately, and Venetia might have believed it all a nightmare but for the stained paper that lay on her heart. But that was a terrible incubus. She knew she must get it to Mallory, but how—but how? Even yet she scarcely dared to speculate in what dreadful straits it had been gained. She could not be certain what it was, for the last thing it suggested was papyrus, though it was easy to guess how it had reached her. The entrance to her room was guarded only by a curtain and the half door latched across in the way known to every dweller in India. Nothing could be easier than for any one to creep in, slide the paper in her breast, and disappear like a shadow. Could it be the bride? It seemed madness to suppose such a thing, but then who—who else would dare?

It was in the hour of the aftenoon siesta that enlightenment came. Sara, completely reassured as far as reassurance could go in their imprisonment, was asleep in her room, and Venetia sat by her window pretending to read but thinking in a weary round of repetition. And as she sat the curtain at the entrance seemed to waft a little and a figure crept in very noiselessly and stood salaaming before her. It was Zaynab. Her face was enough.

"I know—I know!" Venetia said, shrinking as if from a blow. "She is dead."

"Praise be to God! She is dead. Listen, Miss Sahib, for it is death if they find me here—but all are busy now. She stabbed him in the night, and as I lay at the door she came to me and said: 'Take this where you know,' and in your breast I put it as she willed, and when I returned, she said: 'Go now, in the protection of Allah, and be far from this accursed room when the day dawns.' Her eyes were dreadful and, coward that I am! I fled. And when they came in the morning he was dead and she was gone. They do not know, but I know. In the lake, where now I go. Miss Sahib, I have lived too long, that have seen the house go down in the dust."

"Oh, Zaynab, Zaynab," Venetia cried in a tragic whisper. "Do not go yet. One moment. How shall I get this paper to Mallory Sahib? Gulbadan Begam's work is not done—she has died in vain if this is left undone."

Her eyes entreated for her although she said no more. It seemed that her very life hung on the issue.

"Give it to me," the woman said at last, and wrapped it in the folds across her breast and drew her veil about her face. Without another word or look she went out and Venetia in cruel uncertainty whether she had saved or lost the treasure for which two lives had paid crouched half fainting in her chair, for the moment unable to bear any more or even to try and estimate the forces she had set in motion.

Zaynab, hurrying by chambers and passages far from the zenana, came at last to where the sentry paced before the door leading to the rooms of the prisoners. He was a tall black-bearded man very splendid in the dress of the palace guard, and glanced an eye of contempt at the huddled figure as she hurried by.

But as she passed she breathed rather than whispered, "The Peace to Ali Khan My Brother. The death message of Gulbadan Begam," and dropping the paper on the floor at his feet was gone like a shadow. With a terrified glance right and left he pounced on it, flashed it up and hid it in his breast, just as steps came along the passage and his jemadar passed, and found the sentry stiff at the salute.

"All well, Mir Ali?"

"All is well, Jemadar Sahib."

"Well done! Pir Khan relieves you in ten minutes. If the infidels say anything you can understand, report it."

"May I be your sacrifice, Jemadar Sahib! I will not fail. But they speak a language I know not."

Ismail Jemadar loitered, adjusting the hilt

of his sword, and the soldier stood bolt upright like a bronze image until he passed along the passage and out of sight. Then, with another swift glance up and down the way, he lifted the corner of the curtain that covered the entrance to the prisoners' rooms, and sent the envelope skimming along the tiled floor inside, and instantly began his noiseless march up and down, within hearing of their voices. The colonel was well served even within the palace.

Mallory was standing by the window looking with longing eyes at the water and the blue far hills of Seranji beyond. So short a way, and then a good horse between his knees, and freedom ahead, and if his friends were safe and Venetia beside him he felt at the moment as if crowns and empires might go hang for him! He looked at the colonel, with his steadfast field glasses watching for the biweekly hanging out of Giaffar Khan's laundry in the city, his shoulders stooped a little, the grizzled hair showing over his ear, and that too seemed vanity and vexation of spirit. And as he watched the envelope came slipping along the smooth tiles to his feet and the dream was done. He gathered it up, hiding it under his arm and went into his own room, the inner one.

"Colonel, on guard!" he said coolly in French. In a moment he had unfastened the envelope, for that room having no entry of its own was safe provided one of them watched in the outer one. The colonel was on duty there now, moving about rather noisily to cover any rustle of paper. What Mallory expected he scarcely knew, for at the moment the papyrus was not in his mind, but he saw this was of consequence and the red seal of blood on it stamped it. Whatever it was it was not ancient, the paper, thin but good, was such as could be bought in any European shop in Calcutta or Bombay. He unfolded it rapidly and ran his eye down the sheet inclosed in the first empty one.

"Verbatim," it was headed. And then—then——

"Good God!" said Mallory under his breath. The writing was English. He read:

"To the great goddesses of Sais and Bubastis I make my worship, for though they have betrayed and forsaken me, yet is their day everlasting, and the wings of their power sweep the uttermost East and West. And to their justice do I commit Nefert the Queen that her wickedness be not forgotten, and that in her waking she shall meet the wrath of the goddesses and be again dashed down swiftly to the gates of Hell. For thus hath she sinned."

Here is a break that must cover a long paragraph. It then continues:

"So seeing her beautiful above all the daughters of Egypt I loved her, and I put my heart in her hand. And she took my good gifts that I gave her, the gold, the jewels, and the slaves and the peoples, and my heart, even the heart of the King, and she did evil mightily. For she drew her brother the Prince Mersekt from his loyalty and made him King beyond the river and she gave him gold and armies and sent him forth conquering among the peoples between the two rivers"—Mesopotamia—"and further to a country in the North, and me she took and put in chains and in prison. But to me by night came secretly the priest of the goddesses, and he said thus and thus. 'This is the word of the Winged, the Eternal who sees but not with eyes, and hears but not with ears. Behold, Nefert the Queen has troubled the world with a great trouble, and to her is a certain time given that she may do evil, and then the end.' So I said, 'O Holy One, what is her time?' And he said, 'Ten years.' And I said, 'For eight years now have I groaned in darkness.' And he answered, 'Endure for two more and it is done.' And I said, 'I cannot.'" Here is another break. It then continues: "So when I was set free secretly I met her alone in the Valley of Khar, promising her word of great treasures and in her greed she came and she knew me not. So I stabbed her to the heart and she died and again I took the throne and my heart was glad. But in the day of my rejoicing there came to me the priest of the goddesses and he said thus and thus: 'Seal down the Queen, bar the door with strength and bolt it with might and set upon it the fearful names of the great gods, for her time is not ended. And if she break loose as the lion from its lair great and terrible mischiefs are in her hand.' So I said, 'For how long?' And he answered. 'For two years, and blood shall flow in rivers and kingdoms break down before her, and she shall drive the great white people that as yet is not, from the throne they have made in the East, and they shall flee before her to the West, and with her shall be her brother the Prince Mersekt. And, because of them, very fearful shall be the calamities of the earth and very great their triumph.' And I said, 'Shall these things be in Egypt?' And he said, 'No, but in a land of the North where is the white rain and water hard as glass. And with them she shall come conquering and to conquer, and they shall trample the world before them. But because they despise the Gods and know not mercy and justice——'"

Here were stains that obliterated the end.

Mallory read to the end, his brain almost refusing to grasp the magnitude of the thing—then began again at the beginning and read it carefully twice more. There was a note in shorthand c erleaf. He could read that, "Original at the States Bank in Nimegen." That was in Holland, of course.

Having mastered it he went quietly into the outer room and told Gifford in as few words as possible what had happened, taking his place by the window while he went in, in his turn. It seemed a short time before he came back and with his usual careless air pulled up a long chair and lit his pipe. No one looking at the two could have imagined they were discussing anything of special interest, for they spoke slowly and with intervals of reflective smoking, speaking English but very low.

"First, colonel—how was that got and whose is the blood?"

"I imagine," said Gifford with a yawn that might have deceived the very elect, "that the bride has murdered the bridegroom. It comes from her. We shall get news of his death to-day or to-morrow, though they'll keep it dark."

"I hope to God you're right," Mallory said, pulling a spray of jasmine from the window and tossing the little flowers into the water below.

"You'll find I'm right. These women are like that. Of course you can see that a prophecy like this, used in India as they would use it, would set the peninsula alight from one end to the other. It was a prophecy that the East India Company's rule in India would end in 1857 that made the mutiny possible and terrible. It was fulfilled too, by the way, by Queen Victoria's taking over the rule from the Company then. These prophecies have a knack of fulfilling themselves. But, Mallory, this two years' business is important. Say something—anything! I don't want to seem to be holding forth. And then I'll tell you something."

Mallory talked inanely about the weather, polo, anything he could think of for the next five minutes. Gifford throwing in appropriate remarks at the proper intervals. Then he returned to business.

"I must get away from here and get back to my base. The moment I'm certain Revel is done for I shall start and you must carry on the communications instead of me. You can do it now and——"

"Must start? But how in the world can you get out?"

"I should have been out long ago but for the importance of being where this precious pair were. Now I shall go and you'll let us know any outstanding events. This is a specially good time for me to get a move on because if I'm right there will be a good deal of confusion in the palace and Barikoff is not here yet."

"Barikoff—who's he?"

"If Revel was the right hemisphere of the brain of the conspiracy Barikoff is the left. A very dangerous person. But your part is this. You'll hear a splash in the middle of the night—an almighty loud one. Rush out instantly and rouse the sentry and tell him you think I've drowned myself. I've been despondent and so forth. That's all. It's better you should know no more. And then, of course, keep your eyes skinned and let us know all you hear."

A pause and once more he spoke:

"And now the most important thing of all—a thing I never told even you up to now, for secrecy is vital. The keynote of our hopes is this: The Maharaja of Junwar is absolutely loyal though he has outwardly accepted the Muscovian rule, and is serving as a captain in their army in Junwar. His soldiers will follow him to a man when he rises, and Hindu though he is the Moslems will rise with him. We have brought them in touch with Gulbadan Begam's people in Gondwara with the Nizam of Bipur and also with Prince Hazrat Sultan, Mahmud Mirza's cousin, who is hidden in Mianpur city in the disguise of a seller of jewels. Thus you will see that Hindus and Moslems are waiting all over the country to cast off the Muscovian yoke, and naturally we're backing them for all we're worth. But if this particular connection breaks I fear all is lost. Hazrat Sultan is at the back of the signaling from Mianpur. Take word, take orders from him, from no one else. Keep in touch with him all you can and guard this secret with your life. On him all depends. If he goes, all goes."

"I understand," Mallory said earnestly. "And now, one question. Have you a chance for your life?"

"Only a fighting chance and I wouldn't risk it, for I have my uses here, but that this paper has opened new avenues of attack and defense. I see now how they're working and we can counter. If that poor child could know she would think it worth her life. Don't worry about me, Mallory. I leave a good man behind me both for the work and looking after the women, and this paper is my signal to march. Could you possibly memorize it? And so will I, for we must not have it about us. No wonder

they hid that paper! The two years may be fatal for them."

It was long since either had mastered a task at school but Gifford first and Mallory later set to work with a will and after some trouble were both letter-perfect. Then, dividing the bloodstained paper, they rolled it into cigarettes, and smoked them composedly while they talked of matters the whole world was welcome to hear. The last shreds they swallowed with their next meal—an old trick in the East.

CHAPTER XXIII.

That evening the cobbler was very busy with his clouting and the weaver in the next street was late at his loom. Gifford and Mallory read their news together without needing to exchange a word. Revel was dead, his body had been taken secretly to the mainland. Barikoff was expected in two days from Sellore.

"That settles it," said Gifford, getting out of his pocket the cards with which he played solitaire. "Everything is watched and we had better not seem to be in serious talk. One last word—if you come to grief the people in the city will carry on, but, as your life is valuable, don't get knocked on the head unless you must."

That was all, and after that what sleep could be possible? The night went on noiselessly. The sentries relieved each other but so quietly that only a straining ear could catch any sound through the curtain. There was nothing, nothing to hinder sleep but the ceaseless working of his brain, until——

Suddenly and most awfully the silence was broken by a loud splash in the water and a stifled cry, and Mallory, startled out of his wits, although prepared, leaped from his bed and made for the window in something uncommonly near a panic. As he reached it he realized his folly and shouted for the sentry.

"God protect us! What was that?" cried the man, rushing in at the same instant. "Where is the Colonel Sahib?"

For all answer Mallory pointed to the window, and the man, wild with terror of punishment, ran out of the room shouting: "Swords out!" like one mad, until there was a rush of bare feet along the marble and several more men arrived, headed by the jemadar. They rained questions on Mallory whose few words of Hindustani gave out after he had asserted that the colonel must have leaped from the window, and then the officer leaning out yelled for a boat, and the splash of oars was not long in answering.

Up and down they rowed, they searched, they shouted, but nothing could they find, and Mallory almost distracted with real anxiety had no difficulty in playing the part assigned him. He was unable to form the slightest idea of how the colonel had got off, and was in such obvious misery of mind that not one of them suspected him of complicity. At last, doubling the sentries, they went off for the night, assuring him he should be strictly questioned next day and leaving him to such a weight of loneliness as he had thought a man could scarcely suffer and live.

With the earliest morning light he watched for signals, but only the black veil of the cobbler's wife was drying this morning. "No news"—and the long day before him.

It was, however, to be more exciting than he supposed. After he had eaten his breakfast the jemadar with a file of men marched up the passage and ordered him to follow. It might be to execution, he judged that very likely, and if it were so, as far as he was concerned he did not fear to meet it. But Venetia! That was what tore at his heart.

But they led him by a way he did not know, and through the rose garden and by a pavilion and into a marble chamber of coldest, most exquisite purity, and there the guard opened out to either side and he saw a woman seated on the marble seat which might well pass for a throne.

Instantly the scene recalled to him the great fresco in the outer chamber of the tomb of Queen Nefert. There were the men all silent, all gazing toward the figure raised above them. The narrowing lines seemed to converge on that—to exalt it into a strange mysterious power. But there were differences. In the fresco there had been no prisoner bound before the throne, and this woman was not crowned but covered with a very ample and semitransparent black veil which wrapped her from head to foot and hid her face. Only he was conscious of hidden eyes that watched him intently.

The men saluted and she acknowledged the salute with an imperial wave of the hand, and then in a voice of thrilling sweet-

ness addressed some words to Mallory in Hindustani. It was beyond him. He had begged a book to wile away the prison hours and was studying it, but was soon out of his depth as yet. He shook his head. She tried the Muscovian salutation. He shook his head again. Then French. Apparently she spoke that as fluently as he did, and so communication was established.

He tried to assure himself whether she were European or Oriental and could not. The French had a foreign accent though perfectly correct, and she made the frequent references to Allah that a Moslem woman indulges in as a mark of formal piety. They sounded odd enough in French. Afterward he found that every one to whom she spoke had thought her accent foreign whatever language she used. Hindustani, Persian, French, Muscovian—all men and women bore witness that she was none of their people.

"You have thought," she said at length, very slowly and gravely, "that I took no heed of my prisoners, but it is not so. The sentry on your door last night was I, and had you spoken French——"

He started violently, and stared at her, the hair almost rising on his head with deadly anxiety. She continued unruffled, her voice sweet as calmly flowing water.

"But it was your own tongue and I could not know. Will you now tell me when and how the Colonel Gifford escaped? It will be better for you if you do."

The threat was uttered as gently as all the rest: the meaning of the words scarcely credible in the tone.

"I know nothing of when and how he escaped," Mallory said defiantly. "I waked in the night hearing a loud splash in the water and that is all I know. I believe he threw himself in. If you know more I entreat you to tell me. I would give my right hand to know whether he is alive or dead. He is a brave man whom even his enemies must respect."

"We never respect our enemies," the gentle voice said. "Why should we? They are our enemies. That is enough. And as to your question, you cannot think I should tell you if even I knew. One thing I can tell you, however. I have to-day put a stop to all communication with the city from a certain window. The cobbler will cobble, the weaver weave no more. You will always see the black veil of the cobbler's wife when you look across the water as you did this morning. At last we have discovered it."

His arms dropped by his side in despair. All was ended then. What use could he be to his country, to Venetia, the colonel—any one? She was silent, watching him, and at last he raised his head and faced her:

"Have so much pity as to tell me whether he is dead or alive."

"Your own fate concerns you more than his and I have sent for you to tell you it depends on your revealing what passed between you and your friend yesterday. Nothing can save you otherwise."

"Then nothing shall save me, for I can tell you nothing. You must do with me what you please. I can add nothing to that."

"Do you mean that you have nothing to tell or that you will not tell it?"

"I mean both. If there were anything I should refuse to tell it. But there was nothing."

Again she was silent, studying his face, then spoke with the same gentleness.

"You must go back to your prison and think the matter over. You may change your mind. Meanwhile I have one thing for your hearing."

His lips shut in a firm close line. Instinctively he braced himself to meet a blow. She continued calmly:

"I have resolved that the women shall leave to-day for Kashmir. That State is still friendly to the English and they will find a refuge there. Because I will not give a handle to my enemies I have resolved to be rid of them in this way. Where is your gratitude?"

For he was struck dumb. All that the colonel had told him of the danger of passing through the disturbed and rebellious states rushed upon him now, with miserable memories of the terrible experiences of the women and children who even in the mutiny year of 1857 had to face perils less dreadful than those to be expected from an enemy who feared neither God nor man and made Science herself the slave of ruthless cruelty and cynical ambition.

"I entreat, I beseech your highness to keep them here in safety, if you will not send me with them," he said at last. "You are a woman, you must know and pity the miseries and risks of such a journey. Why, even the railways are impassable, they say, and Kashmir is in the far north. Your

brother told me the women should stay here."

"The railways are impassable in parts—yes. But no matter. It is an order. For yourself—if you change your mind, send word to me. You certainly cannot expect to go with them. You are a prisoner of too much importance to be set free. And there are reasons. You must content yourself here."

Then suddenly, in Hindustani, turning to the jemadar, she ordered him to leave her alone with the Englishman.

"But be within hearing and when I clap my hands return swiftly."

They filed out and in the silent hall were left only the woman and her prisoner.

With slow hands, almost languidly, she began to unwrap the transparent veil from the zenana garment of rich Bokhariot silk brocaded with flowers which she wore beneath it. Of a sudden she blazed with kingfisher blues, royal purples and crimsons and subtle greens all blended in a harmonious splendor, sumptuous as jewels.

He watched her, fascinated by the lovely movements of her slender hands and arms. Without a word at last she drew the veil from before her face and let it drop backward over her shoulders, then, leaning her head against the marble, she looked full at him. On each side of her face flowed two solemn rivers of black hair, her full lips, most delicately cut and shaped, were of a dark vermilion, her eyes fringed with the very glooms of night were like shadowed pools of darkness, and on her fair breast she wore the scarab set in the outspread wings of Mut. At last her lips parted and she spoke:

"Thou endest the night!"

He stared at her in speechless wonder.

"That is the reason why you stay," she added, and slowly drew the veil about her again, eclipsing her splendors in its cloud. Before he could move or speak she had clapped her hands sharply and the soldiers filed in again and surrounded him.

They marched him out, leaving her, a veiled figure seated on the throne.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was very difficult for Venetia or Sara to remember afterward the details of that dreadful journey so suddenly thrust upon them. They were awakened one morning with the news that they must be prepared to start in two hours for Kashmir and their knowledge of India and its ways, so far from helping them, terrified them the more with the bitter certainty of the dangers and miseries which lay ahead of them. Sara, not yet quite recovered after her illness, broke down into helpless tears, and perhaps it was the best thing for Venetia that she must put her own griefs aside and devote herself entirely to consoling Sara. She could not even guess whether Mallory and the colonel knew their fate, and though she ransacked her wits could think of no way of communicating with them. She asked the silent ayah who waited upon them whether she could see Zaynab, but had only a deep salaam and the assurance that Zaynab was gone to her own people.

Finally, in despair, she wrote a message to Shirin Begam to ask whether Mallory Sahib, "who will be my husband," would travel with them, and, failing that, if they might see him according to the English custom before they went. An hour passed without answer and the ayah brought a verbal message from her highness.

The customs of the palace did not permit that ladies in the zenana should talk with any man and Mallory Sahib had decided to remain in Mianpur. This was his free decision. The Colonel Sahib had already gone. If the Miss Sahib chose to write to Mallory Sahib her message would be sent and if he made any answer she should have it.

That was all. Feeling utterly lost and abandoned Venetia sat down and wrote a few words:

> It is suddenly decided that we are to be sent to Kashmir, and you will know the danger is very great. They tell me it is your wish to stay here and that Colonel Gifford is gone already. How all this can be I don't understand, but my faith in you is unshaken as it has been all through this terrible separation. We may never meet again, indeed it seems likely we never shall, but I want you to know that I have no real fear for myself and if I can get Sara through I shall be satisfied. I shall think of you and love you to the end whenever that may come. YOUR VENETIA.

She folded it only, knowing it would probably be read whatever precautions she took, and with wistful eyes watched the ayah as she went out with it. They were standing by the boat, ready to begin their perilous journey before the answer was brought, written hurriedly on the back of her own.

"He might have kept it," her heart said with a throb of pain as she opened it.

It is best I should stay. Colonel Gifford will meet you at Sellore and explain. I am assured you will have a safe and comfortable journey. Good-by.

That was all and at the moment it seemed a cruel brevity even though the reasons for saying as little as possible were good. She tore it into little bits and saw her words and his float away on the transparent water where the lotus leaves soon hid them. The boat, comfortable and roomy enough but very different from the ceremonious barge of former days, was waiting and she helped Sara in, and then sitting in the stern with her chin propped on her hand, looked back at the Lake Palace of so many memories, well knowing that neither in life or death should she ever see it again.

Through brimming tears she looked along the many lines of windows for a wave, a signal of some sort from Mallory. Surely he would venture that much for her. But they were all empty, except that at one she imagined she saw a veiled figure standing, and soon they were beyond the reach of signals.

A rough cart with curtains was waiting by the landing place, and a strange ayah beside it, and that was all the preparation. Sara's heart sank when she saw, for it was a dreadful foretaste of what might be expected on the long northward journey, and though Venetia tried to speak cheerfully she saw the slight intended. There was nothing to be done, however, but to get in as soon as possible to avoid the curious eyes staring at the humiliated Englishwomen, for ten or twelve people had collected at the landing place.

It is needless to dwell on the fears and hardships of the next two months. It was a changed world that they passed through. Gone were the British troops, the orderly and dignified Sikh police, the faces of the tourists hurrying from Bombay northward. It was only in places that they struck a train, and then they were hurried into it with the ayah, and it seemed that they were handed on from one man to the other. The larger stations appeared all to be held by Muscovian troops with native soldiers under their officers' orders, and very often Sara and Venetia were taken from the trains and the troops would crowd in and the cars disappear, and a long weary wait at the station follow until a miserable cart like the first could be had to drag them a few miles farther on their way. It was clear that the large towns were to be avoided. They had little or no money, but what they had was never called on except for a bakshish here and there, for all their expenses were paid.

The Muscovian men would sometimes drag the curtains aside and look into the cart with rough coarse jests in their unknown language, but even from them there was no worse molestation, and the Hindus and Mohammedans alike respected the zenana cart. Venetia soon learned to be glad it was so rough and unpretentious for it was so clearly not worth robbing that its very poverty took them safe through many a danger.

She had felt certain they must pass through Lahore or Pindi and that some sort of news might be picked up there. Not a fragment had reached their ears hitherto and the woman with them was silent as death except for her necessary service, and time seemed to have resolved itself into an endless jolting in the half dark of the cart. A terrible experience for two lonely women.

At long last, at a wayside station with a name utterly unknown to them they were bundled into the train once more, in a third-class carriage like a cattle pen, the windows curtained to show it was occupied by women, and the rest of the cars filled with shouting soldiers; and then an endless day of misery and anxiety followed. Sara almost collapsed; she was utterly worn out with fear and fatigue and nearly all day long sat with her head resting on her sister's shoulder in a kind of half stupor.

Venetia looked for a halt at Lahore or Pindi, having entirely lost knowledge of where they were, but though they passed through a city which might have been Lahore, she could not be certain, and they never stopped. Even her fine courage and health were almost broken, when after having disgorged the rabble of soldiers at another wayside station, the train went on some miles farther, and they were then told curtly to get out: "A carriage was waiting."

A carriage! She could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw a landau and pair drawn up on the dusty road where the train had pulled up. She put her arm round Sara, her last wearied instinct to protect her sister to the end, as a smartly turned-out na-

tive officer came to meet the train official who had them in charge.

"I now hand over in health the English ladies who have traveled from Mianpur," said the man sullenly and without any salaam. He turned away roughly and the officer struck him with the flat of his sword on the back.

"Do homage, dog, to the officer of his highness the Maharaja of Kashmir, and lick the ground before the feet of these ladies. And take this vile woman with you. We have other attendants for the friends of his highness."

The voice rang gay and clear in mastery —the very note of freedom. The man, salaaming like a slave, bent down his head to the earth before their feet, his cruel face ash color with terror.

"Let the eye of Mercy behold the repentant, Huzoor," he cried, and crawled away like a pariah dog.

Safety had come at last with a clash of steel, and the long strain snapped and Sara slipped out of Venetia's grasp and fell fainting to the ground.

"May the curse of Maheshwara light on those Moslem dogs!" said the Hindu officer.

It was little wonder that Venetia saw nothing of Mallory at the window. By Shirin's orders he was moved into a room that looked to the north, during that half hour, and, at his window, she herself leaned, watching until the boat had pulled a considerable way to the city, and she knew the Englishwomen were gone for good.

Mallory guessed very well why he was removed and his very soul rebelled against his helplessness. The colonel was either playing the part of a man or dead on the field of honor, the woman he loved was facing danger and, he could swear, facing it gallantly. He alone was shut up like a sick sheep in a pen, useless, outwitted, and the world went on without him. A trust had been left in his hands and he could not fulfill it. If only he could get one word through to tell the friends outside that communication was cut and through no fault of his! And then the thought that he might be believed faithless burst like madness into his brain. What stories might not be spread and believed of the English Sahib who had chosen to remain safe and alone in the Lake Palace of Mianpur with the beautiful Shirin Begam?

When they took him back to his rooms and left him alone he focused the field glasses at once on the windows that had been the only voices from outside. Blank, empty. He made the agreed signal, flashing with a light on bright metal. No answer. He waved the white cloth inside the window, careless now if he were seen, so long as it could be known he had tried to get through, so long as he could reach the disguised Prince Hazrat Sultan. No answer. And at last he sat down to face the frightful loneliness, an almost broken-hearted man.

Three, four weeks dragged on leaden feet and he knew nothing, could not even guess whether Hazrat Sultan might not be taken or dead, and all lost with him. Had Barikoff, the terrible Barikoff, come, he who was said to be the queen's lover? He remembered now that she had spoken of "My commands. My will," and had made no reference to Barikoff who was certainly not a man to be left out of the events he and Revel had set moving. But there was no change in the life of the palace so far as he could tell and no word ever reached him.

Once or twice when the sentries were changed he tried the Thug password in a low voice. It was a frightful risk because there were always two on guard now, and even if one were loyal the other might be a spy, so he hummed the words "The Peace of Ali Khan My Brother," as if they were the snatch of a song. Not the twinkle of an eyelash responded. The men stared curiously and rather contemptuously at the prisoner, and that was all. He gave it up after the third trial, and two days later the sentries were changed for Muscovians, tall and heavy brutes of men who jabbered in their unknown tongue and kept no discipline whatever, and completely ignored the prisoner.

Often he weighed the possibilities of letting himself down from the window and taking the chance for a swim to the city in spite of the crocodiles, for after all there are worse things than death, and this particular sort of life was one of them. The thing that delayed, though it did not deny this project, was simply the colonel's words on that last night: "Don't get knocked on the head unless you must. Your life is valuable."

He scarcely saw how that could be, but it delayed him—only delayed, however.

CHAPTER XXV.

Four weeks after the boat had gone and left him desolate the queen sent for him, and the guards who escorted him were Muscovians. This time, with utter defiance of custom, he was taken to a great room in the zenana where the old Shah Begam and the long line of dead-and-gone princesses and queens of the great line of Mianpur had held their court of women. Perhaps Mallory did not know enough of India to realize the full horror of the proceeding, but even he could guess—what the colonel would have known—that the arms of Muscovia had triumphed far and wide in the peninsula or the woman would never have dared to break the custom of so many centuries in Mianpur and show her face unveiled to a man. Furthermore, she was attended by two ladies of the old begam's, women of rank and hitherto of decency who, also unveiled, stood on either side of her chair, displaying bold handsome faces and trying very unsuccessfully to stand Mallory's astonished gaze without flinching. The colonel could have told him a little of what this would mean in the city, of the rage and shame that would fill the hearts of the native-born, whether Mohammedan or Hindu, at the new license imported by the people they had called in to redress their wrongs and who were now their conquerors.

She motioned him to a seat in front of her and dismissed the guard.

"Again we meet. You have not sent to me. I send for you. I have pitied your sufferings with a full heart, but I could not spare you until the time came. If you have thought me cruel——"

"I have not thought of you at all," he said, and it was all but true. "Why should I? You are nothing to me."

"But you are much to me."

He made no reply.

"You are much to me," she repeated. "It was you whose hand opened my prison and gave me back to the light of day—to the beautiful world of life and sunshine and love. 'Thou endest the night!' Oh, the long and frightful night in the hot stagnant dark, with the years dropping by endlessly as the grains of sand that sifted from the rocks! What prison on earth was ever so frightful as that prison? And you delivered me. Look up to my face and see in my eyes the thanks I can never utter."

It was utterly unexpected. In amazement he looked up at her for the first time. She was beautiful—unspeakably beautiful, the deep eyes shining through unshed tears, the lips parted revealing the little pearls within, the glorious hair like clouds about the moon of her pale sweet face, where every emotion showed like the flame within a lamp of alabaster. Most dear, most desirable, though not to him, he told himself. She leaned forward a little, like a blossomed bough swaying in a wind of spring, a subtle perfume from her garments reached him. Every pulse in his body cried danger, and he turned his eyes from her again. Suddenly she drew back and stiffened in her seat. With a few words she dismissed her women. The curtain dropped behind them and they were alone.

She leaned forward again and in a voice of exquisite sadness and as it seemed with the simplicity of a child, she whispered:

"My words beat against you in vain. Can I find any that will touch your heart?"

He said violently:

"None. What you wish me to believe I don't believe. To me you are only an adventuress who has seized upon an amazing likeness to serve her own ends. Terrible ends too. If your face matched your soul it would be so hideous that you yourself would shudder at it. I am not your dupe. And even if I were, my heart is not my own."

She opposed no violence to his. She only sighed bitterly.

"I am my own dupe. I believed—with all my heart and soul I believed that when we met you must love me because you saved me. And now you look me in the eyes and hate me. I who have known death think life the more terrible of the two."

"I agree with you."

"And yet I must speak with you and you must trust me," she said earnestly, "for there are tremendous things in hand and you and I are part of them. You must make a great decision and very soon. But first I want to restore this to you."

She drew from her thumb an amethyst scarab, and held it out to him. With a cry of amazement he saw it. His ring—but which was which, for as far as he knew his ring was already on his hand? He looked sharply at both, and could see no difference, then up at her, and at the scarab on her breast between the wings of Mut.

"What does it mean?" And even as he

spoke he recalled Gifford's suggestion that Revel had stolen the ring from him at Shepheard's for some mysterious purpose of his own. Instantly he guarded his lips with silence. She should speak and he would draw his own conclusions.

"The one I give you is your own ring. Of that scarab there are but two in the world. The one is on my breast, the other in your hand. Both were a love gift to me in the dim ages that are forgotten and in the dust of death I carried the ring on my hand. You found it where I sat waiting. Now these two scarabs, for reasons you shall not know, are charged with power, and this is so with certain amulets and jewels, and my brother, in this life called Ibn ul Farid, had need of one. Therefore he went to Abuksa that he might see this ring, for the fame of it had reached him. And he took it from you in Cairo, and after that had power over you to make you see what he would. But the scarab he gave you in its place is nothing—a toy made by a skilled craftsman."

"And why do you give it back to me?"

"Because its power over you died with him and for myself I desire no power but what comes from your own heart. Your love is what I pray for. Long ago in Egypt you loved me, though that is a tale I will not tell you now, and surely, since in this world our lives touch again, again you will love me as I love you. But take the ring, for my brother is dead and now I desire but the power of every woman—my beauty and love."

He slipped the ring on his finger in place of the other.

"No doubt you set a price on it. Speak plainly. What is it?"

She looked at him proudly: "I set no price. My gift is free. Being given let us forget it. But there is more to say. In your prison you did not know the world outside. In India there is scarcely a place that our armies have not overflowed, as the Nile floods the land for the sowing, and our harvest is near. And in the East is a great stirring for the rising of the sun, and though the dawn be red with blood the day shall be glorious."

Her voice was like a song, she spoke with a majesty that was eloquence itself. Her beautiful face glowed with inspiration. Mallory dimly understood the wild and passionate enthusiasm she might rouse in the hearts of men who heard and saw her, but she left him ice and steel. He said not a word, but only looked steadily at her. The Angel-of-the-Revolution type of woman had no attraction for him.

"But just because we are winning so many hearts and swords, we need more, and surely all the ways of fate have brought you and me together that we might go hand in hand along the ways of hope. Your people have misruled and trodden down where they might have raised and gladdened. Your people, do I say? But the term of one short life cannot make an alien people yours, and long ago you were a king in Egypt. Take my hand in yours as you did so long ago and let us make a great throne and rule in righteousness and justice. Long, long ago you loved me. Love me again, heart of my heart. Come back to your own people!"

Her voice was like the wooing of a dove in a drowsy golden afternoon as she stretched out her arms to him incredibly sweet and winning. But it did not win Mallory. Behind it he heard the boom of guns, the cries of miserable despairing wretches whom her frightful gospel had deprived of all hope. He remained steadfastly silent, watching for revelations. Her face had a pleading gentleness.

"You do not know what love is. You will learn, and because I know this, I set you free to go to that other. You will weary—you will come back to me, for in life and death we are one. Go to her. I have no fear."

Her arms fell at her side; there were tears in her voice.

"If you could know my heart. If you could only guess that though I am a queen and have great power I am a woman and wholly at your mercy. Could you not pity me then?" She glowed at him with hope and entreaty.

"I could never pity you," he said sternly. "Wherever you go your steps are marked in blood. The men who trust you, you ruin. Beneath your angel face you have the heart of a fiend, and your teachings wither the world. Send me back to any prison. Shoot me if you will but never ask me to listen to your voice again. I loathe you."

He expected that she would rise, a quivering fury, and let loose her wrath upon him. But no, only the great eyes looked darkly

and pitifully at him, the soft mouth murmured its plea.

"Once long ago in Egypt you were angry for a while, but you forgave me, you loved me, you came to my heart. See!—if our gospel displeases you, I will leave it all. What is it to me compared with you? We will escape together and far far away in a land I know well we will forget the mad world and be happy in each other's arms."

Then the pent-up truth flashed out of him. He sprang to his feet.

"And if I could believe your Egyptian lies, do you think I would trust you? I have seen the papyrus. I know how the queen betrayed the miserable king who trusted her. I know that at last he drove his dagger into her false heart and sealed her down lest she should escape and ruin the young world as she did the old. Are you not afraid, here alone with me, lest I should choke the breath out of you and rid the world of a monster? You are no queen, you are the refuse of some base Parisian faubourg where such women as you grow like weeds in the ditches. Now at last I have spoken. Do what you will."

He stood before her tense and quivering, looking for the answering flash. And still she looked at him with a lingering sweetness.

"Even those cruel words cannot turn my heart from you. The day will come, must come when you will know that what I say is truth and then all will be well. I have waited so long that I am patient. Now you shall go and before many days are over I will set you free to go to her, because I love you and am wise. I would do it this moment. I would say 'Go, forget me if you will,' but that it is not in my power. I must be cautious for I too have enemies. You have no word for me. My last word to you is this—when we were king and queen in Egypt you loved me. You will love me again. The gods remember and their years are long."

He stared at her in confused bewilderment—at her amazing generosity—the last thing he could have dreamed of.

She clapped her hands very softly and the two women returned from their post outside the curtains of the doorway.

"Call the guard!" she said briefly, and so sat with her chin on her hand gazing away into the far sky beyond the lake while the guards strode clanking in and marched him back to his prison with rough jests and mockery. In that strange moment he almost believed her. He looked back through the curtains and his last glimpse of her was a stately figure brooding over some lovely thought she could not utter. She looked a great queen.

An hour later she wrote this to Barikoff in the city of Mianpur and dispatched it by a boat with orders to be speedy.

I have done my best and failed. There is no hope—none at all—of getting the secret in this way or through me. The men of his people have hearts of stone. They cannot be set alight. But one thing I achieved. The ring is on his finger again. Since Ibn ul Farid, the only man who could make him speak, is dead, it falls now to you. Were I to tell you what I believe and think of this man you would laugh, therefore on that head I say nothing. It is necessary, I well know, that he should be at the mercy of some one who can hypnotize him into speech, for not only is there the secret but he has seen the papyrus. And with that ring on his hand he is at your will. Now I will set him free and you shall know the day and hour. The rest is to you, my friend, and well do I know that Ibn ul Farid himself had not more skill in the arts that break the will than you. My own time with him will come.

And when Barikoff read the letter he struck his hands together laughing and said, "I have him."

She sat very still, long after she had written, and then calling a woman with her sitar she lay listening to the languorous throbbing music and the strange muted song until day died on the lake, and the waning moon floated dimly on its bosom.

But Mallory, in his room alone, leaned out of the window and dropped the ring she had given him into the deep blue water below and watched until the last watery circle had died away into the unruffled surface. He would have none of their witchcrafts—no, not though his heart was softened by the melancholy kindness of her eyes. In its place he slipped on the worthless ring that Revel—Ibn ul Farid—had given him for a cheat, and after that he slept heavily, as a man may on the brink of the grave.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Eight days went by, and one day a little folded paper skidded along the floor to his feet as he sat silent at the window wondering how to endure the long empty hours. No one spoke to him now. His food was slid in under the curtain as if to a wild beast.

He heard the sentries changing, and that was all. Communication had entirely ceased with the outer world. No cloths were hung out, no lights flashed.

He picked up the paper listlessly. It was written in French, and at the first words the blood shot into his face and his heart leaped.

What I promised shall be done. You are free. At twelve o'clock to-night a boat will be outside your window. They will send you up a rope. Use it and go your way. But when you think of me remember that I gave you your freedom. Mine is not the love that would imprison. It gives all and asks nothing. Yet in this life or another you will return to me, for our bond is eternal. Destroy this with care.

N.

Once more he read it and then destroyed it carefully and sat lost in thought. Her words rang true, her face reflected them. He wished he could see her for a moment that her last memory of him might be a word of gratitude. He grew so restless at last that he could sit no longer, but walked up and down desperately, trying to still the mind by the activity of the body. Suddenly he halted and caught up the field glasses. A cloth, two cloths were drying on a window sill in the city. Not the old one, but another.

"We will meet you," they said, and full of restless eagerness he threw down the glasses and walked and walked till his head was dizzy. As night drew on he made a small bundle of things he must need, and then to evade any watching eyes he lay down on his bed and shut his eyes, and the night began.

The long heavy dark! It weighed on him like lead. Would the end never come?

It came in the most unexpected way. There was a fall light as the brushing of a bird's wing on the marble inside his window. He crept along cautiously, and lo! there lay a little arrow such as a child may shoot from the baby bows he had often seen in the streets of Mianpur, and that was all! No—as he looked closer he saw it carried a thin silken thread attached, and then, leaning out he saw in the velvet dark of night and water under his window a deeper shadow—the boat. Instantly he understood; with trembling fingers he drew the silk tenderly in until it ended in a knot and a slender twine followed. He reeled it in to its knot and found a thin rope and on that he pulled stoutly until a strong new rope of bullock's hide appeared—ending in a rough hook of iron. He tied the bundle about his neck, hooked the rope into a bar of the marble ornamentation at the side of the lattice, mounted the window sill and let himself down hand over hand toward the water. If they were cheating him and the boat was not there he would swim for it.

But they were there. A man's voice whispered beneath.

"This way, my lord. God be praised, all is well!"

Willing hands received him, and softly, noiselessly, the muffled oars pushed them ahead and the Lake Palace was a thing of memory.

It seemed a very short time when the shingle grated under the bow, and he stood up and shook himself like a dog as if to scatter the last taint of prisondom to the wind. There were two men on the shore, two tall men, turbaned, and with cloaks thrown about them.

"Friend, my lord, friend!" one said in a soft guttural voice. "To the right, and swiftly."

He followed without a minute's delay. One grasped his coat to guide him, for it was pitch dark, and so they went wordless until they reached a door that opened as if automatically in their faces. A bright light flashed dazzling, a cloth was thrown over his head.

With hands and feet bound and blinded by the cloth Mallory was carried along what sounded like endless passages. Then she must have meant to betray him all along! —but no, she had risked freeing him; perhaps she would pay as dear for it as he.

A halt. They let him down awkwardly on the floor, they dragged the cloth from his face, and now he recognized the room. It was the English-furnished library of Mahmud Mirza, but Mahmud Mirza's no longer.

The Muscovian soldiers unbound his hands and feet presently—big hairy savage-looking men, stupid and loutish as beasts, a contrast indeed to the slim golden soldiers of the dead ruler. They were laughing coarsely among themselves at his plight and one of them went and kicked at a door and called in his unknown jabber, and another man put out his head and retreated, and a few minutes passed and Mallory struggled up into a sitting position and stared about him confusedly. But his brain was clearing. Now that he knew where he was he

could guess pretty well what lay ahead of him.

The door opened again and a stout dark man in civilian's dress walked in—eyes as sharp as gimlets, sensual jowl blue with a twenty-four hours' beard, nose broad and fleshy at the base with retracted nostrils like a Tartar's. Mallory knew the face; not a few of the illustrated journals had presented it to the world. Barikoff, the most important man for the moment in the Indian empire.

He fixed his eyes on Mallory and bowed slightly, then motioned to his men to push him a chair and took one himself. He glanced at a paper and gave an order. The men filed out at the door, and he opened the talk in perfect French the moment they were alone.

"I am sorry to incommode you, sir, but military necessity has no law and you have been caught in the act of escaping. You will almost anticipate my next word."

"Death," said Mallory.

"Precisely."

"Then why delay? I am ready."

"Because a few questions are necessary first, and if I find you in the right frame of mind it is possible we may suggest another way. Did any one in the palace help your escape?"

"No one."

Barikoff laughed a little, softly, as if a relishing thought were in his mind.

"Well, well! We must not ask too closely where a woman and a good-looking young man are concerned. Our teaching is not hard upon little human peccadillos. But we must not let her tenderness lead us into forgetfulness of political needs. I will come to the point at once. When Colonel Gifford left you we have reason to believe he confided a military secret to you. We want it."

"I have no secret."

Barikoff yawned ostentatiously. "Surely," he said. "we can get past all the inevitables and to business? Can I speak plainer? You hold the key to a situation that delays and puzzles us. We mean to have it."

"You have my answer."

"I hope you will not put us to the pain of drastic measures? Contrary to the world's belief the Free Brotherhood is merciful. What we should like best of all is that you would throw in your lot with ours frankly——"

Mallory did not waste a word. He shook his head.

"Ah, I imagined that would be your reply. Then we must take the other line. Understand clearly, we must have that secret. The want of it is halting us all along the line. Have you ever realized that there is such a thing as torture and that it did not end with the Middle Ages."

"I realize what you say."

"Then—still, no?"

"No."

A great quiet was in the huge room. He could hear Barikoff's heavy breathing, he could hear his own heart beating. He raised his hand and saw the ring on his finger. The fake.

The real ring—it had been the center of so much. Why had she given it back so generously? Was there more than lay on the surface in the gift? He went over her words in his mind while Barikoff stared at him. "And Ibn ul Farid took it after he had used it on you in Cairo and after that because it had power to make you see what he would." Power? Then had she given it back that some one else might succeed to that power, might use him, might—surely this was a folly of the Dark Ages—it could not be! But why had Gifford said to him, "Beware lest they hypnotize you again. It is always easier after the first time." They should not, he swore it to himself, with Barikoff's unwavering stare upon him. But they would believe they could.

And then like a flash of light in the darkness a thought came to him, a resolution.

"You see," Barikoff went on, "the hard necessity of the case. We have no wish to kill you. If we could get what we need you are perfectly at liberty to make your way out of Mianpur and to your friends. If you *can!*"

The last sentence was sinister. Mallory put his hand to his head wearily.

"I don't ask for mercy and I will not tell you what I know—but may I ask this much? I can't collect my thoughts. I am dead tired. Even while I speak my brain is whirling and aching. May we postpone this talk until to-morrow? I hope then to show myself a man."

Barikoff leaned toward him looking straight into his eyes.

"I was once a physician. Yes, I see you are exhausted—the pain is in the temples, I know. Look up at me—I may magnetize

it away. We want your brain clear for our own purposes."

Mallory fixed his eyes on Barikoff's with a weak motion of his hands as if to repel something he dreaded. They stared at each other for what seemed more than a minute, then he said feebly:

"Yes, that's better. That rests me. The relief is extraordinary. It's like sinking into sleep."

Barikoff without relaxing his gaze drew a small glittering object from his pocket and held it up.

"Look at this." Mallory obeyed, his eyes heavy and dull.

In a minute more his eyes had closed. His head fell back upon the chair. He was apparently in a deep sleep. Barikoff whistled softly and a tall thin man came in. He had a dry precise manner, and gold spectacles fixed on a hawk's beak of a nose.

"Test his eyes, doctor. I want to be sure."

Mallory held to his resolution with a grip of iron while the man rolled his eyelid back between his finger and thumb.

"Yes. This is good!" he said in German. "But I'll try the pin trick too. Better be sure."

He took a pin from the lapel of his coat and ran it right into the patient's arm. There was not a flinch or a wince. It might have run into putty.

"So! You can go on. He's off. I should not say he was a good subject, but, according to Ibn ul Farid the ring is a hypnotic charm, especially once it has succeeded."

"Absolutely, and we can get him afterward whenever we want. Now, watch. I ask him."

He leaned forward.

"Can you see?"

A dull voice from Mallory's lips, unlike his own, answered:

"Nothing."

"I make you see a room in the Lake Palace and yourself and Colonel Gifford. Do you see now?"

"I see."

"Do you hear?"

"Yes, his voice."

"Repeat to me exactly what Colonel Gifford told you of the plans you were to remember. You are now in that room. You hear him."

A struggle in the throat—the voice hoarse and whispering as if in agony.

"I cannot, I cannot."

"You must. Begin at the beginning. I wait."

The voice faltered, stammered. There was a long wait. Barikoff remained dead still, his eyes fixed greedily on the working face before him. Then the voice made way as if through some impediment in the throat and poured on in a weak stream of sound:

"He said this—this! 'The most important thing of all. The thing I never told even you up to this. It's vital. We counted on the Maharaja of Junwar and he sold us. He is hand and glove with the Muscovians. Trust him no longer. Rao Singh has taken his place. He is in Sellore now. All the wires run through him. He is to give the signal for the rising. We have powerful friends among the Muscovians and Barikoff is sold to us. We can get him directly the signal is given. Others also. We have spent much money with the Muscovians. At the end Ibn ul Farid was playing our game also. Get yourself kept in Mianpur. Do not leave. If you are killed Rao Singh will take on and Weardale will go in. He can pass as a native anywhere. They will never trap him. The signal for the rising is a rocket from the Hathi Bagh."

The voice stopped for a moment, and Barikoff put another question.

"Did he say who had betrayed Barikoff?"

"No. A secret for the heads." Then suddenly: "My God, have I told, have I said? Oh, the hell of having to remember—to have it dragged out of me. Stop! Stop! Let me go! He said 'Barikoff is betrayed. We have him when we will!' No more."

His eyelids opened, then fell heavily again.

"He's beginning to come to," the doctor said, leaning over him.

"Is there any more?" Barikoff demanded ruthlessly, but with lips ash white.

"Nothing. Nothing." The head fell back. He was sinking into a sleep or stupor. "Oh, the lake and the prison and the endless days," he murmured.

"By the Holy Trinity!" said Barikoff, using a very obsolete Muscovian oath—and then fell silent. He looked suspiciously at the doctor. The doctor looked with equal suspicion at him.

"Friends? If I knew their friends they should have a short shrift and a long rope. If it were conceivable——"

"The entirely damnable thing is that Gif-

ford has escaped and no one knows how," said the doctor, meeting the glance resolutely. "What will you do with this man? Is it any use to shoot him? If so——"

"Use? Are you a fool?" Barikoff was irritable. "No—no. Didn't you hear what he said? Set him free and watch him. See who he gets in touch with. See who helps him. Get him out of the place, or we shall have Weardale, who is a real danger; we shot for the sake of shooting at first and were the devil's own fools for our pains. No, no. Track the dog every inch of his way. It concerns me more at this moment to know who are the traitors among us than even to trace the Junwar plot. Who is Rao Singh? We must know. We must warn Junwar. Will this man remember anything he has said when he wakes?"

"Nothing. I'll wake him now. First you tell him he's to wake."

"Wake, it's over. Wake!" said Barikoff in a tone of command. Mallory's eyelids did not move.

"I tell you—wake!"

Still he lay immovable.

"Sometimes it affects the heart," said the doctor. "Hold hard, I'll try this. But first—do you want the ring again?"

"Not I. While he wears it we can affect him even at a distance. Ibu ul Farid said so. We may want him yet."

The doctor opened his little medicine case and broke a capsule of nitrate of amyl under Mallory's nose. The pungent smell brought the blood rushing to his face, and his eyelids flickered, opened feebly, closed, opened again on Barikoff.

"You sent me to sleep," he said feebly. "A heavenly rest. My head's better already. You gentlemen are not perhaps quite so black as you are painted."

"We could scarcely be as black as that," Barikoff replied with a laugh that attempted good humor rather unsuccessfully. "But I hope you will sleep well to-night. You have a long journey before you to-morrow."

"A journey? Where? Are you going to shoot me?"

"No. Why should we? I do assure you we are not devils incarnate. You can do us no harm and there's no object in shooting you. Indeed we respect your courage in refusing to betray your secret."

He showed wolf's teeth as he smiled amiably. Mallory thanked him gravely and briefly.

"Show the gentleman where he is to sleep, doctor."

And as the doctor left the room with Mallory in tow, Barikoff said under his breath:

"I always distrusted that devil the doctor. He was Orsinoff's creature. I dare swear he's one of those in the British pay, and a doctor has a lot in his power. A pinch of stuff in a man's food, and pouf!—the thing's done. I'll have him watched night and day."

Precisely the reflection passing through the doctor's mind as he led Mallory away talking with the utmost courtesy. And Mallory, half an hour later, lying in a comfortable European bed, said to himself in the dark:

"Not a bad inspiration on the spur of the moment. Gifford would have liked it, I think. They'll have some trouble in finding Rao Singh—can't think how the name came into my head. And Weardale—Conway used to rag me about being an imaginative man, but it comes in useful sometimes. And if they shoot me to-morrow, at least I've set them by the ears. I wish I could have understood what they said to each other. That was the only blot—but I can't have everything in this world. Barikoff will give them all hell anyway."

He turned on his side and slept the sleep of the just.

Thus it befell that next morning Mallory on a good horse and a safe conduct in his pocket was passed out at the Sikanderbagh Gate with the world before him. He said incidentally that he inclined to make for Kashmir, and parted quite pleasantly with Barikoff, who, begging him to observe that Muscovians were much the same as other men, returned to keep an eye on the doctor in return for the doctor's eye on him, and to detail a spy to look after Mallory. And the incident thus closed pleasantly and profitably to all concerned.

Six weeks went by, and nearly all India was aflame. Kashmir and one or two other states were unseduced by the Muscovian lure, and to a man the princes themselves were loyal in spite of terrible sufferings and dangers. In the south one great state was pulling itself together shamefacedly after its debauch of Muscovian thought and action, and its ruler had been entreated to return. This formed a rallying point for the British. But frightful, unforgetable things had been

done there and elsewhere under Muscovian inspiration—the people themselves having suffered worst of all for their misplaced trust. And the sky was black with thunder.

Venetia in Srinagar heard the news from the resident, such news as he judged well to tell. Much it was as well to keep from women's ears. He came each day there with his gazette of selections for ears polite.

"Colonel Gifford is the eyes of the secret service," he announced, sitting in the comfortable cabin of the house boat *Dilkushar* which the Bassetts had rented. "He brought them priceless news from Mianpur, where most of the Muscovian bigwigs concentrated. But his escape was the record for all time."

"How did he do it?" Sara asked eagerly. "Can it be told?"

"Certainly, for it's the kind of thing that might always be repeated by the right man. He followed the plan by which Burton made his famous journey to Mecca. He became a Pathan from Rahmat Ullah, skilled in medicine. His friends in Mianpur dyed his hair and stained his face and the rest was easy. He knows every trick, every turn of the lingo, and was doctoring the Muscovian soldiers all along the route, and made his way into Chester's camp at Diglao simply chock-full of information. You know him, Miss Bassett. Is it true that he has an air that is childlike and bland?"

"I should think so. I don't—I won't believe he's a secret-service man!" cried Sara. "There's nothing secret or tricky about Colonel Gifford. Don't tell me!"

"I don't know about tricky, but he had friends all over Mianpur and even in the Lake Palace."

A pause, and the resident added:

"I wish the other man had been like him. That was a bad bsuiness."

"You mean Mr. Mallory?" Venetia asked quietly.

"Yes—that's a sad story."

"I haven't heard it. May I hear?"

Sara made a frantic sign to him, which manlike he never noticed.

"Yes. The Muscovians either forced or beguiled him into betraying some of our secrets. Something very important which may alter the whole turn of events. They say Gifford turned as white as a sheet when he heard that the Muscovians were boasting that Mallory had given the show away. It may even incline the balance against us. The beautiful begam was the bait, they said. Anyhow, he's betrayed his salt, though no one yet knows what he gave away."

"Is he dead?" It was Venetia's question.

"No one knows. The Muscovians say he's shut up in the palace with the fair begam. But in any case a renegade!"

She turned and walked out of the cabin, her throat very stately and erect. Sara rounded instantly upon the resident.

"She was engaged to him. Surely even a child could have seen I was trying to make you stop!"

He stared at her utterly abashed. "The blithering ass that I am. But why didn't you tell me!" he cried. "Engaged to that miserable creature! I don't believe it even now."

"If I know Venetia she won't be engaged to him long! I wish she never had seen him. I was very fond of him, I own, but if this is true the sooner she forgets him the better."

The resident was silent and Sara added mournfully:

"The worst of it is, she doesn't forget. Things go so dreadfully deep with her."

"She is very young," Mr. Deeping said consolingly, "and there's something in that kind of treachery that turns one a bit sick. I should rub it in about the begam, Miss Bassett. I should indeed! No woman could forgive that, even if she could pardon the other. I'll let you know all I hear."

CHAPTER XXVII.

But what Venetia suffered no one but herself ever knew, certainly not Sara, for she refused altogether to open her lips on the subject. She broke away from her sister and locking herself into her own cabin sat like a frozen image of grief and shame, all her endurance and courage broken down. Sara beat at the door a while, craving to get in, to be with her in the dark hour, but there was no answer. There was no more she could do, for in the time of sorrow every soul must fight its own battle and win or lose in solitude.

The terrible thing was that Sara could not even tell whether Venetia had won or lost, could not guess at all what was going on in her mind. She reappeared in the evening, deadly pale but for a scarlet spot on each cheek, her eyes hard and glittering,

and when Sara would have put a tender arm about her, she recoiled sharply and stood with her back to her looking out at the gay little row of house boats where the lights were beginning to twinkle like fireflies.

Presently, over her shoulder, Venetia addressed her sister.

"Please understand, Sara, that we are to go on as if nothing had happened. I can't speak of this, nor shall you. Let it drop once and for all. There is no more to be said."

That was all, and Sara dared make no answer, for in her ignorance any word might be fatally, hopelessly the wrong one. She sighed patiently and said nothing. Indeed, much patience was needed with Venetia the next few weeks. She kept a proud silence. Her eyes were bright and angry, the carriage of her head haughty. She suffered infernal agonies and in ways people could scarcely be expected to understand. Mr. Deeping would come in with tales of courage and endurance in the beleaguered cities and lonely villages. His voice thrilled as he told of men despairing of help, fighting to the end, shooting their women when no more could be done, sooner than let them fall into the hands of the enemy, and then at the last turning their guns on themselves. He looked round eagerly for sympathy, Sara in tears, Venetia cold as a stone. He began to dislike her—a girl who had no heart for her country's glories and sorrows. After all. a woman who could love a man like that beast Mallory could have no high sense of what either men or women should be! There was one day when he brought the story of a young Indian officer, son of the great House of Gondwara who had lost his life in a desperate sortie—an attempt to dynamite the Saranpore Gate of Sellore—a tale that rang like a trumpet call with all its pride and glory of heroism which for the moment is failure but shines like a star forever and ever in the dimmed eyes of humanity.

"Of the men," Mr. Deeping read monotonously, "only two escaped, horribly wounded. The rest——"

Venetia rose, looking straight before her and walked out of the cabin. He stared in amazement after her, laying down his glasses, and speaking, but not unkindly:

"Miss Bassett, can it be possible—I scarcely like to hint such a thing—but can it be that your sister's sympathies are with the enemy? Such extraordinary conduct surely——"

"Oh, can't you see—can't you understand her? She's half dying of shame because he failed when others are so glorious. And now this young prince—men of all nations do nobly, only *he* failed. Mr. Deeping, you have daughters of your own. Try to pity her a little, but never show your pity, for I think it would kill her."

She clasped her hands in despair, looking pleadingly at him. He shook his head gravely:

"It seems a very incomprehensible state of mind to me. Such a man is best forgotten. And indeed, my dear Miss Bassett, I have spared her all I could. News reached me yesterday that all communication has ceased with Mianpur owing to Mallory's defection and that Colonel Gifford is compelled to risk his precious life again in going there to complete some necessary link in the chain."

"But perhaps he is dead. Let us pray that he may be," said Sara passionately. "You none of you seem to consider that. It's as likely as treachery."

"I wish we could. No, he was seen riding out of the Hathi Bagh Gate with that scoundrel Barikoff bidding him a friendly farewell, evidently all on the best of terms."

"Has anything more come through about him?"

"Only that he showed Barikoff's safe conduct to a party of men, one of whom was in our interest. That speaks for itself. The rumor goes that he's working with them now in Sellore. After all, Miss Bassett, horrible as it is, such cases have been known. Shall I continue my reading?"

"I think not to-day, please," Sara said faintly. The thing would have sickened her even apart from Venetia. Heroism and victory, the only things to lift the burden of those anxious days, were changed into terror for her now. She dreaded lest Venetia should hear anything, for all was leavened with pain, and to save her from it impossible.

It was worse when a month later came news so important that she must meet it wherever she went, since it was a triumph in every one's mouth. Mianpur had fallen —Mahmud Mirza was avenged.

"I think, Venetia, you had better go for a row this morning," Sara said quaking inwardly. "It's such a lovely day."

"Why should I go? I want to be let alone."

"But—but——" Then, desperately, "Mianpur's taken."

"Well, what of that?"

"I can't keep Mr. Deeping away. He has the news."

"Why should you?"

"I don't want you to hear."

"Why shouldn't I hear like every one else? I don't understand you. Of course I shall stay!"

There was no more to be said. Mr. Deeping came with his budget and Venetia received him coldly and courteously, and then sat looking out of the window, her profile clear against the strong sunlight.

"The great significance of the fall of Mianpur is not only that it was the chief stronghold of the enemy, but that it was brought about by the treachery among the Muscovian leaders. A man—a doctor, they say, betrayed their plans to our people. It is a confused story but it appears Barikoff had some reason for suspecting this man and intended to have him shot. The man did a bolt and gave himself up to Colonel Gifford, and the rest followed. He apparently suspected that Barikoff himself had already sold the pass! Not much honor among thieves in Mianpur, you see. No question but Gifford planned this splendid coup!"

"Then have they got Barikoff?" Sara asked.

"Certainly. And that's the beginning of the end, I suppose, Ibn ul Farid being dead, he was the backbone of it all."

"And Shirin Begam?" That was Venetia's voice, very quiet, almost indifferent.

"No. Her whereabouts is not known." Mr. Deeping could never expand with Venetia. She chilled him in every nerve. Even now she never turned her head his way.

"But," he went on to Sara, "the Maharaja of Junwar has done splendidly. It appears they had forced him to hold some nominal office in their army, and there he kept his eyes open. Barikoff sent him word from Mianpur that they had heard a man named Rao Singh was at the back of all the attempts against Mianpur. It appears that there is no such person, and the maharaja knew it, but tumbled to the idea at once and worked up a long story with all sorts of embellishments about the activities of Rao Singh, and kept them so busy on these false trails that our friends in Mianpur were able to get a good deal done under cover. I feel certain we shall hear all this priceless work was run by Colonel Gifford. He knows Mianpur State like a book. There are splendid rewards in store for him and well he deserves them all!"

"Well indeed!" cried Sara. "I know Mianpur well enough to know what it means, and it rejoices my heart to think that Mahmud Mirza and the two queens are avenged. Will they shoot Barikoff?"

"They'll be fools if they don't!" Deeping said grimly.

In the silence that followed Venetia spoke clearly.

"Was any trace found of Mr. Mallory when Mianpur was taken?"

"None at all. He had been seen leaving it long before."

She said not another word while he remained and he noticed when he shook hands with her how coldly handsome she looked. It seemed as if the whole character of her face was changing. The sparkle, the life of it were gone. Perhaps for the first time some glimmer of pity and understanding entered his mind.

"He has fled with the woman!"—that was her thought. And again the weeks went on.

It was one day when Sara had gone with a party to the Peri Mahal that Venetia was sitting alone in the cabin of the *Dilkushar*. She was doing nothing but thinking, she seldom did anything else now, for when she was alone the mask could be dropped and she looked what she was—a woman in bitter trouble.

There was the light splash of oars outside and a voice that spoke to Gobind. No—no! It could not be. She started up, pale and stern, with one hand instinctively to her heart, the other leaning on the table gripping the paper she had tried to read, and waited—waited!

"The Miss Sahib is here?" the voice said and steps came along the little passage.

He came in.

His arms were stretched out, he made a wild step toward her, his face all broken up into light and hope and quivering joy.

"Venetia. Darling!"

Dead silence. She only looked at him with the dreadful withered pallor that had settled on her face when she heard him.

"Venetia! Are you ill?"

Something held him back. She struggled for words that choked in her throat. At last they came:

"Go away. Never let me see or hear of you again."

"Venetia!" The word was a prayer. She saw then how worn, how ill he looked, with a great seamed scar that crossed his forehead, his clothes worn and almost in rags, a pitiable figure. But it stirred no pity in her. She gathered herself together for a last effort.

"For what you have done I loathe and despise you," she said, and then turned from him shuddering.

He made no appeal. With bowed shoulders, like a broken man, he stumbled out of the cabin. She heard a heavy fall outside and never moved.

Then suddenly, amazingly, as when a freshet tears through the barrier of ice in spring and grinds it to fragments and sweeps it wildly away, love and pity so long sealed down burst up in her frozen heart and she flung the door aside and rushed after him. She threw herself on the miserable heap that lay there—the mere wreck of a man—and the tears rushed from her eyes as she clasped her arms about him.

"I don't care what you did. I don't care. I love you. I would die for you. I care only for that. We'll go away together and forget it all. Oh, look up and love me and forgive me, my dear, my very dear!"

Is it needful to write the end of the story? Love is enough. But there are things that must be understood. He had gone through so much. Life ebbed very low in him for all she could do. Gifford was in Srinagur resting after his long fatigues before Mallory could see any one but Venetia and his nurses. And then the whole gallant story was told, partly from Barikoff's revelations before they shot him, partly from reports of the faithful few in Mianpur who knew the whole truth as they knew everything in the palace. But there was more. Of the little group led by Gulbadan's cousin, the young Prince of Gondwara—those who had tried to dynamite the Sellore Gate, Mallory was one. He and another were the only survivors and the scar across his forehead would be the witness of it while he lived.

"We owe Mianpur entirely to him," Gifford said in his quiet way. "His dealing with Barikoff was an inspiration, for once the Muscovian leaders suspected treachery among themselves the game was up. I should never have thought of that. And then his work at Sellore—not to mention the blowing up of the gate with that splendid young Gondwara! Nothing's good enough for Mallory. I bless the day we met at Mianpur."

She listened with a pride and shame very different now. The shame was for herself, the pride for her lover. Must women always be petty while men went out and did such noble things? Ah, no, it was only she who had failed, who had been in the deepest sense a traitor. What is love if it has not eyes that nothing on earth can blind?

One day when Mallory was lying languidly on deck in the shade of a great canvas, Venetia sitting where a stray sunbeam touched the bronze of her hair to gold, Gifford came up the steps. They had been married a week before by the English chaplain at Srinagar, a dawn of new life and hope, though both bore tragic traces of suffering still. Gifford looked at them kindly as he pulled up the chair he always sat in.

"You're pounds better to-day. It won't be long before you're off to the mountains for your honeymoon, you two. Mrs. Mallory, I shall take you for a pull presently. You never leave him."

"I don't want to," she said, her lip trembling.

"But you must. Now, wait a minute and then get your hat. I've a bit of news."

"Good or bad?" she asked with instinctive terror.

"Good. Listen, Mallory. Shirin Begam is dead."

He started up, half sitting, and fell back again.

"Yes. It appears she had been hidden in a house in Mianpur, a house belonging to that old villain Srinavastri. His women gave her shelter. Rumors got about however and our people searched the place. She must have got wind of it, for when they entered the room she was sitting in a great chair, stone dead. It is said she had poisoned herself. Now, it's a curious thing—of course you remember the papyrus?—that it should be just two years since she first appeared in Muscovia and began all her mischiefs."

"Do you think," Venetia asked earnestly, "that there was any truth in that theory of

reincarnation, or was it all fraud? Did she believe it at all herself? Can such things be?"

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows the secrets of the lords of life and death? The Orient believes such things with unquestioning faith, and what is our knowledge compared with theirs? If she and her brother used it as fraud, even believed it all a fabrication, still it may have been true. But, if it was all a fake, she knew the game was played out, and if she had any belief in herself, she knew from the papyrus that two years was her allotted span and that was out too. The truth is probably quite independent of what they believed and it is utterly beyond our ken. I have lived too long in India to deny the improbable flatly. I simply don't know. What do you think, Mallory?"

"It's beyond me," said Mallory.

That was always his answer. True, Revel and she, plotters all through, might only have seized the prophecy and used it villainously among a superstitious people for vile ends. They were capable of that and more. But if the tree falls as it lies, might not the evil spirits of ancient days come back armed with evil even as the papyrus had foretold? There were things he never could account for, even to himself, incredible, mysterious, to be felt rather than known, that made him doubt. Life and death—who knows their secret cycles? She was so beautiful. Had she loved him a little? Were their lives still to touch in some dim future? Should he think of her again as he thought when he saw her silent image in the tomb, and in the fever of longing that followed in his strange illness in the desert?

Unanswerable. He closed his eyes wearily. All he wanted was to forget. Later he could think.

"You'll be glad to see Conway when he turns up. And it's good news that the Egyptian government will share your finds with the British Museum. What with all that and the coming decoration you'll be a bit of a hero, old man! Now, come along with me, Mrs. Mallory."

Venetia lingered a moment. She said with a shiver as of sudden cold:

"I think the Arabs are right. I think those old tombs of dead dreadful things should never be opened. Let the dead bury their dead."

The flames subsided. The fire died out in India and left desolation behind and a sad quiet. The sullen tide of the Muscovian armies rolled back shattered among the terrible mountain passes and the peace of the world was secured for a decade, if no more. Had they learned their lesson? That question was beyond even the wiseacres of the daily press. It lay on the knees of the gods.

For Venetia and Mallory the fire died out also and peace and healing came and rest in the loveliest country of all this lovely world. Healing, but with scars that nothing could efface.

The clouds pass. The sunshine is eternal.

'The Gladiator," a complete novel by Wilbur Hall, in the next issue.

TRAINING FOR HARD WORK

SENATOR WILLIAM E. BORAH, who frequently entertains himself by shaking up the United States Senate and the map of Europe, was talking about the tendency of modern men and women to keep themselves "soft," both mentally and physically.

"What we need," he said, his eyes showing a twinkle that Mr. Lodge of Massachusetts has never found there, "is more people like the good woman who applied for a job in a home in my town, Boise City. She was broad-shouldered, weather-beaten, a few inches over six feet tall, long-armed and possessed of the stride of a cavalry officer, but she asked for light housework, explaining that she was in no shape to do heavy chores as she was still convalescing from a severe attack of typhoid fever.

"'Where are you from?' asked the lady of the house. 'And what sort of work have you done?'

"'Jis' lately,' replied the applicant, 'in fac' up to three days ago, I've been diggin' on a ranch in Wyoming, makin' post holes while I was gittin' my strength back.'"

Kelley. Cordier, Donner and Kent!

By James Hopper

Author of "The Smoke," "Cabaygan," Etc.

Captain Kent and his three musketeers perform a miracle of football.

WHEN the Bears began this football season, a pride was in them of past prowess, and a certainty of their power to repeat. The preceding year, on Thanksgiving Day, they had crushed ancient rivals—those known popularly as the Panthers—by the biggest score ever reached in the long twenty-five-year-old duel. And they were all back, on this first day of the season—the whole strong elastic line from end to end, and the three fast-charging backs, and Blair Kent, leader of men, slippery open-field runner, cool general and indomitable captain. They were all back, welded into one by the stalwart affection borne of hard toil, and perils, and injuries suffered together, borne of the sweetness of victory enjoyed together. A tenderness was in each for the team as a whole; and loyalty; and a warm consciousness of its worth. The college was mad with pride of them; the newspapers hailed them as the country's premier eleven; before them lay a path of victories. Only Jerry Landfield, the coach, held the least misgiving. As they lounged before the great open fire of the training-house hall, of evenings after practice, he would try to express to them this fear.

"Listen, fellows, you have me scared. Positively. You are all so sure! Don't think for a moment that the striped shirts are not getting something ready for us down there. They're all raw for what we did to them last year. And they have material—loads and loads of material. It's young; but how many times have I seen those young wild teams upset the dope and break a veteran machine like ours! For God's sake be careful! Be careful, don't be too sure!"

They listened politely but the words did not reach their hearts.

Seeing this he would tell them the story of his last game. How his team, just such a team as they, a veteran machine grown overconfident, had in their last game been met by a bunch of young wild cats; had been jumped for a touchdown. A touchdown which, fight as they did, with everything going wrong, they had never been able to equal. "It was my last game," said Jerry. "My last game—with no chance ever to retrieve myself. My last game, and a defeat. How would you like *that?*"

But he was speaking of something that had happened long ago, long ago. At least ten years ago—in the fabulous past! Their minds, even as he spoke, strayed back to the present, to themselves. They thought of the team; each, of all the others. Each end thought of the tackle next to him, of how good he was, how dependable, how well they worked together. Each tackle thought of his end with affection and pride. The center thought of the two guards, so stanch at his flanks; the guards thought of the center, a perfect Gibraltar. And the line collectively thought of the backs, and the backs

thought of the line, and all thought of Kent, the superb quarter back. They remembered all of the subtle tricks of interaction they had evolved with time. They were one; no other team could be one as they were.

And as a matter of fact the first part of the season seemed to prove them right and the coach's fears futile worries. The team boomed through its first games impressively. Whatever overconfidence might have been theirs was cured in the Villabromsa game, when for a horrible moment they found themselves backed up against their last white line, and only in the last ten minutes were able to get a-going, all cogs slipping oilily back into their proper places, to roll out at last, irresistible, these spitting catamounts, in three long impressive marches down the field.

Jerry breathed easier. That team would never again, he knew, suffer from the least vanity. A triumphant season now seemed assured.

But ruin can come not only from the inside; it can come from outside, from the fates. On a wet afternoon, with a slippery turf, Right Half Donner, going up in the air for a wild pass, collapsed as he reached the ground. "What's the matter, what's the matter, Don?" all his mates asked, in a circle about him.

"I think," he said, grimacing in his effort to conceal pain, "it's my knee. It's my knee—I think I've thrown it out! Oh, damn—I think I've thrown it out!"

That evening, as they lounged in the training-house hall—while he lay upstairs—they learned what the doctor had said. "A plaster cast for three weeks." They counted the time left before the big game. Less than five weeks! Then Donner was almost surely out of it for the season. Donner out of it! They looked at each other, dismayed.

Well, the best thing to do with that sort of an accident is put it out of mind, and turn that mind to the next best thing. "No use crying over spilled milk," Jerry Landfield thought; and put Hunt in the vacated place. Hunt was a good back. Almost as good as Donner except for a small difference which was a big one. He was slower than Donner by a mere fraction of a second. Just a mere fraction. But that meant slowing up the whole backfield, attuned to Donner's speed. Well, it could not be helped; Hunt would have to do. He fitted better into the machine than any other man, having substituted for two years. Hunt would have to do.

The work went on—a grinding monotony of practice day after day. Jerry gave much time to Hunt, and also ran to the hospital now and then to see Donner—holding, there, in spite of himself, some flitting hope. The autumn was a strange one. The winter colds were slow in coming; it rained a good deal; practice day after day was beneath a low gray sky, in a wallow of slime, and a sort of dark apprehension now hovered over the Bears.

Still, they were not ready for what was coming. In the dusk of the fag end of a long afternoon's work, Al Kelley—called "King" Kelley—rose from a buck and pile-up with the right side of him looking all queer. "Shoulder thrown out"—every one knew it.

Three men, pulling hard on the extended arm, snapped it back in its socket—right there upon the field—and Kelley joined the hospital squad. Three years ago, he had gained for good the nickname of King Kelley because of something regal within him which could not be stopped. Rather a slight lad, in hitting the line he could not be stopped. He would go in headfirst, with back horizontal, not more than two feet above ground, smashing in with terrific impact; and then, driven home within the swirling mass, within there shook, turned, bored, twisted, butted with such concentrated fury he often broke loose—and at least always made his yardage. The end of a big game always found him a wreck—bruised, plastered, bandaged, on crutches—a legendary figure for the press cartoonists. King Kelley—thus he was known throughout the land.

Well, he was in the hospital now, with Donner. Jerry tried to make his mind let go of him and to apply itself strictly to the problem at hand. He put Hart in where Kelley had been. Hart was a good faithful back.

But he could not help looking backward a little. "Donner gone, Kelley gone—backfield gone to hell!" That was the rapid thought that would then come to him before he had time to head it off.

Well, he still had his line. The best line in the land; chrome steel from end to end; and writhing, and alive, and wary and ag-

gressive. With a line like that second-rate backs became stars. And then there was Kent, with his keen brain, his flaming spirit, which would galvanize the deadest eleven to prodigies of action. "We'll be all right yet," he thought. "We've got something still to give them!"

From the south his scouts were bringing him news of a strong, untamed young team, uneven and ragged as yet but possessed of strange sudden terrific bursts of power. "I have my line," he thought.

But in the Champlain game Jack Cordier, right tackle, sprained his ankle. At least, at first it was thought to be a mere sprain. But when it did not respond to treatment the diagnosis was changed. A ligament had been torn in there somewhere. The cast for Cordier; immobility for Cordier.

"Macey will have to do," Jerry said to himself, and placed Macey at right tackle. But the jinx now had settled on that position. Macey broke a leg. "Nothing left but Castleman," Jerry thought, and put Castleman in. The very next day Castleman was pronounced ineligible by the faculty. "Good Lord," Jerry said, "it's got to be Mansfield!"

And now the team did show the results of the evil fate crotcheting it. It was a bit like a wounded bird, with one wing strong and the other carrying lead.

Jerry, in the midst of his toil, began to haunt the infirmary where Donner and Cordier and Kelley rested. While trying to hide the hope in him which would not quiet down he craftily pumped the doctor. But the doctor knew what he was after and was noncommittal.

"They'll be out of their casts all together, if that is what you want to know," he would say.

"And when about will that be?" Jerry asked.

"Ten days from to-day—not a day sooner."

Jerry would calculate swiftly in his head. That was a week from the big game. In a week, sometimes, things get well. Perhaps——

"That's *out of the cast,*" the doctor reminded him, leaning heavily on his words. "And you know what things are like, just out of the cast!"

But still, secretly, Jerry held a little hope. Meanwhile he was acting as though he had none. Stubbornly, patiently, he worked and worked at the team in an effort to get the most of what could be saved from the wreck. The daily line-ups would last till the ball became invisible in the darkness. They were gloomy work-outs, in secret behind barred gates, under low sullen skies, on soggy spouting turf, in slanting sheets of chill rain.

Finally came the day when the casts came off. And right away Jerry knew that he had hoped futilely there—read right away in the manner of the three men the tremendous disappointment with which they felt their injured members, now removed from the protection and the concealment of the cast, so weak and so sore. He knew that they also had been hoping and now, bitterly, were yielding to the evidence. They were out of it; it would be criminal even to try them out. No, they were out of it and that was all.

As one remembering a dream Jerry threw his mind back to the beginning of the season, to its certainty and the splendor of its promise. Well, they had certainly slipped down from that time. Reviewing in his mind the gradual wrecking of his team, of his great team, of that which was going to be the greatest that ever was, Jerry almost wept.

"Well, I still have Kent," he said bravely. "And he's pretty near a whole team in himself."

It was the last week of practice. The gates were open, and every night the college poured out to the stands and in chorus shouted to heaven its confidence in the team. It was difficult to harbor misgivings; the fever of enthusiasm seized every one. Came the last rally, lifting every one into delirium. Donner, Cordier and Kelley, crouched together on the side lines, their throats tight, in a mixture of exaltation and sorrow quite exquisitely unbearable. They were seniors; this was to be the last battle and they would not be in it. And Jerry, gripping his fists in spite of him, in spite of him growled. "We still have Kent; we'll beat them."

Then on the morning of the big game the news, starting from a single whisper, spread over the campus, within hall and dormitory, throughout the town and soon, by wire, all over the land. Blair Kent, the Bear's great quarter and field general was down with tonsilitis; in the infirmary, burning with high fever.

"My God, what a wreck," Jerry Landfield wailed silently, thinking of the great team he had once owned.

"No chance now," he thought, "unless *they* are weak."

The game was on. *They,* the Panthers, of the black-and-gold jerseys, had not proven weak at all. They were one of those young teams who are the fear of the coaches, an eleven a little rough and unpolished but possessed of terrible raw bursts of strength and filled with the unquestioning audacity of youth. Sent out upon the field all burning with the words of their coach they had attacked the patched-up Bears, a little heavy with self-doubt, with a clawing fury which had immediately placed the older men on a weary, hanging-on, stubborn but half-despairing defensive.

The whole first half the Bears had toiled as if in a pocket, the fighting on their territory all of the time. Charging and charging, plunging, passing, running, the Panthers would drive them backward toward their own goal. There, the last white line scorching their backs, the Bears in a wild revolt would stand, break through, tear to pieces the human catapults aimed at them, take the ball on downs. Which immediately—too weary, too uncertain of themselves to attack from so dangerous a position—they would send down the field in a long high punt.

Upon which the Panthers would attack again, pushing with relentless ferocity toward the goal they were determined to win. And the Bears could not extricate themselves and get out of danger. It was as if a heavy lid had weighed on them. As if in a nightmare they toiled and toiled, unable to shake themselves free of the threat heavy upon them, pocketed in their territory and escaping final disaster time after time only by the merest hair line.

The ending of the half saved them, and between the halves, in the little dressing room beneath the creaking, groaning stands, Jerry exhorted them, flayed them, branded them, beseeched them, and sent them out for the second half with new souls. For a while they attacked, they seemed about to turn the tables. But the fates were still unappeased; they had not yet satisfied their obscure grudge. As the Bears hammered down the field to the shrieking joy of their supporters there was a fumble. Upon the loose ball pounced Harford, the Panther back, and ran clear to a touchdown.

On the score board high hung on the fence a great white seven took position. The Bears' doom seemed sealed; defeat and disgrace their lot.

In the infirmary Blair Kent suddenly came out of a hot state, in which he had been grotesquely visioning, to a sort of white, lucid coolness. Lying on the iron bed, feeling at once very clear and a little weak, he listened to the great salvos of roars which rattled the windows of the still, white room. As he listened, clearly conscious now, he knew that he had been listening to the same thing along while in fever; listening to a great ceaseless yell which, through the murkiness of his delirium had been like a moan; listening to the "Ho-o-o-o-old 'em! H-o-o-old 'em! Ho-o-o-o-old 'em!" which from time immemorial Bear teams in trouble, Bear teams reeling in the shadow of defeat, had heard from stand and bleacher, from the voice of the college. "Ho-o-o-old 'em! Hoo-o-old 'em! Ho-o-o-old 'em!" like the moan of the sea; and then, above, light and clear, like the clatter of machine guns, the Panthers' "Give-'em-the-ax-the-ax-the-ax, give-'em-the-ax-the-ax-the-ax, give-'em-the-ax!"

It was this he had been hearing, for a long time, in his fever. Things were not going well; something was wrong.

Things were not going well. What was he doing, here, in this bed? He was all right; only a little weak—his head, suddenly now, altogether without his command, gave a small roll on the pillow as if it did not belong to him. Just a little weak, that's all. And he ought to be out there.

He lay a moment on his back, like a child on a wintry morning, though he knew he must be up, then finally rolled out in his pajamas. The door of his room was open as though some one who had been within had for the moment stolen out. His clothes hung in the closet. But they were not the clothes he was going to wear; those were next door, in the locker room of the training house.

He stole out of the room in his pajamas, and downstairs, and in a quick streak across the lawn to the training-house locker room. How deserted everything was—it was like the end of the world—the infirmary, the halls, the stairs, the garden, the street, and

now the locker room. Nothing living about, but that great unceasing roar from the field —"Hold them! Hold them! Hold them!" He opened his locker after some difficulty. For a moment he thought he would not be able to remember the combination. And there was his armor! The cleated shoes, the moleskin breeches, the striped jersey, the sweater, the leather helmet. It was strange how clear was his plan, how wabbly the execution. But finally he stood panoplied as of old, stamping on his cleats in a rather pathetic imitation of the way he always stamped, like a full-blooded horse, before going into the fray.

Sweater? No, he wouldn't use any sweater—to hell with sweaters. Helmet? Yep. He picked it up and walked out dangling it at the end of his arm by the elastic.

He crossed the lane to the arena's high perpendicular wall and followed it to the players' entrance. The gates were closed; no one was there. He struck at the gates with clenched hands. Gee, it was funny how little noise his fists made; he couldn't make any noise at all with his hands!

Suddenly a hot surge flowed through him from head to foot; he felt his eyes grow bright, a wild warm strength was in him now. His tattoo on the doors grew resonant. They opened.

"My Lord, Mr. Kent, what are you doing!"

"Going in, Tommy, going in!"

He brushed by the old gatekeeper and went on, dangling his helmet. He was in a long tunnel beneath the stands which creaked and groaned. He went on toward the quadrangle of light at the end; he was out. The green field lay before him. Across it, on the other side, was the Panthers' rooting section, writhing black and gold; behind him—he did not turn to look—were his own people, the old college, soughing its "Hold them! Hold them! Ho-o-old them!"

He slipped under the ropes to the space along the side lines. On a bench against the low fence the Bear substitutes sat in line, their chins forward, their shoulders hunched under their blankets, immobile as Indians. Kent went over and sat with them. Not one of them gave him a glance; they were all intent upon what was taking place on the field, the tragedy taking place on the field.

The team, there, backed up against its goal. The team, somehow like a bark in the gigantic billows of a storm.

He took in the situation with a few glances. Up there on the high score board the telltale numbers—the big white seven above the big white zero.

On the field the team, still fighting stubbornly but without fire; the team bogged, mired, wrapped as if in palsy; the team struggling monstrously and impotently as if tangled in invisible glue; the team, defeated!

A low curse at his elbow turned his head. It was Donner who was sitting beside him. And beside Donner, King Kelley, and beside the King, Cordier. The three crippled veterans had their arms about each other, as if each were trying to console the two; and with chins thrust out and moody eyes they watched in desolate helplessness what was happening on the field.

"Why don't we do something, why don't we do something!" Kent thought restlessly; and after a moment left the bench and, bending low so as not to interfere with the view of the stands, made beneath the falling thunders of sound to Jerry, on the side line.

The coach knelt there, one knee in the mud, chewing the bitterness of an unlit cigar, his eyes fixed upon the struggle. Kent knelt down by his side. "Jerry," he shouted in his ear. "Put me in! Me and Cordier and Donner and Kelley!"

The coach looked at him and Kent saw the surprise and consternation of the glance. "Go back to bed," Jerry shouted. "You're sick; go back to bed!"

Kent shook his head. "There's only about ten minutes left, Jerry. Send us in—go on! Can't more'n kill us. Put us in—go on!"

For an instant Jerry considered, his eyes alight. Then his eyes went dead. Why allow these boys to hurt themselves now? To no possible purpose? Squaring his jaw he looked away from Kent to the field again, and his body went rigid as granite.

Kent knew what this meant; he went back to the bench and sat down. The others had seen him go to the coach. They probably surmised his errand and its result. Without a word they made way for him and Donner put his arm around him.

The four now sat as the three had done —close, taking subtle comfort in each other —and, tormented, held their eyes upon the field.

The Panthers kicked. The Bear back receiving the ball fumbled it. A bloodthirsty shriek went up from the Panther stands. But the Bear back, with a desperate dive, fell on the ball, recovered it.

Kent now rose smoothly to his full slim height. "Come on," he said to Cordier, Donner and Kelley.

They pressed about him, excited. "Did Jerry say we were to go in?"

"Come on," he said, and dangling his helmet led the way to the side line and then upon the field. Across the field toward the teams they walked, the strangest procession ever seen there. As he walked Kent raised his hand to the officials, and now, the game held up, both teams, grouped in circles, stood awaiting curiously the singular advance. And the Bear stands had caught sight of the four, and wondering, for a moment were silent.

So that it was in an ambient stillness and immobility that the four walked across the field. Kent led, dangling his helmet, which he had not yet put on. The stands could not see the hard brilliance of his eyes nor the fire of his cheeks, but now and then he wabbled slightly. Donner and Cordier plainly limped; and the great shoulder harness humped Kelley to a sort of baleful deformity.

To the referee walked Kent, the others following. "Cordier for Mansfield, Donner for Hunt, Kelley for Hart, and I for Ransome," he said; and Mansfield, Hunt, Hart, and Ransome, sagging with weariness, walked off the field while the stands, sure now of the incredible thing which was taking place, sent a great shout to the sky.

Cordier nestled into his position between his old mates, the right guard and right end. From the first minute of the game, with a badly outplayed tackle between them, they had been having a terrible time. "Oh, Cordier, but we're glad to see you!" their looks said, though all they did was to slap him on the back. Then, coldly exultant, they spoke right at the Panther tackle, hot with triumph. "Just a minute, old man," they said, "and we'll have you squawking like a chicken."

And Donner and Kelley took their places with Hall, their old companion back. He too had been having a terrible time; he grimaced when he saw them again by his side; without that grimace he would have wept.

And Kent took his old position behind the line. But before giving his signal he went the length of the line, first to the right, then to the left, and to each man gave a little intimate prod, and into each ear whispered a warm word, and felt, under his touch, to his voice, the great machine of flesh and blood reawaken and begin to thrill as always to his voice, to his touch, as in the past it had thrilled. He turned to Cordier, to the King, to Hall, with a smile and a look. "Come on, boys; the gang's all here!" Then raising his face to the sky he bayed out the signal, and to the call again felt the team tremble.

In challenge of the fates which for so long had exercised their malignance upon the team, in defiance of the law of matter, it was with all the cripples he attacked. The ball moved; "crash" went Donner into the line in a feint; "crash" went King Kelley with the ball, through the hole torn open by Cordier. Kent was behind him; almost right away they struck something hard; it swerved them and they churned, but still going forward, like a derailed train on the ties. Kent could feel within his arms the King's tremendous butts to right and left, ripping open a way. Then abruptly they went down.

"Second down; six yards to gain," the referee announced.

"Six, eleven, ten, four——" Kent called out, defiantly announcing a repeat. And again, with Donner deceiving, King Kelley went through the line torn by Cordier. It was third down with only one precious yard to go.

Again Kelley. First down.

The stands were now all up, stirred by the splendor of the madness they were witnessing. Kent's eyes went to Donner. "You know, old man!" they said. And Donner, whose weak limb had been reinjured, with just a little sob took the pass and using torn ligaments shot cross tackle for five yards.

Then again Kelley.

Nothing like it had ever been seen. The Bears, reanimated by the terrible will of those four broken-bodied men, were now marching down the field. Nothing like it ever had been seen. Almost right away their injuries had given way; but this, somehow, under Kent's hallucinated leadership seemed to have goaded them to a more furious fury. Between charges Donner, on his

bad leg, limped almost to the ground; yet when the ball stirred he was off like a deer, pain and disability forgotten. Cordier's ankle was like a leaden boot filled with hot ache; but stamping his whole weight upon it he made it do its job; stamped upon it, ripped the hole which must be made. Kelley, as he bucked, swerved a little; by no prodigy of determination could he make that exquisitely sensitive shoulder go in first. But he dragged it in after the other, and once within the Panthers' swirling mass made it do its share, butting, butting, butting, butting. Kent, after each down, wabbled as if about to faint. But steadying himself, he raised his face to the sky and out of his torn throat hurled the clarion-like signal. The fever that possessed him made him see everything large and clear; what to do next seemed always large and clear. And his spirit planed over the team like two wings of flame.

Once he tried a forward pass—only once. Everything was set just right. Barclay, the left end, whirling like a hawk in flight, had reached exactly the correct position. Kent's arm went back; he shot it forward, the ball upon the palm. But to his great stupor the ball traveled barely halfway to the waiting end and fell miserably to the ground. It was as if he had been removed to another planet, with conditions of gravity utterly changed.

"I guess I'm not just right," he thought. "No more forward pass."

So by mere strength, in painful, terrible thrusts like the convulsions of a dying giant, the team moved on toward the goal. But when almost beneath the bars they were stopped. They lost the ball which, immediately kicked, soared back over their heads, clear back to where they had started, near the center of the field. But a sort of delirium possessed them now; they felt as if they could plod on forever in this somberly delicious hell of pain and exhaustion. Once more they moved toward the Panther goal.

Toward the end it was Kelley, Kelley, Kelley. Kent had found in him the attack which, for short sure gains, could not be stopped. Kelley through Cordier; Kelley through Cordier. Donner around on one of his wraithlike runs. Kelley through Cordier. No such bucking ever had been seen as the King's. He swerved a little each time in a wincing impossible to control; but immediately, as if to punish himself, it was with a sickening impact he crashed in; and once within, he corkscrewed and corkscrewed and heaved and lunged.

It was Kelley who went over the last white line to the touchdown. And when the goal had been kicked he lay down in an ecstasy of pain, and Cordier lay down by him, and Donner too.

For a moment Kent remained standing—standing above those comrades of his whom he had driven so implacably. Then his legs began to wabble, like reflections of legs in a rippling lake, and he sank down and joined them on the ground.

"Bring them all out!" Jerry Landfield cried, stirring at last out of the profound stupor in which he had sunk. "Have them all carried from the field."

And carried they had to be; not one of them was there now who could put foot before foot. But later and ever—they, Kent, Kelley, Donner and Cordier, declared it had been well worth it. All of their lives they will be able to look back and say it was well worth it. To see the big white seven, upon the score board, rise up against the Panthers' seven.

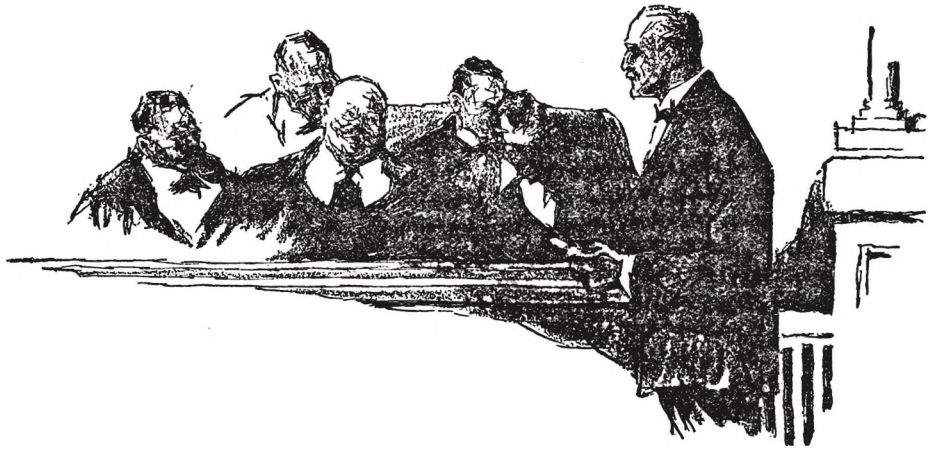
"Kelley, Cordier, Donner, and Kent!
Who're all right? Who're all right?
Kelley, Cordier, Donner, and Kent!"

EVERY FEW THOUSAND YEARS

JOHN KIRBY, Irish wit, journalist, clubman and American representative of a European republic or two, has the brutal gift of frankness markedly developed. During the last session of Congress he displayed it in picturesque and unrestrained operation for the benefit of a mid-Western representative who, breaking an official silence of nearly three years, had addressed the House in mighty but meaningless tones.

"I'll bet," he told Kirby, meeting him in a capitol corridor a short while after his melancholy peroration; "I'll bet you didn't think I could make a speech. Now, did you?"

"Well," replied Kirby, who particularly disliked the man, "I'll admit I can't think of anything as amazing as that happening in modern times. In fact, I can't remember anything to equal it since Balaam's time."



"Whoso Diggeth a Pit—"

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Through to the Finish," "According to His Folly," Etc.

Ralston Ames had his own notions about the ethics of criminal practice, but Fate changed them for him.

POLK MERRILL was guilty of murder, guilty as Cain and everybody knew it, and nothing stood between him and a Manila rope deservedly knotted beneath his left ear save three hundred thousand dollars and Ralston Ames.

Yet this was a potent combination, for the three hundred thousand was what remained of the half million that Merrill's cattle-raising father had left him five years before, and Ralston Ames was the greatest criminal lawyer south of St. Louis.

The deal between them was pretty generally known; Ames had not told it but Merrill had, and such a story spreads wideningly. If Merrill not only could dodge the hangman but be freed to continue his pleasuring and wasting his estate would shrink to a quarter of a million, the other fifty thousand going into the Ames bank account to join the ten-thousand-dollar retainer already in hand paid. Ralston Ames, when he defended a man, charged what the traffic would bear.

And with the evidence what it was, and the prisoner who he was, current opinion declared that if the lawyer could get his man clear this time he would have earned it.

The audience in the fetid city courtroom, from the frowsiest of habitual spectators through all the social grades there crowded to the representative company of attorneys within the rail and the judge on the bench, felt, now that the testimony was all in, that Polk Merrill had put on his last wild show. The mills of the gods, with him, had come to their final grinding. Texas law and practice has tolerant leniencies as regards homicides of certain sorts, but the killing that Merrill had done was not one of these.

They settled back as Ames rose and stood before the jurors with a show of grave but perfect confidence, to hear him begin what with a lesser man would have been a hopeless argument in the face of overwhelming evidence. The witnesses had made ample explanation of the crime but it had been explanation that did not excuse.

The killing had taken place on a hotel roof garden at nine o'clock of a summer evening. Merrill had started a profane disturbance there in the presence of women, and Bruce Eckels, a respected middle-aged citizen who not only was not armed but was known of all acquaintances never to go armed, had sought with others to quell it. It was undisputed that Merrill was saturated with bootleg whisky. It was also admitted that he was a drug addict and that heroin in combina-

tion with alcohol in his system invariably tended to make him noisy, quarrelsome and dangerous.

Thus stimulated he had drawn a pistol and fired it when they closed in to expel him from the roof, and Bruce Eckels had died on his way to a hospital.

Testimony had been introduced by Ames to prove that Merrill had no previous animosity toward Eckels, that he was not even acquainted with him, that his fevered mind had imagined himself to be in danger and warranted in shooting in self-defense.

It had seemed a vain line of evidence. The witnesses for the defense, no less than those for the State, had demonstrated one thing beyond peradventure—that Polk Merrill possessed nothing whatever but good blood and money. Decency, respectability, reputation, all these he had long since lost. He was twenty-seven years old and a liability to the community which thus far had allowed him to live in it and which was now demanding, through an able prosecutor, that he legally die in it.

Girdler, the district attorney, had seen to it that the jury was composed largely of middle-aged men, who might be expected to sympathize with Eckels.

Seeming to oppose many of them or to accept them only with reluctance, Ames had seen to it that a majority were middle-aged men with grown sons. Three or four of them had children who had not always lived ornamentally. One of them, Colford, a heavy, forceful man with a stubborn mind and some gift for rough argument, had a boy of twenty-five who was not much better than Merrill. Ames knew, if Girdler did not, that Colford had more than once gone to great lengths to extricate his son from serious trouble.

He was looking into this juror's stern, seamed face as he began his address.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said quietly, almost conversationally, "you are here to do justice. Justice to the State; that is the State's due at your hands. Justice to the prisoner; that is his due. Justice to your own consciences; you are bound, as honest men, to do that. That is what you wish to do, and that is all I ask you to do. Justice!"

His voice, not raised, vibrated with sincerity. He stood at ease before them, a tall, handsome man of forty-seven, his thick whitening hair tossed back from a high forehead, his clean-cut features pink with the healthiness of a well-ordered life and still-resilient arteries. He paused as though to arrange his thoughts—always, in his jury speeches, Ames gave a perfect impression that his words came extemporaneously—and then went on:

"Bruce Eckels is dead and you have heard the story of his death. Polk Merrill killed him. Polk Merrill cannot bring Bruce Eckels back to life, nor can you, nor I. He can only grieve—in so far as his poor defective brain allows him to understand what he he has done—and emulate that other mad character of history who prayed that he might wet his victim's grave with his repentant tears.

"You have heard the evidence, gentlemen, and you know the tragic happening of that night. And you have gone back in your minds beyond that night, as the story has been woven before you, and have followed the sad career of a youth who had a good father and a good mother and a decent upbringing and all the training that goes to make a man a worthy citizen of his community—and which, as you must realize as well as I, would have made him a worthy citizen if something had not happened to warp and twist his brain."

Ames turned slightly to glance toward where his client sat slumped with the muscles of his face twitching in a chair at his counsel's table, and as his gaze moved back toward the jury box it rested briefly upon his own son, now in his second year in Harvard Law School, home for the Christmas holidays and come to watch in professional action the father he loved and admired. The boy, a big, good-looking youngster with broad, intellectual forehead and wide-set eyes was in a front-row spectator's seat that Ames had got a court officer to secure for him, leaning slightly forward, lips parted and a light of pride upon his face.

A little wave of affection passed over the lawyer, as always when he looked upon his son.

Marshall Ames was the one thing in life, since the boy's mother and sister had died, that Ralston Ames really cared for. His work and his son were his sole interests—and at his work, now that he did not especially need more money and could hardly achieve greater fame, his principal satisfaction lay in looking forward to that time when Marshall would have his diploma and

come into his father's office, with "Ames & Ames" on the door, whereupon the older man would slowly withdraw from some of his activities and live in the accomplishments of the youth who would take them up.

The emotion was fleeting and hardly conscious, little more than a feeling of gratification that the boy was here and a renewed determination that he should witness a triumph. Then instantly Ames put everything out of his mind save the task before him. His eyes did not wander from the faces of the jurors. His voice, still conversational, almost confidential, began to review the history of Polk Merrill's dissipations.

A drunkard and then a drug fiend, slipping down the ever-steeper hill of habit, he pictured him, until one of the younger lawyers in the inclosure whispered in astonishment to his neighbor, "For the love of Pete, what is he doing—making Girdler's speech?" And Girdler, the district attorney, listening to this steady, inexorable marshaling of damning facts against the prisoner's character, shifted uneasily in his chair, well aware that Ralston Ames made no unintentional slips in his jury addresses and wondering toward what trap this unprecedented argument for the defense led.

Slowly, impressively, coldly, Ames told the jury what manner of man Polk Merrill had been and what manner of man he was. First weak, then vicious. There was scorn in his voice, and contempt; his words lashed. Merrill, who had gloomed and fidgeted and twitched throughout the trial, suddenly raised his haggard face and stared with wide, frightened, incredulous eyes at the man who had taken his money and now was publicly excoriating him.

Yet systematically, methodically, and to an ever-increasing degree, while the surprised jury followed his every word, the lawyer was insinuating into their minds the thought that the prisoner's downfall had been something beyond his own control, the steady overmastering advance of a sinister disease that had clutched his mind and soul.

He was performing a desperate experiment in jury psychology. They had expected to hear him deny what the evidence had told them, and braced themselves to resist his eloquence. Now they found him agreeing with them—but plausibly explaining the cause of what had happened in a light they had little considered. More than once he saw a juror's head nod slightly and unconsciously in acceptance of what he said. He was getting their minds to run with his, along the line of least resistance. Then:

"Gentlemen," he began again after one of his impressive pauses, "you have not given thought to this, naturally, but I do not doubt many of my legal brethren here present have wondered why, when I outlined to the honorable court what things I asked should be presented to you in his charge, I did not ask him to especially charge you as to manslaughter, a crime which is defined as 'voluntary homicide committed under the immediate influence of sudden passion arising from an adequate cause but neither justified nor excused by law.'

"I did not ask the court to especially charge you as to manslaughter. I do not ask you to find my client guilty of manslaughter. I do not want him found guilty of manslaughter."

Every attorney in the room inclined his ears more sharply; even the judge moved a little in his chair and looked intently through his glasses at Ames. The audience rustled with a subdued excitement as he continued:

"The penalty for manslaughter, under our statutes, is not less than two nor more than five years. If Polk Merrill continues to be insane, a menace to the peace and safety of the State and the citizens of the State, *five years is not enough!*"

A great fear shone in the prisoner's eyes as he half rose from his place at the table and cried, protestingly:

"No! No! What are you trying to do?"

An officer seized his arm and pressed him back into his seat. Ralston Ames did not even turn his head to look at him.

"Some stage play, that," a youth at the reporters' table murmured to his neighbor, a veteran.

"No," replied the older man, whose eyes were studying the prisoner's face. "I'll swear Merrill had never heard of it. Ames is pulling a new one."

Merrill seemed to prove this ignorance by sinking back into his chair, muttering audible curses on his lawyer for double crossing him. Ames went relentlessly on:

"One who commits a crime while insane may not be punished for it—but he should be incarcerated in a proper place, and for the safety of the State he should remain

there not one year, nor two, nor five, nor ten, nor any definite term, but for life, if need be, so long as he is a danger to the community."

"Oh, I see," breathed the old-timer at the reporters' table. "There's the little joker. Beautifully done, too."

"The scholarly district attorney will tell you," Ames said, "and he will tell you truthfully, that 'temporary intoxication of mind produced by the recent use of ardent spirits,' to use the statute's phraseology, is not an excuse, under the laws of this State, for the commission of homicide, although evidence of such temporary insanity may be introduced for the purpose of determining the degree of homicide. But, listen, gentlemen. Polk Merrill was not and is not temporarily insane because of the recent use of ardent spirits. He was and is insane because an insidious drug has undermined the intelligence God gave him—because long and vicious use of an opium derivative in combination with alcohol has wrecked his mentality and filled his brain with distorted visions.

"For such a man"—Ames' voice boomed resonantly—"for such a man there is a place provided by law—an asylum where sick brains are treated and where those who are beyond the hope of cure—as his friends may well fear is true as regards this unhappy youth—shall be restrained for the remainder of their natural lives."

Ames stopped and scanned the faces of the jurors, one after the other, and when he spoke again it was as man to man.

"You know me," he said. "Not personally, perhaps, but by reputation. You know, I hope, that I am esteemed to be a man of my word. Hear me, then, make a solemn statement to you, upon my most sacred word of honor.

"I promise you, men, when you have rendered a just verdict in this case, that I shall immediately—to-day—the moment that verdict has been returned—charge this prisoner, Polk Merrill, with being insane. This is not the court and a jury of twelve men is not the jury before which a man is charged with lunacy; such a matter comes properly before a county court and a jury of six.

"Before such court and such jury I shall bring the charge and I shall prosecute it to the limit of my ability. And I ask you to believe that, whether my client wishes it or whether he does not—and you see him before you and, as men skilled in reading the thoughts and actions of other men, you see that he bears in his face evidence that he does not wish it—I shall do my best to send him to an insane asylum. And my best, in so clear a case as this, will be a successful best.

"In this I am doing my true duty both to my client and to the State, gentlemen. I was retained to save him, if possible, from the gallows or the penitentiary, and I am confident that I have done so—have done so justly, because he is irresponsible—but there my duty stops. It does not command me to turn loose upon a community one who is mad; and Polk Merrill is a madman, unfit to go up and down the streets free and unrestrained."

From his breast pocket Ames took a folded paper and held it up before their intent and curious gaze.

"Not for more than thirty seconds, when you have completed your duty, will he be free," he said. "When you have brought in your verdict, and the honorable court, in accordance with it, has ordered his discharge from custody, this paper will pass from my hand to the hand of a deputy sheriff, who will serve it instantly. It is a complaint charging Polk Merrill with insanity. He will not be turned loose to be a menace. He will go back to jail. From there he will be committed to the asylum."

The prisoner's face was hatefully distorted.

"You dirty, two-faced crook!" he snarled across the space between them, and then he sprang to his feet and cried:

"Judge! Your honor! He can't do that! I don't stand for anything like that! He's sold me out to Eckels' kinsfolk. I don't want him for my lawyer any more. Can't I have another lawyer?"

"Be seated," the judge said coldly. "Your defense is in your attorney's hands. In the court's opinion he is handling it quite within the bounds of propriety."

Merrill dropped back again into his chair, sputtering helplessly, and Ames turned and let his eyes rest pityingly upon him.

"Poor fellow!" he said to the jury. "He cannot see, of course, what is best for him. No mind diseased is able to do that. When you have brought in your verdict of not guilty, gentlemen, I shall do as I have promised you. I have given my word. I leave Polk Merrill in your hands. You will not

send him to the gallows. You will not send him to the penitentiary. You will find him not guilty—as an irresponsible insane man should be found—and I shall send him to the asylum where the insane are kept so long as they remain insane, even though it be until they breathe their last sad mortal breath."

Ames did not go again to sit beside the prisoner but took a chair not far from the jury box. As the district attorney rose to begin his speech an old lawyer named Kingsbury, a cynic wise to the signs of weather as its winds blow past juries of good men and true, leaned over and whispered to another member of the bar:

"Ralston's got 'em, Sam. It looked before he spoke like gun-totin' homicide might get almost as hazardous in our fair State as playing cards on a railroad train. But reason reigns, and the government according to the fathers still lives. He'll put the whelp into the asylum. How long before he'll get him turned loose?"

"How long does it take the doctors to get all the dope out of a man's system?" the other asked.

"I dunno. Depends how much he's got in it, I suppose," Kingsbury said. "Not more than six months, probably. Ralston ought to have that contingent fee in time for a nice li'l' vacation trip next summer."

"He's a wonder," the other lawyer breathed enviously. "If he'd ever put Merrill wise and tried to rehearse him he wouldn't have had half as much chance of getting away with it. Of all the smooth jury workers I ever saw——"

"Ssh-h-h!" somebody warned. The district attorney had begun to speak, but he felt his task was hopeless.

II.

Ralston Ames and his son sat together in an inconspicuous corner of a hotel grill room. It had seemed they would never get away from the courthouse for the swarm of attorneys who surrounded Ames to congratulate him.

"Well, Marsh, to-morrow's another day," the lawyer smiled after they had ordered and the waiter had gone kitchenward. "It oughtn't to take me later than noon to get him adjudged insane and committed, and then we'll take a little vacation. What do you say if we get out of town for a day or two's shooting? Or will it be enough amusement for you to see how badly you can beat the old man at golf?"

"I don't know," Marshall replied. "I'm —I'm sort of undecided. I can't seem to think of much of anything but that scene in court. If Merrill could have got his hands on a weapon as you handed that warrant to the deputy sheriff after the judge discharged him, he'd have killed you."

His father laughed comfortably.

"And yet, when I left him in the anteroom, after I had a chance to explain it to him, he wanted to shake hands with me three or four times. He had got that 'last and mortal breath' peroration of mine the same as the jury did, of course. For all Girdler said—not as convincing as he might have been, Girdler!—he didn't see that as soon as the asylum people get him cured of the drug habit he can be proved sane and a habeas corpus will release him—with no criminal charge pending against him at all."

The youth frowned thoughtfully.

"Will he be cured?" he asked. "Cured, I mean, so that he will leave it alone for the rest of his life, and never be dangerous again?"

"Quién sabe?" his father said lightly, and shrugged his shoulders. "He will be sufficiently cured to be freed."

"I wonder——" Marshall murmured.

Ames looked up quickly into his eyes.

"What's worrying you, son?" he asked.

"Oh—nothing," the boy replied diffidently. "It was your duty to get him off, and that was the only way to do it—and a wonderfully ingenious way, too; I was darned proud of you. But I couldn't help thinking—you won't be offended, dad?"

"Of course not."

"It was a pretty bad killing he did."

"Rotten."

"And he ought to be hanged. That is, if you believe in capital punishment. If not, he ought to be put away for life—for the safety of everybody else. That's what the jury thought, wasn't it? They thought you *were* going to put him away for life."

"I didn't say so. What they thought I said——"

"I know," agreed Marshall. "We've got an instructor up at Harvard—one of the younger men—who maintains that a lawyer, even for the defense, ought to be satisfied with justice. He argues that when an attorney has seen to it that his client gets a perfectly fair trial and a just verdict, he has

done all that the ethics of the profession call for."

"That instructor, practicing criminal law, wouldn't make enough to buy golf balls," Ames commented dryly.

"Isn't that what the law aims at—real justice? Isn't that how a conscientious lawyer should use it?"

"Son," said Ames tolerantly, "when you're young you get a lot of thoughts like that, and they're all right—theoretically. In practice a good lawyer uses the law as he finds it. What I did to-day was absolutely in accord with the law. If juries are made up of blockheads who can be whiffed one way and another by brainier men, I am not to blame. My job is to get my clients acquitted."

"Of course, dad. And yet—I know some of the biggest lawyers in the world have disagreed as to how far an attorney is justified in going in trying to acquit a man that he knows to be guilty, but when I saw you making monkeys of those jurymen I wondered——"

"Marsh," his father said as the waiter set down their first course, "a criminal lawyer defends criminals. His duty is to get them free, if he can, just as it is the district attorney's duty to convict them, if he can. He does it according to law and practice. If he is able to find flaws and loopholes, he is wholly justified in doing so. He doesn't make the laws; he uses them."

"But if he uses them in a spirit contrary to what the lawmakers intended?"

"This soup needs a little salt," Ames suggested. "You will find, as you go on with your studies, that the weight of most of the best authorities, from Blackstone down, is that an attorney is justified in overlooking nothing that may be to his client's interest, so long as it is lawful and ethical. His duty is to win for his client. There is an old Chinese proverb that states the situation rather well: 'The goodness of a house does not consist in its lofty walls, but in its excluding the weather.' "

"Isn't that almost the same as saying that the end justifies the means?"

"Why not?" said Ames.

III.

Instead of the six months that the cynic Kingsbury had estimated as the maximum of Polk Merrill's stay behind asylum locks and bars, the time dragged out to nearly eight, for Merrill's addiction had gripped him vitally and there were setbacks, so that Ralston Ames, who kept close track of his condition, through the spring and early summer, dared not bring his habeas corpus proceedings then because it could not be hoped that the medical men would declare their patient cured. But when, on returning from Europe late in August, he learned that nearly three months had passed without Merrill once screaming for the drug's relief, the wheels of law were set to turning and in due time Merrill walked the streets again, free, in his right mind, full-fleshed and clear-eyed, and poorer only by the stiff check that he had paid to Ames on the day when the jury of six declared him sane.

Ames scrutinized the check, shook hands with his client, advised him carelessly to leave booze and dope alone in the future, and well-nigh forgot him, for there were more important matters on his mind. For one thing, he had become the attorney for the head of a mighty ring of illegal liquor dispensers, who gave him much to think about and stalwart additions to his income.

Two happy months he and Marshall had spent together abroad, and then the boy had returned to school. Reports of him were altogether gratifying. Ames spoke often and proudly of him to his fellow members of the bar and in moments of leisure dwelt more and more on the day when that sign on the door should read "Ames & Ames." Marshall was coming home again for Christmas.

It was one night the first week in December that "Buck" Townley, slamming a Ford over his regular route from the Rio Grande, with seventy-two quarts of tequila in the car and twenty ounces of morphia and heroin ingeniously hidden about his person, rushed full tilt into trouble at the foot of a long hill.

The road was curved and narrow and he was behind schedule time and driving at all the speed his car was capable of when his headlights suddenly picked up an automobile, its lamps out, drawn squarely across his path. He tried to go around it without slackening pace, saw that he didn't have room, jammed on his emergency brake and came to a jarring stop as two men came out from behind the obstruction and one of them threw a flash light into his face and called sharply:

"Get 'em up! Pronto!"

Townley could see a big automatic in the fellow's right hand in the flash light's beam, and he lifted his hands high, sat tight, and awaited further orders.

The second man also switched on a flash light and directed it at his own breast. It illuminated a metal badge.

"Federal officers," he said. "We'll take a look at that car. Climb out."

Buck obeyed and the man with the pistol ran a hand over him competently and satisfied himself that the rum runner was unarmed.

"All right," he said. "You can put 'em down; it'll save you muscle cramp. But don't go to make a get-away or anything like that, because if you do I'm aiming to let this gun of mine go off."

Being wholly unable to think of any profitable comment Buck kept his mouth closed. A car and a hundred and fifty dollars' worth of tequila was not a serious loss, as the hazards of his trade went, but his narcotic burden was a different matter. Worth more than a thousand dollars at smugglers' prices and vastly more when the peddlers put it out—and this was not all. Rum running is one thing as to its possibilities of punishment; the narcotic traffic quite another. Not in one trip out of twenty did he bring in dope. Did the officers know that?

"Well," suggested the man with the badge when the seventy-two quarts had been expertly located, "ain't you going to say anything?"

"You say it," Buck replied. "Where do we go from here?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"That's right, kid me!". Buck exclaimed, aggrieved.

"No kid," the other assured him. "How much is it worth?"

"Oh, I see. Well, how much do you have to have? I ain't very well fixed for ransom to-night."

"See what he's got," the chief commanded, and the fellow with the pistol again made a search, limited to pockets and investigation as to whether or not there was a money belt, and hence not involving the drug supply in Townley's clothes linings. In the glow of the searchlight he counted the roll of bills. "A hundred and eighteen," he reported.

"You can go for a hundred—and we won't hold you up again for two weeks," said the one in charge.

"All right; give me back the eighteen," Buck sighed. He stuffed it in his pocket. "Now if you'll move that bus of yours, so I can be stepping on her and rolling along out of——"

"Where do you get that stuff? You ain't going to step on nothing but your feet. The hundred was to let *you* go. The car is seized. We report that you made your escape."

"Oh, but look here——"

The man with the pistol waved it gently.

"Beat it, buddy!" he said.

Buck beat it.

He came into Ralston Ames' office thirty-six hours later and passed the outer guards.

"Listen, Mr. Ames," he said. "I got highjacked and shook down for my car and seventy-two quarts. By officers, maybe, but more likely pirates; I haven't seen anything in the papers about the car being turned in or any report made on it. Well, that's all right, but I was packing a load of hop, too, and they didn't get it, and now I find Scully's been called away to Dallas or somewheres, and I can't find Hofflemaster, and I want to know who to turn the stuff over to. I've had it long enough. Gee, when them hombres went through me and it looked like they'd find it——"

Ames had been listening with unaffected and growing irritation. Now he broke in:

"I don't know what you are talking about. Are you trying to retain me as your attorney in some connection?"

The rum runner showed surprise.

"Why, no," he said. "It's only, like I said, that Scully's had to beat it out of town and he didn't leave me no orders where to deliver the stuff—or if he did I haven't got 'em. Knowing you and him worked together——"

"You are entirely mistaken," the lawyer said. "I suppose from what you say that you are one of James Scully's men, and of course I have represented him in some legal matters, but as to having any connection with his business affairs——"

"But, listen, Mr. Ames!" Townley exclaimed. "I'm up against it and I got to get some advice from somebody, and you're who the boss comes to. There's a customer of mine that's raising the dickens and how to handle him I don't know. I was to deliver him twelve quarts—Scully has me deal with

him sort of wholesale without making him buy through a bootlegger, seeing that he's a steady customer—and when I came in without it yesterday it seems his supply had run out and he's ugly as sin and blames me.

"But that ain't the real bad medicine; he can get more hooch somewheres else, if he has to. He's hollering for heroin—and I ain't got no authority to sell it to him. He says he knows I've got it and he's going to have it or he'll spill it to the Federal outfit that I've been selling him tequila. He might do it, too; you can't never tell how one of these hopheads will act if he gets shut off on his supply.

"Well, that's what. If Scully was here I'd put it up to him and he'd know what to do. But, me, I ain't no retail hop peddler and I don't know what Scully would want to charge him for it if I was—but the cussed fool is likely to start something neither him nor me nor anybody else can finish if somebody don't do something. What's the answer?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Ames replied distantly. He resented this familiar confidence, as though he were a partner of criminals. "As far as I'm concerned you'll have to use your own judgment. And I'd rather you wouldn't come here again on an errand like this. Merely because I have defended some of your employer's people——"

"Oh, all right, all right," Townley said. "Excuse me for butting in. But I'd like to have you tell Scully the next time you see him that I tried to put it up to you. It'll square me some if he don't agree that I did right in letting this feller have it—because, barring advice to the contrary, that's what I've sure got to do. I don't dare do nothing else. You wouldn't, if you knew what a hell raiser this Polk Merrill is when he gets crossed."

"Polk Merrill?" repeated the lawyer.

"I hadn't ought to have mentioned names. That shows how haired up this thing has got me. This Merrill is a regular customer of mine, like I said, and lately it seems he's got to lighting up with dope, and——"

"Really," interrupted Ames. "I'm not interested in the details of your troubles. Settle them for yourself."

"Right, me lord," replied Townley. "Which means he gets some H, pronto. If Scully asks did I come to you, tell him I did and what you said, will you?"

The rum runner went away and Ames' eyes narrowed on the door that had closed behind him, while he nodded slowly.

"Gone back to it. He would, of course," he murmured. "Most all of them do, sooner or later. And sooner or later he'll be coming to me to get him out of trouble again, I suppose—and it won't be so easy next time." His lips twisted in a contemptuous sneer. "The weak, good-for-nothing, damned fool!"

He turned after a moment to go on with the pen letter that he had been writing when Townley came in, and immediately the unpleasant expression left his face, for he had brighter things to consider than a degenerate youth's inability to learn from experience. He wrote:

Telegraph me when you leave New Orleans, and I will have the car meet you at the train—will be there myself, of course, unless something mighty important comes up to prevent. I am making some plans for the vacation that I think you will like. I am going to have my work in such shape that I can neglect it shamefully, for the whole fortnight if need be. Not that I propose to monopolize your time. Several very pretty young ladies have been asking me, lately, just when I expect you, and I don't imagine I shall see any more of you than I am entitled to. Well, that's all right, Marsh. I shan't be jealous of them. I want you to have just as good a time as you can. By and by, after you have come home for keeps and started in to prove to the old man that he is way behind the times as a lawyer, I'll see more of you and——

Before he completed the sentence Ames sat back in his chair and smiled contentedly.

The boy's desk would be in that next room, where the door could be opened between when there were no clients in the office. And out beyond the waiting room, on the door that opened into the hallway, would be the new lettering. A short family name lent itself to such a sign as he planned: "Ames & Ames" on one line, with nothing to indicate that the partners were old and young, father and son; nothing to show they were not altogether equal.

IV.

An annoying traffic blockade slightly delayed the lawyer in getting to the railroad station. Many other automobiles were in the driveway that led from the street to the main entrance and clear parking space was some distance from the door. He stepped out of his car there, told his chauffeur to wait, and turned briskly toward the building, and at that instant, from somewhere in-

side, it came—the sharp, reverberating report of a pistol. Confused shouts and screams followed. A policeman who chanced to be passing went in through a side entrance on the run, dragging clear his own revolver as he went.

Ames was impeded in the station entrance by people rushing out, most of them women. They were hysterically incoherent.

"What was it all about? The first thing I knew was when I heard it, and I looked and——"

"I saw he had a gun, but before I could even open my mouth——"

"I was almost in line with it; if it hadn't been that I'd just moved to one side——"

Ames pushed through. In the broad corridorlike space between the waiting room and the train shed milled a significant jostling throng, surrounding something on the floor at which they craned over one another's shoulders. Thirty feet or more away, in front of a bench for waiting passengers, a struggle was just coming to its end. A resisting, cursing man was being jammed backward into the seat by a railroad special officer and the policeman who had dashed in from the street, and the policeman was getting out handcuffs. The special officer was telling him and the world, excitedly:

"It's God's mercy he didn't get me. Not a particle of warning. How could I figure he'd go after a gun? He didn't look like that kind. I didn't notice him come in or anything about him till he started cussing and screeching at the porter. Said the boy had swept dirt on his shoes. So I come over to tell him he's got to lay off that language or get out, and he yells and froths like a crazy man and snakes out his pistol and tries to let me have it. And I duck and jump in at him, so he misses me, and I get his wrist before he can shoot again, but that first shot goes square into that crowd that's just off the westbound and gets a feller. Dead. I heard a doctor say so. My God, I couldn't help it! I grabbed as quick as I could——"

"Say! You're hurting me. Stop hauling me around. You've got me, haven't you? Go easy!"

It was the prisoner, now suddenly relaxed, who shouted this, and Ames saw that he was Polk Merrill. And in that instant Merrill caught sight of the lawyer and cried:

"Hey, Mr. Ames! You're just the man I need. Get me out of this. I didn't go to start anything but when this feller began to bawl me out and it looked like he was making an excuse to kill me—tell 'em to take me along without hurting me, and then come and get me out. It was an accident; anybody'll tell you that; I don't even know who got hit. I want to get clear, right away. You can do it. You'll charge me like blazes, I suppose; everything you do costs like the devil, but——"

From the floor some men were lifting the body of Merrill's victim, and as the crowd parted and fell back Ames saw his face.

His cry was very terrible.

"Marsh! My boy!"

There will be another story by Mr. Davis in the next POPULAR.

AN INGENUE GRANDMOTHER

THE youngest grandmother in the civilized world is a matronly ingénue of Glasgow, Scotland. That, at least, is the claim of Mrs. Archibald Moynes, who happens to be the grandmother in question. She was married in 1905, at the age of fifteen. And now, at thirty-three, having covered less than half the scriptural span of three-score and ten years allotted to her, she rocks the cradle of the second generation of her line.

Without the aid of pencil and paper it is possible to arrive at the astonishing conclusion that by the time the ingénue grandmother of Glasgow attains the seventieth anniversary of her birth her first great-great-grandchildren will be over a year old. And should she continued to her eighty-fifth birthday, it is quite conceivable that she will find herself the revered ancestress of no less than five generations.

To the ladies who believe there is merit and distinction in hanging up records for nonstop jazz performances we commend, for consideration, the record, present and potential, of Mrs. Archibald Moynes of Glasgow.

Huckleberry Flynn

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Hale and Farewell," "Simple Simon," Etc.

As a movie director Mr. Ottie Scandrel was a Poor Relation, but as a child of fortune he was an Elder Son.

ALEXANDER DUMAS, a French boy who once tossed off *beaucoup* best sellers, was frequently heard to remark that nobody knows what Lady Luck has on the shelf for them. There's not the slightest doubt that Alex registered heavy with the statement. The only trouble is that he didn't go into details. Luck is divided into two classes—the ayes and the noes. Either you have it or you haven't. Look at all the hounds of misfortune who'd be caught with a pair of sugar tongs if it was raining hot consommé. And then take a look at all the darbs who'd be on hand with a sponge in every pocket. *Those* babies are the kind who pick pearls out of restaurant oysters, tab the goats with the fancy prices for a win and positively never have relatives who drop in for week-ends.

They're the jockos who could fall in the mud and come up with a steam yacht in each hand!

If a party who answered to the name of Ottie Scandrel was not one of these fools of fortune then Christopher Columbus never flung a sail to the wind. The ludicrous part of it was that "Sheik" Scandrel was an optimistic numskull, a clown for conceit and a simp in a silk suit. Yet, if any proof was needed that Ottie was in line when Fate handed out the coupons, mention need only be made of Thomashefsky Flynn, otherwise the "Battling Huckleberry," "Silent Phil" McClusky, who had the lightweight crown within inches of his eager fingers, Carrington Forbes, a demoniac screen director, to say nothing of Addison Vandergilt and one of the fairest representatives of the speaker sex—Miss Judy Marshmont.

All of which combined isn't the half of it, dearie.

After a busy season, handling everything from imitation flyweights to heavies who only needed a cloud around the ears to be mistaken for mountains, Scandrel signed Silent Phil McClusky. This jobbie was iron in human form, for a fact. He was a punching maniac and one year under Ottie's direction found him all set to hurl challenges at the lightweight champ. This happened around the end of August and before opening up a direct line of communication with the champ's manager Ottie felt that his

health demanded a vacation if only for a week.

Accordingly he left Silent Phil with instructions to behave himself, sent in a half a century for some happy rags, threw a pound of grease in his gas eater, called for me at the doors of the Bronx gym and set a course for a certain part of Long Island where some descendant of the James boys ran a cave known as the Wild Waves Inn.

This slab was the fried tripe and no mistake!

The minute we reached the inn Scandrel broke out with a set of golf clubs and at once proceeded to give the links belonging to the hostelry a terrible tearing up. Honest truth, from the second we arrived Ottie and golf were inseparable companions. If the game had been roulette played for one grand a spin it couldn't have taken him for more time. He tried his best to make me tumble for the pill clouting but there was too much weather out on the fairway. I decided I could get all the exercise needed sitting on the regular beach in front of the hotel, dolled in a nautical costume that was guaranteed not to run or walk fast.

Thursday morning when I fell out of bed and slipped down into the chow parlor for the morning melon it was to discover Scandred already at the table, polished up for eighteen holes of the Scotch pastime. My boy friend was as English as Buckingham Palace in a uniform direct from dear old Bond Street. The sartorial ensemble with its twice-two knickers, hosiery that was breaking out in triangles and ferocious dogs would have made the Prince of Wales go into immediate conference with his staff of tailors. Positively, taken by and large and fore and aft, Scandrel was a dizzy Beau Brummel from the top of his nut to the soles of his feet.

"So this is golf?" I murmured, having a chair at the board.

He completed tearing off a couple of yards of kid with the waitress who handled our menu and threw me a nod.

"Double up on the cereal," he instructed the handmaiden and then turned to me with a yawn. "You think this game has knocked me triple cuckoo, but you're wrong, Joe. I only entered into it to find out what it was like. On the level it's the bunk. Picture a pastime they make as *hard* as possible. That's this golf thing. I suppose they'll soon be using handcuffs in tennis and playing poker with blank pasteboards. The bunk, absolutely!"

"Then you've been bunked ever since we landed," I cut in. "You must be nearly a Pullman by this time."

Scandrel curled a lip.

"Tie away that noise. I admit I walk a nasty game but it hasn't got me. I turned in the highest score for the last few days but you can write that off. The guy I went around with came through with a mere seventy-eight. I cleaned up with one hundred and forty-two for the entire eighteen holes and then the little crook wanted to collect the five cart wheels we had riding as a side bet. Believe me, I slapped him for a rosy goal!"

The waitress returned with her tray. Scandrel dipped in and didn't have anything to say for five minutes straight.

"When do you contemplate returning to the beautiful Bronx?" I inquired after a time.

He tore himself away from the fodder and sighed.

"Sooner than that. The clerk just now give me a telegram from McClusky. O'Silverstein, the champ's manager, has been smelling around for a tussle on the opening night of the West Harlem A. C. and Mac thinks everything's set. This means we'll have to shoot back to town right after dinner to-night."

"Why wait until then?" I asked. "There's a good train out of this slab at two bells—if you can't gas the boiler."

"What," Scandrel sneered, "and leave the bandits that run this trap get a meal on us that is paid for? Do I look insane? We'll blow out at seven—or later. Now," he mumbled, flashing his ticker, "I think I'll sink the pill a little and do a piece of golf."

I was about to sympathize with him when the waitress loomed up again.

"Anything else, Mr. Scandrel?"

Halfway out of his chair, Ottie sank back and grabbed the card.

"Er—why certainly. Bring me a plate of custard. If you're all out of that make it a dish of apple pie. Ha, ha! This out-of-the-door life gives me an awful yen for the kitchen."

Twenty minutes later by anybody's watch we crossed from the dining room to the lobby of the Wild Waves Inn. Here we found the management of the hostelry courting bankruptcy by having all the lights

going full blast. Near the door that went out to the porch there was a little group of people but we didn't pay very much attention to them—at first. What took our eye was a young gentleman who lounged with an elbow on the mahogany clerk's desk.

This youth was twice as handsome as Valentino and as well dressed as Fifth Avenue. He was the candy in white flannels and rosy cheeks. And he had a slender build on him that was like that of a thoroughbred race horse. In view of his class the line he was handing the clerk was somewhat disconcerting.

"Get me right, bo," he was snarling. "I'm 'Battling' Brady, the lightweight champeen of the world! I'm so tough that I take a bath with a piece of sandpaper, get me? Now what do you mean there ain't no rooms for rent here?"

The clerk, a nervous wreck so thin he must have eaten spaghetti one at a time, looked half paralyzed.

"Just what I say, sir. All our single rooms and suites are engaged."

While the Prince Charming whose patter was that of the underworld got the broadcasting Ottie presented me with his elbow.

"The Duke of Disease, eh? Where does he get this Battling Brady stuff? The only ring this guy knows anything about comes in on the telephone. Let's stick and see what he's trying to walk off with."

The stranger in the Grade A clothes snapped his fingers at the clerk.

"Away with that noise? You mean there ain't no accommodations here for *me!* Well, buddy, if you don't want the shape of your beak changed rush away and bring me back the manager. Quick!"

The clerk broke a world's record getting away from the desk.

"Yes, sir. Instantly, sir!"

The next instant Ottie started to say something but stopped as quickly as if he had been pierced by a bayonet. His jaw dropped and he stared google-eyed across the lobby. I followed his gaze with my own and found the reason. This was a sweet mamma who had evidently drifted in from the porch.

For a fact the young lady would have given Aphrodite a tough battle for top place on the ladder of pulchritude. In the vicinity of sweet nineteen or thereabouts, the girl looked like Christmas Eve and made the opposite sex wish to play Santa Claus. If a picture was pretty she was a whole art collection for, besides admitting to fluffy red-gold hair, enchanting brown eyes and warm, red lips, she had a complexion that would have been worth a million dollars to her if sold by the inch.

Turned out in some wise scenery this vision made the rest of her sisters resemble a broken-down steeplechaser after two miles of the jumps.

"How very remarkable!" Scandrel muttered. "Joe, can you even approach her for niftiness? If she doesn't outlook the 'Follies' then Grant never saw Richmond!"

As he finished speaking the young lady tripped gracefully over to the desk and handed Handsome a look that would have driven an ordinary mortal to the banks of a river.

"Pardon me," she lisped in a voice that made a cello sound sour, "but isn't this Battling Brady, the lightweight champion of the world?"

"So she's got it too?" Scandrel groaned in my ear. "The district attorney is going to find out about this curly bear cat! Champeen of the world——"

Off came the good-looking young man's straw hat. He bowed like a dancing master and displayed his teeth in a six-inch smile.

"So I am recognized," he began. "I cannot quite bring myself to deceive you——"

"I can!" Ottie hollered. "This ends right here!" Breaking away he leaped across the lobby and confronted the impostor. "Just a minute!" he hissed. "What license have you to hand out this lightweight champeen stuff? The lightweight champ's name ain't even Battling Brady. What's the steer?"

The self-styled Brady swung around angrily.

"What do you mean by this interference?" he snapped. "Don't you know this is a scene for——"

"Shut your mouth close!" Scandrel roared. "And take this away with you!"

With that he crashed over a right hook. I could see that he put a lot of steam in the wallop. It caught the other flush on the button, hurled him across the desk and dropped him into a convenient trash basket where he was out as cold as the water cooler behind him.

So quickly was it done that the good-looking skirt could only stare with round eyes. Then these same eyes began to flash dan-

gerously. But before she could speak an interruption was furnished by six or eight of the loungers near the door who came streaming across the lobby, led by a bird who wore riding breeches, a flannel shirt open at the throat and polished boots. He clutched a sheaf of typewritten papers and, while I was still looking for his horse, tore up to Scandrel and shook a finger in his face.

"You blockhead! You imbecile! You ignoramus!" he roared. "What do you mean by messing up this scene? The management of this hotel promised no interference when we began to shoot this morning. I ought to summon the constable and have you arrested!"

I got the drift of his chirp when, upon looking in the direction of the porch entrance, I spied a camera set up to the left of the doorway. Ottie, in the meantime, had snatched away the ream of typewritten papers the man in riding clothes held and was giving them some of his very best undivided attention.

"'For Honor and Love. A Six Reel Farce Comedy by Addison Vandergilt. Produced by the O. K. Komedy Film Features.'" Slightly dazed, Scandrel looked up and began to laugh. "Really this is quite amusing. I thought you were Paul Revere and I thought that other sapolio was trying crude work. So I busted up a moving picture, eh? My social error. I apologize for the mistake."

Somewhat mollified the man in the riding breeches took back the papers and heaved a sigh. Turning his back on him Scandrel devoted his attention to the young lady. The rib had gotten over her own indignation and a dazzling smile wreathed her interesting lips.

"That's Carrington Forbes," she whispered. "He's our director and he's always terrible grouchy in the morning. Still, I suppose he has good reason to be angry with you. You shouldn't have punched Thomashefsky——"

"Where?" Scandrel horned in.

"His name is Thomashefsky Flynn. We call him Huckleberry around the studio. He's only been with us for two weeks and this is his first picture. Don't you think he's frightfully good looking?"

"Yes, frightful!" Scandrel growled, with a careless look back at the trash basket. "Never mind him. He don't mean nothing in my life. Er—what did you say your name was?"

The girl introduced herself as Judy Marshmont. She and Ottie were clicking off some tall conversation when Flynn snapped out of it and got groggily up. Carrington Forbes, back to normal, gave orders for a retake of the scene. It was then that Ottie buttonholed the director.

"Listen," he began, "here's where I even off. Judy—Miss Marshmont, I mean—has been telling me this here picture is about prize fighting. Well, the pugilistic industry is my long suit—my unshrinkable pajamas. I'm a manager of push-'em-overs and just at present I'm handling Silent Phil McClusky, the big noise in lightweight circles. On account of my fox pass I think I'll stick around, if you don't mind, and give you the benefit of my advice. Yes or no?"

Carrington Forbes appeared interested.

"That will be extremely kind of you, Mr. Scandrel. As a matter of fact I'd be very grateful for a few hints. And perhaps you might care to buy a few shares of stock in the O. K. Komedy Film Features. But aren't you," he added, "bound for the links?"

Ottie laughed like a prairie dog.

"That sucker game? Honest, it's a total loss to me! Er—give me a look at that story and we'll take this scene over again!"

With that he took Miss Marshmont's arm and conducted her across to the lobby entrance. Flynn, pulling himself together, shuffled his pups.

"And you were supposed to be a professional pugilist?" Carrington Forbes hissed at the handsome young man. "Bah!"

The other shook his head sadly.

"What can I do against brass knuckles?" he moaned in a voice that plainly told he didn't know what it was all about.

There was no further sign of Scandrel until p. m. on Friday. Fagan, the house detective, had given me a little information in the interim. It seemed the biggest buffoon in the universe had been as close to the O. K. Komedy Film Feature gang as if he had been on their pay roll. And the picture gang had been all over the neighborhood getting scenes for the crank drama.

"Not only that," the sleuth of the Wild Waves Inn informed me with a wink, "but I hear them tell how Mr. Scandrel give them a supper last night and opened champagne like water."

"I'll bet it tasted like it anyway—if Ottie did the opening," I murmured.

Fagan went on to slip me choice titbits of stock gossip. According to him, Ottie had breakfasted with the enchanting Miss Marshmont, had lunched with her and then had taken her for a twenty-mile bus ride in the can to some tavern for dinner. At exactly twenty minutes after nine on Friday night the door of my sleeping compartment was flung wide and Scandrel, with four bell hops loaded down with his luggage as a background, appeared on the threshold.

"I'm leaving, Joe."

"You're gone already!" I told him.

He snickered at this and jingled a few centimes in his pocket.

"Listen and don't be busting out with comicals. I'm leaving directly for the lower end of the island where I'm taking some more scenes of 'For Honor and Love.' Er —I've bought a ninety-per-cent interest in the picture off Forbes and the O. K. company and so now I'm sticking like a plaster to see there's no monkey business."

He gave me time to digest this remarkable piece of news.

"What am I supposed to do—go all to pieces?" I queried. "So you're a movie magnate now? You might as well kiss your bank roll good-by. The films have taken better men than you for the grift!"

"Get away!" Ottie snarled. "That might be level if I wasn't directing the picture myself. I am! That Carrington Forbes is a terrible bust on the lot. He owns the other ten per cent so now I leave him carry my megaphone around for me. Never mind about me going broke. If I don't clean on this flicker stuff I give you permission to cuff me around proper. Well, our reservoir. Tell McClusky I'll be at the gym Sunday morning. Take care of yourself and keep away from hop dens!"

I reached the Bronx on Saturday afternoon. There was no sign of Scandrel on Sunday, and Monday morning, together with a bell to his metropolitan place of residence, revealed the fact that he was still out of town. At two o'clock the same afternoon Silent Phil McClusky wandered into the gym and tapped me on the shoulder. The lightweight who believed he would be the next king of the division was an unprepossessing lad with a pan on him that any gunman would have been proud to own. He featured a pair of sharp, glittering eyes, a smeller so crooked that when he breathed he pumped air in his ear and a chin that looked as if it had been made out of concrete.

It was comparatively easy to perceive that McClusky wasn't overflowing with joy.

"Where's the boss at?" he hissed. "He must be out of his mind or something. I'm burning up all over. Ask me why. Because O'Silverstein has been ready to talk cold turkey since Thursday. He give us until this morning to talk terms for a bout with the champ and when I give him a greeting on the chicory at ten o'clock I get a laugh. So now we'll have to set back and twaddle our thumbs until mebbe after the first of the year. And why? Ask me. All because I got a nut of a manager that wants to go in the poultry business."

"The—what?" I asked, with an elevation of the brows.

McClusky showed his teeth—each of them.

"You heard me. One of the crew was taking his best gal for a spin down Long Island. He seen Scandrel Saturday night. He said Ottie has got chicken on the brain. Honest, I could sob out loud. If my lawyers can't break our three-year contract I'll do it myself, no fooling!"

The disciple of fisticuffs looked so distressed that I could not forbear a few words of courage.

"Don't take on so, Mac. If he didn't want to come back and talk matters over with O'Silverstein it's probably because he's got something better in line for you. The history of box fighting has no record of Scandrel passing up the pennies—no matter how many or few they are."

"Like fun!" McClusky mumbled. "He's a loon. The chicken business? I always had an idea he was an egg himself!"

He wandered disconsolately away and I was turning to depart for my private sanctum when there was a slight commotion at the door. The bunch around it fell back and in walked the prodigal. Dressed in a pair of whipcord riding trousers, a flannel shirt and polished boots, Scandrel hurled aside a couple of the loungers and whirled around when some one back of him had the audacity to chuckle.

"Any more merriment," he yelped, "and I'll slap the crowd of you for a bird's-eye view of Japan. Gangway!"

McClusky had turned around and joined

me again. His eyes stuck out so far that you could have flicked them off with a boxing glove.

"Hot towel!" he croaked. "He's gone in for the horses. Now he'll stall me sure!"

With complete silence reigning in the vicinity of the doorway Director Scandrel moved across the gym, nodded indifferently at Silent Phil McClusky and turned to me.

"Well, Joe, I got back. Honest, you ain't got no idea what it means to shape up a big comedy fillum. Beside it hives are a pleasure, for a fact! Can I see you in your private office for a while?"

McClusky stepped to the front.

"Well, what a swell manager you've turned out to be—like a mump! Didn't you get them telegrams? I had O'Silverstein on the phone this morning. The fight's out now!"

Scandrel yawned.

"Indeed? How very remarkable! Why bother me with such uninteresting matters?"

McClusky fell back as if he had been kicked by a mule.

"Uninteresting?" he bellowed. "Is that all I get for losing the chance of a scuffle with the champ? You must be running to opium! If I was six inches bigger I'd give you a punch in the nose! You——"

Losing his indifference, Scandrel caught the flaming lightweight by the shoulder.

"Shut your mouth close! Who do you think you're talking to—one of the bourgeois? As long as I've got you signed you'll do what I say and not what you want. Jot that down on your cuff. Er—your next engagement will be versus 'Huckleberry' Flynn——"

McClusky gnashed his teeth.

"Flynn? I never heard of him! You're trying to skid me! I'll notify the police department——"

"I've heard enough from you!" Scandrel snapped, socking him one. "Come, Joe. Let's adjourn to your office." Once within the room, with the door closed, Ottie took a chair with a sigh and rested his feet on the top of my desk. "Ain't these roughneck box fighters remarkably amusing? I guess McClusky will give an impersonation of nothing at all when I'm around in the future. He can punch like candy but he ought to get his tongue disinfected. What's new?"

"Not a thing," I admitted. "What was this talk of you matching him with Mr. Flynn?"

"In the picture—in the picture. This boy Flynn is a prize dumb-bell and I like him the same as Paris green but I can't can him on account of that silly Forbes having already made one reel of 'For Honor and Love.' In the last part of the fillum is the big kick. That's where Flynn, taking the part of the lightweight champ, gets knocked out in a big fight scene. What a sucker I'd be to go and hire somebody to push the pillows when I got McClusky here under contract. I'll use him then and if he don't like the ten-buck bonus I'll hand him he can cry all over his little handkerchief! The picture's coming along swell. I don't want to brag but I don't mind admitting I've put pep into it and more laughs than the Winter Garden!"

"And Miss Marshmont?"

To my surprise Ottie flushed slightly.

"Er—she's as fine as silk—outside of a slight headache. That's the reason why we're not working down at the O. K. studio in Brooklyn to-day. What's the use of me getting the reputation of a slave driver? Lincoln did away with that in '61, and who am I to go against him? Let the homely molls work when they've got headaches. But this ain't talking business, is it? Er—I want to hire the gym off you, Joe. The last reels of the fillum show Battling Brady's training quarters. This is made to order for me. For a dollar a head that bunch of make-believe Vanderbilts and Morgans ought to come in as extras on the picture and sit up and beg like trained seals. They might laugh at my clothes but it's a cinch they won't at my money!"

After talking terms for an hour the matter was finally arranged.

The task of turning the pavilion of slam into a moving-picture factory began at once. The electricians drawing jack from the O. K. Komedy Film Features rushed in with a horde of carpenters and began to make necessary alterations. A couple of days after that Carrington Forbes, Ottie and Thomashefsky Flynn together with the eye-soothing Miss Marshmont and a flock of other actors and actorines showed up to emote all over the works.

The members of pugilism's leisure class who fought with their mouths instead of their hands snapped at the opportunity to become future movie stars and participate in Mr. Addison Vandergilt's farce comedy. In fact they displayed so much enthusiasm

that Ottie went to tears when he learned that instead of snaring them with a dollar apiece he could have got the entire tribe of them for nothing.

Shylock, at the top of his form, was a fool and his money compared with Scandrel!

While the fourth reel of "For Honor and Love" was being shot Ottie kept as close to Judy Marshmont as a miser to a dime. Any one around the place could have seen with less than half an eye that the big clown thought no more of the blond gal than he did of his bank balance. Really, if undisguised affection had been bark he'd have made the Oregon forest look like a box of safety matches.

It was all very amusing.

When the double for Venus appeared on the spot Scandrel's complexion looked as though it had been touched with rouge. When she spoke to him he gazed at her with an expression four degrees below stupidity. When she smile it was a cinch to see that he didn't know if he was coming or going—or both. Juliet might have pulled a nifty on the balcony but it needed only the studio gym to tell the world that Ottie was up to his ears in romance.

"It's the bells and the blossoms this time," he admitted. "Honest, love's like indigestion—you get it all of a sudden and it's just as painful! Sweet mamma. But ain't she the class though? It'll be the bridal veil sure."

"And when will that be?" I asked.

Scandrel shrugged his massive shoulders.

"At the right time. Give me credit. Fools rush in where angels fear to wed. There ain't going to be no bone pulling this time. When I feel the day is ripe then I'll set Judy in the know. A million-dollar picture and a million-dollar wife! If that ain't getting the best of it, what is?"

He continued to roll Miss Marshmont about in his horseless vehicle. The oil and gas he consumed was enough to have made him a friend of the Rockefeller family for life. But all was not platinum that looked like silver. A couple of days later, while turning down a corridor on my way to the gym, I perceived Huckleberry Flynn chewing the fat with the Marshmont frail.

A deaf mute could have overheard his plaint.

"This, Judy, cannot continue! I love you devotedly and your being constantly with this Scandrel imbecile is simply tearing my heart to rags and tatters. Marry me! Marry me and you will never regret it. I—eh—even though I'm infatuated with the movies I'm something more than a mere leading man. I——"

Miss Marshmont interrupted him coolly.

"Don't be a silly boy, Tom. I have my career to think of. It means a lot to me—more than you can possibly imagine."

"You're in love with Scandrel!" Flynn burst out bitterly. "Oh, don't tell me! It is useless to endeavor to pull the wool over my eyes. He's promised to make you a big star and this has turned your head. Swear that you don't love him!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," Judy Marshmont retorted with a flash of temper. "I'm not engaged to you—or anybody else. So I see no good reason why I should have to admit *anything*. Now I'm going. If some one should overhear us this would be all over the studio."

"I'll never give you up!" Flynn muttered.

Back in the office, temporarily converted into Scandrel's headquarters, I discovered the former box fighter pacing the floor. I had hardly entered when Silent Phil McClusky rushed in, registering suppressed emotion.

"Hennessey said you wanted me," the lightweight hissed at Ottie. "What's what?"

"Get cool!" Scandrel snapped. "I'm just giving you a buzz that starting to-morrow morning you go to work. Report at eight o'clock for a rehearsal——"

"A what?"

"You heard me! Give me your lip and I'll give you my knuckles! I said rehearsal and I mean rehearsal!"

McClusky looked as blank as unused note paper.

"Hey, what are you trying to make out of me—a show girl?"

"We'll probably begin shooting you Friday!" Scandrel went on. "With a camera—not a cannon! This here is the fight you're going to pull with an actor named Flynn. There ain't any purse but I'll oil you well. Make me?"

"Oh, one of them movie scuffles!" McClusky sneered. "So this is why I lost out with that bout with the champ? The movies—who do you think I am, Mary Pickford? Quite so! I'll see you again when you come out of it."

He turned to the door.

"Drop that knob!" Scandrel roared. "You ain't got the manners of a goat—breezing while I'm talking to you. You'll play in this here picture and you'll fight Flynn for the camera or I'll push you dead, I will for a fact!"

"I'll fight the champ. I'll fight anybody you dig up for me but——"

"Apple sauce!" Ottie broke in harshly. "You'll fight Flynn or you'll fight me! Glue that in your skimmer and take the avenue. I'm sick of listening to your excuses."

McClusky gaped witlessly at me.

"Yes, sir. Nine o'clock to-morrow, did you say? Let's make it eight!"

Next to the way Scandrel threw the scenes of the speechless comedy together the most laughable thing around the premises was the antics of his extras and supernumeraries. Picture a mob of mugs beside which the features of "Wild Bull" Firpo would have been beautiful turned overnight into possible screen heroes and not knowing what it was all about. The former towel wavers, water-bucket carriers and alcohol slappers began to strut about the minute Ottie used them —each with only one idea. That was to monopolize the camera at every opportunity. Burlesque had nothing on the antics of the hairy apes. Every fifteen minutes Scandrel had to hand Carrington Forbes the horn and separate a couple of welterweights who were mistreating each other because one had pushed his companion away from the lens. And when he wasn't tearing them apart Scandrel was clouting some one himself for deceit or conceit!

Oh, "For Honor and Love" was all very frivolous to be sure!

The picture, Ottie confessed in an unguarded moment, had already set him back fifty grand cold. That was bad enough but the plot was worse. The story of the mélange was the story of a best-selling comedy novel by Addison Vandergilt but the general idea of it had got lost somewhere on its way to the Bronx. On the level, a private detective could not have found sanity in it and the story itself was faithfully and securely buried under a mountain of banal absurdities. Even Miss Marshmont confessed that it was all over her red-blond head.

Scandrel, once he had made Forbes his yes-man, had proceeded to snowball the whole thing with his own idea of humor. This consisted principally of slapstick comedy and uncouth rough-house that wouldn't have gotten a laugh out of a baby in on an Annie Oakley. It was a confusion of grotesque acrobatics running wild!

Whatever virtue "For Honor and Love" possessed was due to the charming presence of Judy Marshmont. Positively, that cause for masculine eyestrain could have made a knock-out hit out of a flop similar to the one Nero staged at Rome. She got admiration even from the superboiled extras who didn't think any more of Judy than London does of the king. The girl had only to raise her hand and voice a request for anything from a pound of candy to a piece of the moon and she had the whole studio rushing to wait on her.

Judy was both thrilling and killing!

Thomashefsky Flynn loaned his collar-advertising beauty and classical features to the part of Battling Brady but if the lad was an actor John Drew thought that grease paint was something they put on the barn. The Battling Huckleberry, as he had been affectionately dubbed, was a bit of a mystery. His wardrobe would have made the best-dressed men in Manhattan look shabby. The cigarettes he smoked were made in Egypt for him and once I got a peek at the bank roll he was carrying. The size of it suggested private bootlegging or the stock market.

Flynn, quiet as a secret going the rounds, had little to say. He appeared on the job early and left late. When he made a mistake he let Ottie burn him up with language that would have set any one else of his age out shopping for a box of cartridges and never came back with a more severe set of words than, "Yes, sir. I'll try to do better next time." And never once did his handsome Rand-McNally lose its sweet and soulful expression.

"This boy is over my roof," Scandrel mumbled once or twice. "I catch him trying to sheik Judy and I bawl him out but he takes it all like a duck does water. I've reduced Forbes' wages twice now just because he hired Flynn. I wish he'd open up and give me an excuse to change that pretty map of his."

But Flynn, canny as a case of Scotch, kept to his trade and adored Judy Marshmont from a distance. This open admiration on his part aroused the wrath of Silent Phil McClusky who already thought the same of her as Buffalo does of the Niagara

Falls. While Ottie was busy hurling everything but Ben Hur into his movie McClusky guffawed at Flynn's looks, at his clothes and the tough talk he was called upon to use in the rôle of Battling Brady. The onlookers got a slight hint of McClusky's feelings when the first rehearsal was called for the big bout which was the picture's punch in more ways than one. Then it was plainly evident that young Master McClusky had extreme difficulty in pulling his punches and trying to make sense of Ottie's instructions—at the same time. The rehearsal got by the board but was set back a week because Scandrel, suddenly afflicted by a sudden rush of ideas to the head, switched his routine and put in some cut-back stuff that showed Battling Brady in the cradle, playing with a pair of toy boxing gloves.

One afternoon before the big fight scene was to go on for good I happened to be looking up the subway in that part of gay Gotham known to the customers as Bunk Boulevard. Directly in front of a café, famous in the days when dry agents were as absent as clothing at the equator, stood a twelve-thousand-dollar motor car of a celebrated vintage. No, it wasn't a 1924 Mud Hawk but the very latest thing from dear old London. There were quite a few people stealing a glance or two at it when a haughty young man issued forth from the vestibule of the café and, pulling on a pair of chamois gloves, nonchalantly elbowed the curious aside, wedged himself under the wheel and slammed the door.

When he gassed the bus and threw in the reverse I saw he was no other than Thomashefsky Flynn himself!

The remarkable part of it was that when I got back to the Bronx an hour later I spied Flynn alighting from a car at the corner—the kind that gives transfers.

He joined me at the gymnasium door with an affable nod.

"I trust I'm not late. Director Scandrel is using the infant he hired last night for the flash-back and so I had an hour or two of leisure this morning. Er—have you any knowledge of when the big fight scene is to be taken?"

I shook my head and looked at him seriously.

"Be careful you're not taken yourself, Flynn. This McClusky is anything but a gentleman when he's got the pillows on. He's a punching fool and if he thinks he can chop you up he'll do it with the greatest of delight. I've been informed that, for picture purposes, he's supposed to knock you out anyway."

Flynn's smile remained untroubled.

"Indeed, I have suspected McClusky's animosity—hatred, you might call it. Being a common roughneck he naturally envies my education and intelligence. It is exceedingly kind of you to warn me but I think there is scant cause for alarm. Er—you've heard of 'Haymaker' Hennessey, of course?"

The gentleman mentioned was a light-heavyweight who had been ruined before Volstead and Congress had come to his rescue. A clever boxer, a sweet hitter and a tornado for action when he wasn't lit, Hennessey had gone the way of all the rum hounds. For the past two years he had been sleeping in the cellar of the gym and picking up near-beer money in any lawful manner.

"The name is familiar. What about him?" I inquired.

Flynn flushed faintly.

"Hennessey has been teaching me the rudiments of self-defense," he confessed. "For the past month I've been sparring with him and learning the art of protection. I don't wish to be egotistical but I think I can hold my own against McClusky."

"You think it," I cut in, "and I hope it!"

Upstairs tempest and fury were having their inning. To be exact, Scandrel had a job on his hands that D. W. Griffith would have spent sleepless nights over. This was merely a rehearsal of the scene before the big fight. All of the plug-ugly extras were being called upon to find seats at the ringside in their rôle of spectators. This sounded simple enough but was anything but an easy task to direct. A couple of ex-convicts were tearing each other up in one corner of the room. Six or seven reformed gunmen were engaged in a Donnybrook that would have made a native of Dublin throw off his coat and vest. And in the foreground Scandrel himself was beating a couple of sour-visaged young men with the large end of his megaphone.

"My word!" Thomashefsky Flynn exclaimed as we entered. "How horrid! You will pardon me if I retire to my dressing room."

He disappeared while Ottie pasted his two unruly actors and bawled for the manu-

script of the continuity. Carrington Forbes came running with it, Ottie snatched it from him and mounted a chair.

"I'll beat the heads off the tribe of you!" he shrieked vainly. "I'll take each one of you separately and cave your ribs in! Try and get a nickel out of me after this bust! I'll fire the crowd of you——"

This got some attention from the mob. A big bolognie snatcher with a pair of ears on him threw away a tooth and grinned crookedly.

"Aw, don't do that, boss. When youse says to come in and take a chair a couple of these mock oranges give my dogs a tramping. We'll be good." He swung around and faced his fellows. "The first guy that opens his pan gets a knife between his shoulders!"

The scene then continued with some degree of order. Ottie had taken perhaps a couple of hundred feet of it when I noticed a tall, distinguished-looking bird with a pair of cheaters astride his smeller and a brief case under one arm, standing on the side lines and taking it all in with what seemed to be the greatest of enjoyment. Twenty minutes or so elapsed before this party made the fatal mistake of chuckling out loud. The laugh came in a minute of quiet and reached Scandrel's ears.

My boy friend turned around like a streak of lightning, located the culprit and walked over to him.

"What ails *you?*"

The other nodded at the camera.

"The scene. I'm getting quite a kick out of it."

Ottie pushed out his face.

"Yeah. I know who you're not but I don't know who you are. Do your stuff and make it snappy!"

"My name," the other replied politely, "happens to be Addison Vandergilt. I'm the author of 'For Honor and Love.' At least I thought I was."

Scandrel got as much pleasure out of the statement as a chorus girl out of a glass of water.

"How very remarkable! Addison Vandergilt? You thrill me the same way as perfume. Don't be putting on no dog around here. You might have wrote 'For Honor and Love' but I'm busy *rewriting* it. And we can dispense with both your company and your hilarity. Laugh that off and find the door!"

"Thanks, I will," Vandergilt replied smoothly. "I've seen quite enough as it is."

So much for that.

Bright and early the next morning two cameras were planted to get the Battling Brady-McClusky bout on the celluloid. Ottie had spared neither sense nor expense that the picture fight should resemble the real thing. To crowd in plenty of local color he had begged aid from a local fight club with the result that the timekeeper, referee, announcer and all the rest of the participants were the bona-fide article. The answer was that when he showed up at the studio with Judy Marshmont on his arm the next morning, and Carrington Forbes and megaphone at his heels, there was a real thrill to be had from the mob impatiently waiting their cue to go on.

"A million-dollar picture or Napoleon never even seen France, Joe!" Scandrel chuckled when Mademoiselle Marshmont excused herself to retire to the privacy of her boudoir. "This scene alone is setting me back another five thousand. I'll be selling lead pencils in the street sure if it don't go over—but how can it fail? Even if I hadn't put a laugh in every second of it there's Judy to make it a sensation. We can't lose!"

He suggested I find a seat in the background and with Forbes trailing after him moved away. Over in one corner Silent Phil McClusky, hidden in a bath robe big enough for his whole family, was rubbing his crooked sniffer. When I dropped down beside him he gave me his glittering eyes and a look the Duke of Wellington must have worn on the eve of Waterloo.

"I hear them tell," McClusky growled, "that this is the day I take Good Looking like the marines took Shadow Thierry!" He licked his lips hungrily. "I got to knock him out anyway so I might as well get some fun out of it!"

"Why the grudge against Flynn?"

The lightweight laughed.

"The big sap's a comedy in himself. Look at the clothes on him! And what right has any one to be as pretty as him? Not only that but I seen him trying to date Miss Marshmellow on the corner the other night and all that saved his life then was the taxicab he escaped in! I told Ottie I'm going to break him in half and Ottie says that for all he cares I can wear one of

Flynn's ears for a watch charm. That means the lid's off. I'll click Nuisance for a wreath reading 'Rest in Pieces' or I'll never fight again!"

With the utmost unconcern McClusky lounged at ease while Ottie, raving and ranting, finally got the mob seated around the roped inclosure. He finally called for McClusky who, remembering his rehearsal, clucked for the bucket brigade and ambled nonchalantly down to the ring which he entered.

"Right into your corner!" Ottie hollered through the horn. "This is the real thing, kid! You're not acting for the movies! Be yourself! All right, Flynn! You're the champeen of the world! Come on! Come on, Fathead!"

Flynn, tripping over the hem of his mulberry kimono, stumbled into view with his handlers. He had Haymaker Hennessey as his chief second. The former skee terrier had got a whiff of the cork and was a trifle unsteady. While the extras razzed him plenty Flynn gained the ring and slipped into his own nook. The announcer had his say-so, the referee handed out his instructions and the hard-boiled extras settled back for the time of their lives.

"Now, Judy!" Scandrel barked. "Come on! You're a little late so make it hasty! Don't mind the gorillas! Walk right through them and take that empty chair down front!"

The girl who would have made Solomon beg her telephone number came into range of the cranking camera. She was quite the actress. Breathing hard and giving every symptom of one who was really late, she hastened to the chair that was reserved for her. There she sat down and straining forward looked directly up into Silent Phil McClusky's ruined countenance. The appeal of her eyes was such that the professional leather pusher would have jumped through the ropes if Ottie's warning hadn't caught him in time!

A second later the gong clanged and, a picture in his purple ring costume, Thomashefsky Flynn, sparring lightly, met McClusky in the center of the ring.

Curling a murderous lip Silent Phil immediately socked him twice with a right and a left to the head. They mixed but not for long. Breaking away, McClusky tore in to pummel him severely. Flynn, agitated by the rushing tactics, covered up and went into a clinch. The referee pried them apart but the infuriated McClusky was not to be stopped.

As they broke he got a wicked left hook through that brought an angry circle of red over Flynn's left set of ribs.

Battling Brady weathered the punch and jabbed desperately. With Haymaker Hennessey yelling advice he led for the jaw with a straight right, missed by a mile and a quarter but registered with his left and then retreated, covering up like a turtle. The bell found them tapping away aggressively.

"More action!" Scandrel hollered. "What do you think you're doing—trying out a dancing act at the Palace? Bust out! Tear each other up like a letter! All right, Judy. Speak it out!"

The best-looking girl since Eve's time promptly stood and flung her arms wide to Flynn.

"Oh, sweetheart!" she cried in a heartbreaking voice. "You *must* win! You must win for honor and love!"

McClusky was on his feet with the speed of a bullet.

"Where do you get that stuff?" he chanted. "Sweetheart can't win for love nor money! If I can't flatten him in the next round I'll go into the millinery business!"

"You're out of order!" Scandrel shrieked. "Who told you to make up your own lines? Sit down or I'll stiffen you with a chair! Round two now! This is a tough one, fellers!"

The echoes of the bell had scarcely died away before McClusky was up and at it. Shooting over every variety of wallop known to the trade he spilled the pale but handsome young Mr. Flynn twice, drew claret and closed the other's left eye. It was brutal enough to have enchanted any of the Roman emperors. Out to cut Flynn to ribbons, Silent Phil went about it without loss of time. He pounded, bruised and beat but the good-looking gladiator proved to have as much sand as Long Beach, took a terrific lacing gamely and reeled out for the third round obviously in distress but still on his feet for it.

The cast-iron extras by this time forgot it was all make-believe and were with the underdog to a man. They begged Flynn to stick it out and get McClusky in a voice that must have been heard as far south as South Ferry. Their encouragement stiff-

ened the groggy youth up. As they mixed he not only fought back courageously but actually registered with a straight right to the body that made McClusky grunt. They clinched, fought in at the ropes, in one corner of the ring and in the center. McClusky took honors with every punch but from the baffled look on his ugly face it was evident that he was wondering why he didn't turn in a K. O.

"Take him!" Scandrel shrieked. "You've got him chopped up! Put him in a paper bag! Be quick about it!"

"The big mockie won't fall!" McClusky hissed venomously. "I'll tuck him in now!"

A series of right-and-lefts to the body brought a groan from Flynn's twisted lips. It looked like daisies for him but he took the assault nobly and though strictly on the defensive pushed over a pair of healthy ones that momentarily stayed his opponent's advance. With Scandrel doing everything but battling both of them, they fought like husband and wife until a startling thing occurred. It might have been the result of the alcoholic Haymaker Hennessey's teachings or it might have been luck pure and somewhat simple. Whatever it was, Flynn, a bruised and battered wreck, made McClusky miss with both hands, found him wide open and sinking his right to the plexus, crossed with his left in a dizzy clout to the button.

Amid the greatest confusion Silent Phil slumped to the mat.

In a silence so profound that a falling feather would have sounded like the collapse of the Woolworth Building, Ottie threw away his megaphone and sat down heavily to tear out his hair. At the same minute a swarthy youth in a pinch-back green suit loomed up out of nowhere and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Scandrel? I'm serving you with an injunction sworn out by Mr. Addison Vandergilt to restrain you from releasing the motion-picture film known as 'For Honor and Love.' The plaintiff alleges this is a distorted version of his novel of the same title and will tend to injure his reputation if placed before the public——"

The process server faded after some more chatter and Thomashefsky Flynn crawled painfully down from the ring and tottered up to Miss Judy Marshmont.

"I knocked him out!" he said through puffed lips. "Judy, I couldn't allow him to beat me with you looking on! Marry me! Do not let this be in vain."

Scandrel, jumping up from his chair, pushed a way forward and picked up one of the hands belonging to the Sultan's dream.

"Stand back, Flynn!" he snarled. "You're as game as baseball but you can't get away with this! Judy, all along I've been only waiting to propose matrimony myself! Marry me and——"

"I'm sorry," she cooed, "but I'm afraid I can't marry either of you. That is, not without the law's interference. You see, I —I promised my famous husband I'd use my maiden name on the screen until I was a success and——"

"Husband?" Flynn whispered, blinking his good lamp.

Judy nodded.

"He hates the screen and all connected with it. I love it. Hence our agreement. Perhaps you will understand better when I tell you my regular married name is Vandergilt—Mrs. Addison Vandergilt!"

Three days later I ran into friend Ottie near Columbus Circle. For one who had thrown a fortune away on the pictures he looked as pleased as Paris with a note from Helen of Troy in his jacket.

"Here's something that's very remarkable, Joe," he began. "It seems that Flynn comes from a family of Pittsburgh millionaires. He went cuckoo on the fillums but that don't go with the old folks at home. His old gent's lawyer got in touch with me yesterday and told me to write my own ticket on how much I wanted in the line of kale to suppress the movie in which Thomashefsky's classic profile is seen. I did so and though I lose I win—five-grand profit and all the fun!"

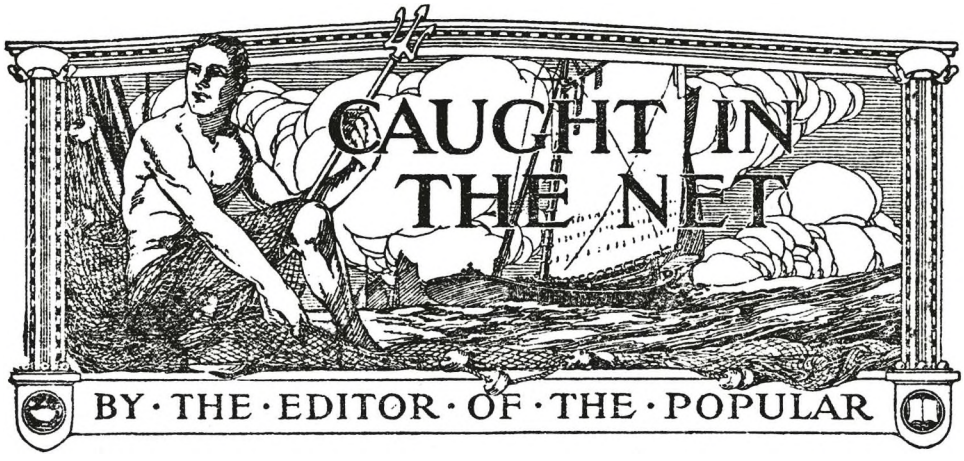
"And McClusky?" I ventured to inquire.

Ottie shrugged nonchalantly.

"Don't mention that dumb ox to me! I give him back his contract and he took the atmosphere. What I care? All I'm interested in now is Battling Brady—as I'm going to call Flynn in the future. I got the ring papers on him for three years but no doubt I'll be selling him back to his wealthy relatives next week. A fox for cuteness, hey?"

Rather!

"Christopher of Columbus, Ohio," by Mr. Montanye, in the next number.



INNOCENCE VERSUS EXPERIENCE

READERS of this magazine will recall the recently published story by Elmer Davis which told what happened to a young man who wanted to live up to an impractical code of honesty and fair play; and told, also, how he was saved from the dire consequences of his rashness by another man who, through long experience and bitter, had learned to live up to a code equally honest, equally fair, but many times more practical.

It is perhaps regrettable that disillusionment must so often come to the rescue of high-hearted idealism, as it did in the case of Mr. Davis' hero. But it will always be so until something happens to change the truth of the trite old proverb, "It takes all kinds to make a world." In the complexities of modern civilization the Galahads who see nothing but innocence and altruism about them fare ill. It is the Bayards, straight, vigorous, downright themselves but with an eye and a mind open to the possibility of wolves among the sheep, that best survive and prosper.

Pure innocence, unleavened by the common sense that comes with experience, almost always rides for a fall. A pity that this must be so, yet it is so, and we must accept the principle. The danger in accepting the principle, of course, is that we may lose faith in the abiding goodness and practical worth of virtue; that through disgust and bitterness at having been so often the purchasers of gold bricks we may turn ourselves to inducing other folk to buy them from us.

If you have ever played on an athletic team you ought to be able to take the same code that guided you in physical competition and apply it generally to all your human contacts. As an athlete you knew the game was governed by certain rules and you assumed, for general purposes, that your opponents would play true to those rules. Still you were not absolutely sure that fair play would be the guiding principle of every player opposing you. You kept an eye open. Moreover, you knew that the rules permitted a certain latitude of execution in the plays and that the opposing side must be expected to employ legal ruse and concentration of superior power at every opportunity. You assumed that the object of the opposing side was not to get an afternoon's exercise but to win the game. And you governed yourself accordingly.

There is no reason why the attitude of the athlete in competition should not be the attitude of the individual in life. Few of us are saints. Our legitimate object in life is to win. Experience tells us that that is the object of every other person with whom we are competing. If we assume, as so many high-hearted youths just out of school do assume, that our opponents will not take advantage of our inexperience, we must expect to pay. Our opponents are not playing the game for fun, even if we are. And they cannot be expected to call off the bets if we in our trust-

ing innocence lose our entire roll. They have won according to their own lights and we have tacitly accepted those lights as our own by consenting to sit in their game.

One of the hardest things for a clear-eyed young man to learn is that not all games are played according to his own conceptions of sportsmanship. When he sits in another man's game and loses he is like to become suspicious and embittered. But if he is made of the right stuff he will write his losses off against receipt of a valuable consignment of experience and resolve that the next time he buys a stack of chips he will find out who is playing against him, why, and how, before he throws down his first ante. Then he will return to his lodgings, face himself in the mirror, and indulge in a hearty laugh. If he fails to laugh there is danger ahead—not for other people so much as himself.

GETTING FOLKS TO EAT MORE WHEAT

AMERICAN surplus wheat not only presents an economic problem of first importance, but its ramifications run through politics and society in both obvious and subtle ways. As we see it, there are two formidable forces working against the farmer in his efforts to dispose of his surplus wheat. And it may be surprising to know that neither of them has anything to do with foreign markets or the tariff. They are purely domestic.

First, the price of bread to the ultimate consumer is a serious handicap to consumption of flour. A loaf of bread when wheat was normally plentiful used to be a nickel. Now, speaking generally, it is eight cents. Under close analysis, the familiar and oft-repeated rise in costs of everything cannot be held wholly responsible for this. Bread making has got into the hands of manufacturers who turn it out by machinery and highest-efficiency methods, and according to mass-production theory bread ought to be cheaper, if anything, under such management. It is only reasonable to suppose that the big baker is hurting the cause of wheat, so far as the farmer is concerned, by maintaining the price of bread at such high levels. Of course, the big baker can justify his position through enormously increased overhead due to elaborate processes of hygienic manufacture, advertising, et cetera. But the small baker is prone to follow the example set in price, and so that one circle of forced cost is completed. Consequently many of the poorer people do with less bread than formerly and eat more potatoes and cereals other than wheat.

If the farmers' coöperative organizations would unite in a campaign of "Back to the Five-cent Loaf," they might induce some big baker to start the ball rolling in a practical and profitable direction.

Another important and generally overlooked factor in the reduced consumption of wheat bread is the multiplication of books on the subject of diet which are read and believed in by the more intelligent members of our society. Every one of this regiment of dietetic writers warns us against too much flour consumption. It is always classed with sugar as a fattener and life-shortener, and millions of people are affected by the steady reiteration. Wheat being easier to resist than sugar, they cut down on it. Restaurant and hotel managers confirm this observation.

Farmers are wise to get back of the "Toast-for-breakfast" movement, but they ought to emphasize its nonfattening qualities more. And, in similar fashion, they ought to get busy in a score of other directions advocating the use of flour. A publicity man with ingenious imagination should be engaged to prepare cookbooklets for free distribution, the recipes stressing the many uses of flour. He might get writers to prepare articles and books which would offset the arguments of the antiflourists. Chemists might be offered a large sum to produce a delicious beverage made of wheat. "Wheatale" maybe.

We can visualize titles for the wholesome propaganda: "Flour for the Thin," "How to Grow Plump and Lovely," "Lean on the Staff of Life!" "How Wheat Builds Muscle and Beauty," "Wheat Eaters are World Beaters."

TO TEACH THE BEST POLICY

EDUCATORS who think that character building is at least as important a part of the mission of our public schools as the imparting of the Three R's and the varied trimmings that go with up-to-date education will be interested in the efforts of the National Honesty Bureau to teach our school children to obey the commandment "Thou Shalt Not Steal." There is real need for instruction in the gospel of honesty. Last year burglary and robbery cost the people of the United States a quarter of a billion dollars and robbery "from the inside"—embezzlement by trusted employees—another hundred million. That was the cost in dollars; the greater loss in human wastage and sorrow that was the result of this widespread dishonesty is far beyond calculation. Almost every one of the men and women who committed these crimes must some time in the past have taken a dishonest step in some lesser thing; made a little slip from the path of fair dealing that cleared the way for the larger dishonesty. Most of us are inclined to smile a little at the stern moralist who traces back to an orchard looted by a schoolboy in knickerbockers the safe blown by the veteran yeggman and draws the conclusion that a stolen apple invariably is the first step along a road that will end only at the prison gates; yet few will deny that early youth is the latest time at which the inculcation of the principles of honesty should begin.

The Honesty Bureau's program of education is thoroughly practical and has the backing of many educators and business men. An important part of its work will be the publication of "The Honesty Book," a handbook of instruction in "mine" and "thine" for the use of parents and teachers. The bureau also has secured the cooperation of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, the International Rotary Clubs, the Chautauqua societies and other civic bodies in making a special appeal this year for honesty both in school and in business.

The value of making dishonesty of any sort abhorrent to the school child is apparent. People grown older in the ways of the world may perhaps accept "with reservations" the principle that honesty always is the best policy and point to cases where a crooked path has proved a profitable one in the way of dollars; yet they must admit that the dishonest man robs himself of something far more valuable than the loot he steals from his victims.

GLORY IN DEATH

CAME the strains of a brass band playing the deepest of dirges. The professor went out of his way to witness the funeral. Down the street moved a magnificently draped hearse drawn by horses caparisoned in black net robes with purple tassels. Behind the hearse marched a double row of men in solemn mien, followed by a long line of coaches.

A lump rose in the throat of the professor. How beautiful it was to give the departed such dignified and impressive ceremony! He sighed that this post-mortem splendor was reserved for the famous and rich, and only in the latter case if they bought it.

In the midst of his reflections the professor caught sight of the mourners in some of the carriages. They looked poor enough. One woman in a gay but shabby shawl aroused his suspicious curiosity.

"Whose funeral is it?" he inquired of a girl of the neighborhood.

"An Eyetalian's," she said simply, in a matter-of-fact voice.

Then the professor's mind dwelt on the passionate love of display and ceremony in the breasts of our Latin neighbors. It suddenly appealed to him as something desirable in our own mode of living. Why, indeed, should not the passing of any human soul be celebrated with pomp and music? It was eminently fitting. Were not our trappings of woe all too harsh, too commercial? Our foreign citizenry could teach us much, if we would but heed their ancient customs and poetic traditions!

"Do you know who the dead person was?" he asked the neighborhood girl.

"Sure," she said, her eyes brightening. "It was Tony Maglioni, the iceman!"

WHAT EVERY FOOTBALL PLAYER KNOWS

IN a huge stadium fifty thousand people have gathered to watch one of the big football games of the season. It is a partisan crowd, eager for victory, likely under the lash of defeat to criticize bitterly the player whose error was responsible for the shattering of glowing hopes. In the press stand perched on the brim of the great concrete bowl are sport writers from scores of papers ready to set forth in unfeeling type the physical slip or mental lapse that led to the "break" by which the game was lost and won. Along the side lines sit hundreds of men who in their day have played football—critics who because they know the game and have felt its strain are less harsh in their judgments than many a spectator who never dropped a kick or missed a tackle. Keen-eyed officials wait ready to impose heartbreaking penalties for infractions—intentional or unintentional—of one of the most complicated codes of rules known to the world of sport.

The target for all these thousands of eyes, the players—twenty-two young men, most of them not old enough to vote.

These young men must know many things and be able to do many things—be able to do them swiftly and surely despite exhaustion and the shock of hard knocks and the knowledge that a mistake may mean a lost game. They must be able to handle the tricky ball cleanly, for a fumble is a signpost on the road to defeat. They must tackle hard and tackle surely. Each player must know his duties in from twenty to thirty offensive plays which are started from four or five different formations. He must know a complicated signal code. On the defense he must know his position and duties in a half dozen different team formations. He must be able to size up the opposing team's plays under conditions that shift constantly with the position of the ball on the field, the down, and a dozen minor factors. He must keep out of traps set for him. He must know the rules thoroughly that he may avoid penalties and take instant advantage of opportunities. He must be cool enough to look before he leaps; bold enough to plunge in without thought of consequences after he has decided what to do; alert enough to turn the unexpected to his team's advantage; game enough to play his hardest while his head is spinning and his knees sagging.

Football isn't chess played by coaches with human pieces. Nor is it a game like professional baseball, played by seasoned athletes who make their livings by it. It is a fast, rough game played by college boys who—like their older brothers in the rougher game of life—make mistakes. It is easy to sit in the stand and criticize these mistakes—but is it sportsmanlike? The overweight gentleman who grows caustic because a weary quarter back calls for a line plunge instead of a forward pass might be less clear-headed had he been hurled to earth a dozen times in the past half hour; the loud person who shouts his disgust at a fumbled punt might be less sure of himself if two husky ends were rushing down the field with the object of committing legalized assault and battery upon his person.

The wonder of football is not that many games are lost through errors; it is that games ever are won by anything else.

POPULAR TOPICS

IT will be a satisfaction to every one who believes in good citizenship and in good sportsmanship in the ordinary affairs of life to learn that there were only one third as many lynchings in the United States for the first six months of this year as there were in the same period of 1922. However, there were eleven lynchings too many. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which made these figures public, attributes this improvement to the agitation for a Federal anti-lynching law and to the fact that the migration of negroes to the Northern States has brought home to the South the importance of negro labor and has brought into being a desire to better the condition of the Southern negro so that these workers will not

be lost to Dixieland. Three of the lynchings reported were in Florida, two in Georgia, and one each in Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Texas.

WILBUR HARTNETT, a Washington newspaper man, has an interesting hobby. He tours the United States in an automobile and makes a practice of giving lifts to the people he meets on the road. Last spring while traveling west on the Lincoln Highway he gave rides to two hundred women and twice that many men. Of the women, he says, thirty were college girls taking pleasure hikes, eighteen were waitresses seeking new jobs, and the rest were movie-struck damsels walking toward Los Angeles, weary, footsore and often dead broke but still hopeful that fame and fortune awaited them at the end of the long road. A few of the men were college students on vacation trips and the rest traveling workmen or plain hobos. One man had just been released from prison.

IN the last twenty years there has been a great increase of interest in technical education. In 1922 there were fifteen thousand five hundred students attending agricultural colleges, more than twice as many as in 1902. There were twenty-seven thousand students enrolled in engineering colleges, as compared with ten thousand twenty years ago. The largest increase of all was in the enrollment in colleges teaching household economy, the attendance being almost seven thousand, five times as many as in 1902.

IT isn't safe to judge a nation by the films that picture its life. The London *Evening News* recently printed a humorous article, "America As I Know It, by A. Filmgoer," that should be read by the men who make our movies. The impression that the writer received from seeing numerous films "made in America" was that the East is inhabited by "unscrupulous but enormously successful business men who devote their nights to squandering in cabarets their ill-gotten gains;" that in the West "bad men" think nothing of shooting peaceful citizens and one another and spend a good deal of time in "rolling on the ground in attempts to gouge each other's eyes out;" that the North is inhabited by "bearded scoundrels who go there to escape the law, to steal mining claims and to menace lonely girls snowbound in log cabins." The sunny South gets off easily—it is "notable for cacti and half-breeds. The last-named have no particular vice; they are just bad."

HIKING doesn't mean what it used to. Not long ago a college girl told us that on the previous day she had been on an eighteen-mile hike. "Didn't you get tired?" we asked. "Oh, no," she said. "We got hitches for all but two miles."

MORE than twenty-two million children attended school in the United States last year, an increase of almost six million over 1902. The value of property used for school purposes was almost four and one-half billion dollars, four times as much as in 1902.

STANLEY BALDWIN, Britain's prime minister, is a man we would enjoy casting a vote for. Cigarettes and cigars mean nothing in his life and regardless of his surroundings he smokes a large pipe. We need men like him in the United States. Just why pipes should be beyond the pale in hotel dining rooms and at dinners and other gatherings where the rankest cigars get by without outspoken objection never has been plain to us. A pipe smoker of position so lofty that even head waiters wouldn't dare glare at him is one of the things we need badly in this land of much-amended freedom.

The Unusual Adventures of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Cup of the Magyars," "The Gold Traffickers of Montmartre," Etc.

IV.—THE UNDERGROUND RIVER OF THE OASIS.

Mr. Robert Henry Blane of Houston, Texas, ventures further into Africa, seeking treasure and solitude, and meets a number of interesting people, not the least of whom are Mary Grant of Vicksburg, Ivan the Strong of Minsk, and the redoubtable No. 37, who seems to be of everywhere.

TO Robert Henry Blane, alias The Texan Wasp, had come a new sensation. A perfectly novel and ridiculous sensation. The handsome and adventurous Texan to whom fear was an unknown emotion experienced for the first time in his life an overpowering feeling of depression that hinted at an impending calamity.

The strange sensation had seized The Wasp at Tangier where he had said goodby to the American cowboy who was working his way home on the oil tanker. It persisted for days, growing greater with each hour that passed till at last it grew to such proportions that he had to turn and face it. Then, like a wise adventurer, he named the thing. Mr. Blane told himself that he was in the clutch of fear. A great fear that possessed the terrifying powers of a pursuing dragon. A fear that shook the iron nerve that had enabled him to outwit the king of man hunters, No. 37.

The fear had grown from a mysterious and persistent pursuit that began at Tangier. There was a night flight over the flat whitewashed roofs of the quarter Bab-ed-Dakhl with a score of the local police close on the Texan's heels. It was a marvelous flight. The athletic Blane was forced to show the speed that had brought to him the applause of thousands in his college days. He had swept across the sea of roofs, jumped the narrow streets that intersected the rabbit warrens of the native quarter, flushed unveiled women who, thinking themselves secure on their own housetops, had put their face wraps aside, and upset devout Mohammedans making their evening devotions beneath the stars. A thrilling race. The squeals of the startled women, the yells of the police, the cries of the natives, the quick pounding of heavy feet over the mud-plastered roofs—then silence. The Texan Wasp had dropped suddenly down a precipitous wall on the Paseo de Cenarro and the action choked the cries of his pursuers. Awe-struck at his daring they stood and

watched him as he dropped from one outjutting stone to another. His jeering laugh came up to them as he fled into the shadows.

No boat out of Tangier for three days. And behind Tangier ran the trails stretching southward to the dry lips of the Sahara. The Wasp felt the strength of the hand that had reached out to gather him in. At dawn the next morning a tall and distinguished-looking person in full Arab costume —gandurah, flowing burnoose and haik— went southward with a caravan bound for Fez, the City of the Sultans.

And the fear grew on the route. At Ouezzane the pursuing hand made another clutch at The Texan Wasp. A captain of Spahis had been ordered to make an arrest but he had signified his intentions before he had a grip on the shoulder of the person he thought of taking in charge. It was unlucky for the captain. Three hours later he sent a courier northward with his apologies and regrets. The devil that he was told to arrest could get more out of a horse that any man he, the captain, had ever seen. He had fled with a troop at his heels, fled out across the hot sands where the sunbeams ran one through like heated rapiers, and the soldiers had lost him in the wastes. The fellow rode like a centaur. The troopers were unable to explain his escape. He rode like the devil himself!

A great compliment for Texas.

Through wastes that were dead and yet strangely alive; through sands tinted red and yellow and brown—tints that were palpitant, impudent, strident even—through throbbing heat in which sand devils danced rigadoons, The Texan Wasp came to Fez. Fez the Mysterious! Fez the Jealous City that has clung through the centuries to the traditions and customs of its colorful founders. And in the City of the Sultans Robert Henry Blane told himself that he was a little afraid, just a little afraid of a persistent pursuer. And that pursuer was, without a doubt, the great sleuth, No. 37.

Robert Henry Blane, one time of Houston, sat on a bench on the Place du Commerce of Fez and considered the matter of routes. Evidently the great detective had made up his mind that The Texan Wasp was to be gathered in at all costs, and, curiously, Mr. Blane could not rid himself of the belief that No. 37 would be successful. The feeling of an impending calamity could not be shaken off.

Across the hot square flowed the life of the City of Mystery. Mohammedans in white burnooses and yellow slippers; Moroccan Israelites in black caftans and small black caps; negroes from the Sudan, with that dead black that lacks the cheerful shine of the American colored man; Spanish dealers, and dandified French officers. The Texan Wasp watched the human tide flow by and he wondered as he watched. All the folk that went by had little activities to fill their days. The merchants had small shops on the Rue du Mellah to which they were hurrying; the negroes were porters; the Spanish dealers were trafficking in olive oil, carraway seeds, honey, ivory, and silk; the French officers held administrative positions. On the busy square The Wasp seemed to be the one person out of a job.

Across the square from the big gate leading to the gardens came a tall soldier walking with a queer, swaggering manner and chanting softly as he walked. In the center of the Place he passed an officer without saluting, then he halted as his superior called out an order.

Robert Henry Blane watched the little happening. The officer sharply questioned the soldier; the soldier replied with a carelessness that annoyed the officer. Words passed, then the officer's fist shot out and the tall soldier dropped. The superior went on across the square, leaving the insubordinate private on the ground.

Because The Texan Wasp was the one person without a job he took upon himself the task of succoring the soldier. He pulled the fellow into the shade and bought for him a sou's worth of water from the water seller with his goatskin bag. The human tide, momentarily arrested by the happening, flowed on again and Robert Henry Blane was left with the soldier.

A strong, tough man was the private. He recovered quickly from the effects of the blow, mumbled his thanks to The Wasp, then he continued the little chant that had been interrupted by the officer. Robert Henry Blane listened. The soldier crooned it softly, rocking backward and forward as he sang, occasionally clapping his hands as some particular line appealed to him.

He sang in French but the listening Wasp knew that it was not his native tongue. The words had the throatiness of the north, and

this fact together with the song itself made the Texan feel certain that the fellow was a Russian. The Foreign Legion has many Russians in its ranks.

The song that he chanted was curious. It was a little Iliad of life and love. It was primitive, unpolished, a trifle raw. It told of the love of a Russian peasant of Minsk who worshiped a girl that loved him in return. But the young lady's parents frowned on the match. They turned the peasant from the door and gave the girl in marriage to a rich landowner.

The Texan Wasp listened as the soldier chanted the detail with all the Russian's love for small and intimate particulars. The hot sunlight gave life to the words so that Blane pictured the crude drama. He saw the wretched home of the girl, the money-loving parents, the lover, the fat landowner, the disconsolate maid being dragged off. But of all the verses of the poem the queer refrain stirred The Wasp. The soldier hissed it, his blue eyes alight with hate. The refrain ran:

"Katchinka mine! Katchinka mine!
Oh, I'll come back with blade ashine
And spill his blood, Katchinka mine!"

The song ended at last. The singer turned and regarded Robert Henry Blane. "A good song?" he said quietly.

"A very good song," admitted The Wasp.

"It is mine," said the soldier. "I made it. We Russians are all poets." Then, after a little pause, he added: "It was my affair. My Katchinka."

"I'm sorry," said The Wasp. "Very sorry."

The private acknowledged the sympathy with an inclination of the head. "To-morrow I leave the Legion and start on my way back," he exclaimed. "Then I will do what I have written in my song."

"It is a long way home," commented the American, and as he spoke he wondered how the Russian would accomplish the journey. The pay of a private of the Foreign Legion is twenty-five centimes a day.

The Russian seemed to guess what was in the mind of the man beside him. "I know where there is money," he said softly. "A lot of money! Tons of money! I know where it is hidden. It is twelve days' journey from here, but to-morrow I start. And then when I get the money I will go home."

He became silent. Robert Henry Blane stared across the hot square. He pondered lazily over the things that make men rovers. Here was a fellow who should have stayed in his native village and farmed the land. Instead, because of a love affair, he had wandered down into Africa, joined the Legion and spent his days chanting a song of hate about the man who had robbed him of his sweetheart. To the Texan it seemed all wrong.

The soldier broke the silence. "This treasure I speak of," he began. "Now you would not believe my story if I told it to you. Why? Because you are an American and you do not know this part of the world. But the treasure is in American money. What do you think of that?"

The Wasp did not answer, and after a pause the soldier went on. He could not resist the desire to startle the very blasé and worldly person at his side.

"A grand banker of your country robbed his bank," he went on. "It was five years ago. He came to Casablanca with the money and from there he came to Meknes and on to Fez. He had all the money with him. Leather bags of it. I know! It will be all mine soon! It is enough to buy a countryside in Russia.

"We Russians have a proverb. It runs: 'There is always a thief that is bigger.' A good proverb. This banker from your country met the bigger thief on the road to Fez. That is all."

"And the thief has kept the money till you were ready to leave the Legion?" sneered the Texan.

"I killed the thief," said the Russian quietly. "Killed him in fair fight in the hills. He was a rebel. When he was dying he bought a drink of water from me with his story. I mean the story of where the treasure is hidden. He was afraid to use the money. He hid it, hid it in a place that none can find, and it is there to-day."

"And you believe his story?" questioned The Wasp.

The soldier got to his feet and looked down at Robert Henry Blane. "I believe it because it made me write my song," he said. "Till then I had no song because I had no way of getting home. Then, after listening to his story, I knew that I would get home and I began to sing. We Russians know of many things before they happen. His story wove all the verses that you have heard. It was the loom. It plaited in all the threads of hate that made my brain

ache through the years. Now I am content. To-morrow I leave the Legion and then I will hunt for the treasure."

He stood a moment regarding Robert Henry Blane, then he lifted his hand and saluted. "Thank you for getting me water," he said. "Good-by."

"Good-by and good luck," cried The Wasp. "I hope you get every dollar of the swag."

The soldier moved off across the hot square, and as the Texan watched him there came back the vicious refrain of the song:

"Katchinka mine! Katchinka mine!
Oh, I'll come back with blade ashine
And spill his blood, Katchinka mine!"

Robert Henry Blane remained on the bench. By him flowed the colorful tide. Shrouded women, the dark, mysterious eyes alone showing between the head shawl and the veil; kiddies, their heads shaved so that there was left the little tuft by means of which Mohammed would lift them into paradise; charm sellers with verses of the Koran printed on colored slips of papers; hags whose wizened skin showed through a thousand rents in their torn garments.

One of the hags, who looked as if she might have known Fez in the days of Sidi Mohammed, regarded The Texan Wasp keenly for a moment, then dropped on her haunches before his bench. Deftly she shuffled a pack of greasy cards and spread them on the hard ground. She muttered in Arabic, jabbing at the tattered cards with fingers that had become claws. The handsome stranger would know his future! No, no, he must be told. A mad future! Regard the cards!

She flung upon the ground a nine of hearts, a six of spades, a ten of clubs, a seven of the same suit, and the five of diamonds. She turned her beady eyes on The Texan Wasp and made a motion with her claw suggesting that he should total the pips.

The Wasp did so. The result startled him. The total was 37, and the number 37 was not one that he loved.

With an insane hurry the old woman gathered up the cards, shuffled the pack and held it out to the American. She suggested that he should throw five cards face downward on the ground.

Robert Henry Blane did so. The hag mumbled over them, then turned them hurriedly. There were three tens, a five, and a two. Again The Wasp totaled the pips. He stared at the hag with a little amazement showing on his handsome face. Twice running the total of five cards thrown from the pack had made a number that he hated—the numeral alias of the greatest man hunter in all the world!

The Wasp opened his mouth to question the hag but at the same instant bedlam broke out upon the Place du Commerce. A two-horse carriage, driven by a Sudanese, had crashed into another. The vehicle driven by the negro suffered greatly in the collision and the driver turned upon his fare and demanded money sufficient to recover the damages. It was the protests of the fare that made Robert Henry Blane forget the hag and thrust his way through the curiosity-welded circle that bound the disputants. The French of the passenger, audible at moments when the negro paused to get his breath, had the accent of home. It was American-French and it dragged the Texan toward it like a magnet. Perfect French, but beneath it the soft Creole croon that brought up visions of bayous, of shrimp boats running up from Grand Isle, of the old Mississippi rolling lazily by New Orleans toward the Gulf. Robert Henry Blane knew that the girl's voice held the music of the South that he loved, the South that was home.

The Texan broke through the circle and stood at her side. She did not see him till he roared an order to the negro, then, as she glanced up, he saw her face. It was a sweet, pathetic face. It wasn't beautiful but it possessed those clearly defined marks that tell of purity and truth, and in the glance that the girl turned upon The Wasp was an appeal that was irresistible. The big Sudanese had scared her greatly with his bellowing.

Mr. Blane answered the appeal in the Blane manner. He snatched the whip from the ebony coachman and deftly laid it across the fellow's back. The crowd roared and the Sudanese saw red. He lowered his woolly head and charged the Texan.

Robert Henry Blane gave the crowd an exhibition of lassoing that was entirely new to them. He caught the end of the long whip, stepped swiftly out of the way of the charging negro, then, as the Sudanese went by, he slipped the loop around the fellow's leg.

The negro came to the ground with a crash, raising a cloud of dust that com-

pletely hid him for the moment. A crazed, wild Sudanese was the coachman. He got to his feet, measured the distance between himself and The Wasp and charged again.

Robert Henry Blane dropped the whip and thrust the girl out of the way of the maddened negro. The packed circle made it difficult for him to find space for her and as he turned he found the Sudanese upon him. A blind, madman thirsty for blood.

It was then that Robert Henry Blane gave the crowd a further exhibition. The negro, bent forward, gave the Texan a "back" that was irresistible. The Wasp, without an apparent effort, vaulted clear over him, and the Sudanese, unable to pull up, drove his head full force into the stomach of a huge Mussulman whose curiosity had thrust him into the middle of the circle.

The Mussulman went down with a roar of rage. Two of his friends rushed to tear him from the grip of the Sudanese who, firmly convinced that he had clutched the American, was busily pounding the fat man. Three friends of the negro took the part of the coachman and as the battle royal grew warmer The Texan Wasp, calm and unruffled, took the arm of the girl and guided her across the Place to the crowded Mellah.

"Where do you wish to go?" asked Robert Henry Blane.

"I am staying at the Hotel Bellevue," answered the girl.

"I will get you a carriage," said The Wasp. "It is——"

"No, no!" cried the girl. "Not a carriage! That brute of a coachman frightened me! Please show me the way and I will walk there."

Robert Henry Blane guided the girl through the maze of narrow streets, piloting her skillfully out of the way of the donkey men whose shouted *"Balek"*—take care—worries the unfortunate pedestrian. He chatted to her in an effort to make her forget the incident on the Place du Commerce, and unmindful of her protests he walked on with her when he had brought her outside the mud walls of the old town and had set her upon the rather pleasant path leading to the hotel.

She thanked him in a sweet whisper for his help on the Place. She painted a gloomy picture of her plight if he had not been there, and, when The Wasp protested that a French policeman would have settled the difficulty, she refused to accept his belief.

"Anyhow it was nice to find some one from home there," she murmured, no note of coquetry on her voice. "I couldn't believe my ears when you spoke to me. I didn't think that there was one American in Fez."

"Fortunately for hotel keepers Americans are everywhere," said The Wasp. "What would happen to them if we didn't roam? The Russian, German, Austrian, and Pole are compelled to stay at home because their money is worthless. The English are not as wealthy as they were, so the goose that lays the golden egg to-day is the American."

There was a little silence after the remark. A black soldier of the Sultan's guard passed by in his rather ridiculous costume of red jacket, red trousers, white spats and rolled turban. An Arab guiding two camels heavily laden with grass looked at the two Americans with black, beady eyes; a tattered wretch mumbling prayers begged for charity.

The strange surroundings must have suggested to the girl the need for an explanation of her being there. She began to speak in a soft whisper, her face turned away from the man who walked at her side.

"I am from Vicksburg," she said, her voice hardly audible. "My name is Grant —Mary Grant. My brother went to the war and he did not come back. I mean he did not come back to America. He thought Vicksburg too small. You see he was an adventurous fellow and he wished to see the world. He wrote to us from Marseilles saying that Warren County was no good to him, and that was the last letter that we had."

Again came a little silence. They approached the hotel. A blind Arab squatting in the dust of the road chanted scraps from the Koran.

The Texan Wasp paused before the door of the hotel and the girl roused herself. She began to talk hurriedly, jerking out little scraps of information in a manner that suggested nerves strained to the breaking point.

"I had to come!" she gasped. "Mother longed for him! She is old. You—you understand? She wished to see him before—before she died. I traced him to Oran and then to Fez. No, no, you cannot help me. You have been kind. Thank you! Thank you! Good-by! Good-by! I feel that—that I will find——"

Her voice broke. The soft brown eyes filled with tears and with a strange little cry the girl turned and rushed into the hotel, leaving Robert Henry Blane standing in the hot sunlight.

The Wasp waited for a few moments undecided as to what he should do. Here was an American girl in Fez the Mysterious—Fez the strange City of the Sultans. He told himself that he should help her; then as this decision was made, there leaped into his mind a picture of the hag on the Place du Commerce. Twice the hag had thrown the cards and made the pips count 37. How had she managed it? He told himself that it would be wiser to withhold his offer of help. Who was he to offer help? He thought of the night flight across the flat roofs of Tangier, of the near arrest at Ouezzane when the troop of Spahis chased him out across the burning sands.

The Wasp turned and walked back to the crowded Mellah. The fear that he could not shake off pricked him fiercely as he tramped along.

He returned to the Place du Commerce and searched for the hag who had thrown the cards on the ground. The search was difficult. There were many lean hags with faces lined like war maps on the Place. Before the Compagnie Algérienne he found one that he felt sure was the fortune teller, but when he addressed her she shook her head.

"The cards!" cried The Wasp, speaking in Arabic. "You told my fortune here on the Place less than an hour ago!"

The hag shook her head and looked out along the hot road that separated the European town from the Arab quarter. The Wasp spoke again; the hag sprang angrily to her feet and waddled off. A tattered beggar who had listened to the assertion and the denial giggled in the foolish manner of a person who wishes to suggest that he could tell something if the proper solvent was applied to his tongue.

Robert Henry Blane had curious dreams on the night that followed his meeting with Mary Grant of Vicksburg. He had dreams of the French penal settlement at Cayenne. Very unpleasant dreams. He dreamed that he had been taken to Cayenne by the singing Russian who proved on his arrival to be No. 37. The horror of the place awakened him, then when he fell asleep again the dream continued. There came to him in the awful hell of Cayenne a rescuer whom he first thought to be the girl from Vicksburg but who turned out to be none other than Betty Allerton of Boston, the girl he had loved in the long ago.

The hot morning sun roused him. He dressed and looked out of the window at the crowded street. The little shops were open, their owners sitting cross-legged among their wares. Robert Henry Blane watched them. They sat in their cubbyholes with a certain air of dignity. They were small merchants of Fez. They had a place in the community. They could look with contempt on a wanderer who had no home, no goods, no clients. Just for a moment The Texan Wasp envied them.

A tall, muscular figure caught the eye of Robert Henry Blane. It was the Russian that came striding up the narrow street. Not in uniform any longer. The dress of the Legion had been put aside and in its place the man from Minsk had substituted a worn costume of blue denim. Upon his head was a red fez that was just a few sizes too small for the task that had been thrust upon it.

The Russian was still chanting. His words were drowned by the babble of other voices, but The Wasp could see the ex-soldier's lips moving as he walked along. The fellow was chanting the Iliad that he had built around his own affairs.

The Wasp thrust a morsel of plaster from the crumbling window sill into space. It fell upon the red fez and the soldier glanced up. A look of truculence that had been brought by the tiny missile was replaced by a grin of delight.

"You are the person above all others that I wished to see!" he shouted. "Can I speak to you?"

"Come up," said The Wasp. "Room No. 8 at the top of the stairs. Mind you don't break your neck as you come. The stairs were built by the person who invented the corkscrew."

The Russian came up with a speed that proved he had spoken the truth when he stated that Blane was the one person above all others that he longed to see. He flung open the door in response to the American's "Come in" and he began to talk before he was inside.

"Listen!" he cried. "I spoke to you yesterday of the treasure and a miracle happened."

"What was it?" questioned The Wasp.

"You did not ask me for a share!"

Robert Henry Blane laughed. "What have I to do with your old treasure?" he asked.

"Nothing," cried the Russian. "Nothing at all. But I have spoken to scores of people about this money and each one of them thought that I could not get it without his help. Do you understand? They talked immediately of forming a partnership with me. Every man to whom I mentioned it said: 'Let's go and get it. We can find it.' Always *we!* You are the first one that has ever said 'I hope you get every dollar of the swag.' That is what you said yesterday. You hoped that *I* would get it! You did not say 'we' or 'us.'"

Robert Henry Blane watched his visitor. His excitement had increased. The blue eyes of the Russian were filled with a strange light. He was free to search for the treasure that would take him back to Minsk, back to the girl that he loved, back to the fat landowner whose blood he craved.

He began to talk and his words stumbled over each other as he explained to the American the little matters that made him certain the treasure really existed. With a dramatic power that was extraordinary he told of the death of the man who had stolen the money from the American banker—a lieutenant of that very unamiable ruffian, Raisuli.

It was a very unusual tale. The Russian told it in detail. He imitated the gestures of the dying scoundrel who had begged for a drink of water before he was whisked into eternity and he told without any attempt to excuse himself how he had tortured the fellow by leaving the bottle just outside the reach of the clawing fingers that waited to carry it to the parched lips.

"I knew that he would tell!" he cried. "I knew! I pulled him into the sun so that his thirst would become greater and I made noises with my throat as I drank. What good was his secret when he was dying and his thirst was great? I asked him that every time I took a pull at the bottle.

"Then he told! Ah, God! he told it to me, and every bit of me became an ear! I wrapped myself around his mouth so that not a whisper would escape. Not a whisper! The story was for me because I had tortured him into telling it. Had not I pulled him into the sun and made noises with my throat? It was my story! I lay close to him and listened like a mother listening to the first lispings of her baby.

"He died after he had drunk and while the rattles were in his throat I began to sing. Till then I was dumb. Ah, yes! Dumb as the white stones that mark the *versts* on the road to Minsk. I had never sung! *Never!* But his story of the treasure unloosed a voice within my brain. Listen! I sang all through the day and in the hot nights I made rhymes. I strung verses together in my dreams. Verses and verses till my head ached with the number that I made. And all of her! All of Katchinka! My Katchinka! Of her and of him and of what I would do when I reached home."

He paused for a moment to get his breath, then with his head thrust forward toward The Texan Wasp he continued his story.

"We Russians think that all men who sing see things that are hidden from the ordinary person. We think that the poets know of what is to be to-morrow and the day after. It is our belief and it is a splendid belief. So am I wrong in thinking that I do know the future, I who was dumb till he told me that story? It made me a singer so I know that the tale he told me is a true tale. I know!"

The tremendous obsession that clutched the Russian reached out and plucked at The Texan Wasp. The fellow's story had brought a strange feeling into the room. The ex-soldier's desire for revenge had filled him with the power to make converts. He was Belief itself!

Robert Henry Blane sought a reason for his unusual credulity and he found it instantly. He, Blane, wished to go farther into the desert, the desert that seemed more friendly than the little house clusters where the Rod and the Law held sway. The Russian had found a convert who wished to be converted.

"What is your proposition?" asked The Wasp.

"You pay the expenses of the trip and you will have thirty per cent of the treasure," answered the Russian. "It is a twelve-day journey. We must go to Oudjda and then by camels southward into the desert. You must buy or hire the camels. We must go alone. The money you must find; I have the route within my brain. Never have I put anything on paper. It is my treasure but I will give you a por-

tion. There will still be enough left for Katchinka and me. It is a great sum."

"I agree," said The Wasp.

The Russian put out a strong sun-tanned hand and gripped the hand that Robert Henry Blane extended. "My name is Ivan Polokoff," he said. "In the little village where I lived near Minsk they called me Ivan the Strong."

"My name is Robert Henry Blane," said The Wasp. "I am an American and I do nothing unless it appeals to me. If it appeals I will do anything."

"I guessed you as a person of that kind," growled Ivan the Strong. "I am proud to have you as a partner. All night long I lay awake and wondered if I would find you. You became part of the rhymes."

A great strong thing is the Desert of Sahara. It squats and grins at the little men who try to rule it. It is a white, wind-whipped, indecent thing that sprawls over leagues and leagues of territory, sucking with parched lips at the fertile stretches on the north, throttling the little hut clusters that cling to its hot bosom, and stirring with its thousand-league limbs the sand storms that wipe out desert trails and smother wanderers. A terrible thing with ten million breasts of hungry sand!

Over these breasts of wind-tormented sand rode Robert Henry Blane and Ivan the Strong. Dropping ever southward as the gurgling camels covered the leagues of sun-bitten sand. By Tioudadine where the heat devils live! By Hassi El Aricha! By Badda and Mengoub where the ghosts of the lost ride on the sand storms! On and on, biting deeper into the wastes.

Twice the guide deserted them. The first guide thought the Russian mad because he sang all day of Katchinka, so he fled in the night, taking with him a spare camel. The second became suddenly fearful of the wastes, turned and rode back over the track they had come.

All day long the Russian sang. In the mind of Robert Henry Blane the Song of Katchinka became a lariat that dragged himself and the Russian into the desert. They were tied to the thing. It was belief and it was stronger than steel hawsers. It defied the blinding sunlight, the waterless wastes, the nights of terrific loneliness. It became a living thing. At times, mostly during the heavy, hot hours of the afternoon, Blane felt that he could take verses of the song in his hands and squeeze blood from them. It was a great song, a song of fattened hate. Sometimes the big Texan found himself joining in the refrain:

"Katchinka mine! Katchinka mine!
Oh, I'll come back with blade ashine
And spill his blood, Katchinka mine!"

Onward, ever onward went the two. By nomad camps where "pancake" tents of torn and tattered Afghans were protected by hedges of dead camel's thorn. Wretched places. Their half-nude inhabitants came out and gibbered at The Texan Wasp and Ivan the Strong. They ran beside the two wanderers, making queer, doglike noises, their skinny paws extended for the food they craved. The pot-bellied infants stumbled in front of the sobbing camels; the women whined from behind the tattered shawls that covered their faces.

The Texan Wasp was sympathetic but the Russian rode by without seeing the gaunt things that begged for food. The Russian saw nothing but the treasure. He plaited new verses into his Iliad with every hour that passed. They were verses that told of his arrival at Minsk, of the ride to the village, of the meeting with the fat landowner who had taken Katchinka from him. They were terrible verses. He howled them wildly in the night and the jackals applauded him.

The camel of Ivan the Strong, not buoyed up by hate, lay down in that careless manner of camels and gave up the ghost. The Russian took turns at riding the mount of Robert Henry Blane. Riding or walking he sang. Now the earlier verses that told of the boy-and-girl love of himself and Katchinka were omitted entirely. It was solely a song of hate, a song reeking with revenge. The Wasp watched the fellow with slitted eyes. The Wasp felt that Ivan the Strong was going insane, yet on one point his mind did not fail him. He had learned the route by heart. The trail into the sands as described to him by the man he had given water to as he lay dying, was scratched deeply on the memory tablets of the man from Minsk.

They came to Tannexara. They passed it on a moonlit night, the scared inhabitants of the mud huts peeping from their doors as the two swung through. The voice of the Russian appalled the folk of the little village. It swept over the huts like a clarion call. They heard it for a full half hour after

the two had passed—"Katchinka mine! Katchinka mine!"

The second camel followed the example set by his companion. At the end of a day when the sun prodded them with molten spears the camel dropped on his knees, turned his face like a true Mussulman toward the east and slipped softly into the paradise of good camels. The Russian kicked him and cursed him. Ivan the Strong was a madman now. Yet he knew the route.

"We must walk on," said The Wasp. "There is a moon and the night is cool."

They shouldered the two bags of meal and the goatskin bag of water and went on. The desert was fighting for a knock-out blow but The Wasp and Ivan the Strong were smothering cleverly and dodging the uppercut that the White Witch of the Sahara wished to administer.

They staggered on till sunrise. Here and there in the waste were little piles of stones that marked the trail, but these piles were often hidden by the wind devils. At dawn the two staggered into a nomad camp, flung themselves without asking permission in the shade of one of the tattered tents and slept through the day. The desert dwellers were afraid of them. They were two huge men, sunburned and bearded, and one sang a song that frightened them. Robert Henry Blane wondered at the effect of the Russian's song upon the folk who knew not a word of the language he chanted. Curiously they seemed to understand. It hypnotized them. It made them whine with fear.

When the night came down they went on again. The Wasp blessed the flat-faced foolish moon that stayed with them. The Russian spoke to it. He asked it not to shine on the night that he would come back to his native village. He told it that he desired the darkness, the soft, sweet darkness that would allow him to leap upon the fat landowner who had stolen the girl he loved.

Before the dawn a dog barked in the white stretch ahead of them. Another dog joined in, a third took up the alarm. The Russian laughed insanely.

"I think it is the place!" he cried. "Presently we shall see the palms. He spoke of the palms before he died. He said I would see them. My Katchinka! I am coming, Katchinka!

"Yes, he said I would see the palms, and when I saw the palms I would know that I was there. And the treasure is there. Little brother from America, we are close to the treasure! Close to it, little brother. A strong man are you, little brother, for you have walked with Ivan the Strong and you have shown no weakness."

In silence they staggered on. The east reddened, then with a startling suddenness the sun sprang up over the rim of the desert and they saw. They saw what the Russian had spoken of. Coming toward them as their tired feet ate up the distance were the green palms of the oasis, the splendid palms that the Almighty had set in the wilderness and fed with mysterious waters.

A scared crowd came out in the morning sunlight to meet the two. The Russian howled at them. He called for food and they backed away from him. They told him they had but dates and a little quantity of meal.

Ivan the Strong wanted more. He heard a young goat bleating in the rear of the mud hovels and he rushed toward the sound. The skinny-legged owner of the bleating kid was knocked over as he tried to protect his treasure.

The Wasp lit a huge fire and broiled sections of the animal upon the coals. He and the Russian feasted royally, and the starved inhabitants joined in the great repast. The starved ones laughed and screamed as they ate. They wasted nothing. With great care they cracked each bone and extracted the marrow.

The mad Russian watched them and addressed Robert Henry Blane. "They wanted to kill that goat for weeks but they lacked the nerve," he said. "They are delighted that a strong man like myself came along and put the animal on the coals. We will go now and find the treasure."

"We will sleep and hunt for the treasure later," said The Wasp quietly.

Ivan the Strong looked at the cool gray eyes of the Texan and considered the remark. "There are few men that I take orders from," he said. "You are one of them. We will sleep."

The people of the desert have a theory regarding the little, fertile oases that crop up in the midst of the arid sands. They, the desert folk, assert that once upon a time there were many rivers in the Sahara but, when the sun got too hot, Allah in his wis-

dom allowed the rivers to burrow like the vipers into the sands. Now, according to the belief of the Arabs, the rivers run in great underground caverns that they have cut out for themselves, but here and there in the hot wastes a river, thinking of the little people that it once knew, sends up a stream of water to feed the date palms.

When The Wasp and Ivan the Strong had slept and had again refreshed themselves on the remnants of the young goat the Texan sent for the headman of the village to guide them to the "source," the spot where the water bubbles up mysteriously from the sands. Robert Henry Blane had taken the deck now. The information concerning the route, which the Russian possessed, had given him a certain right during the journey across the desert; now the chanting madman had to be directed by a sane mind. The treasure was in the underground passage leading from the "source," but of the distance and details the ex-soldier knew nothing.

Ivan the Strong felt the assumption of authority and immediately disputed it. He paused in his wild chanting and eyed the Texan.

"I am a strong man, little brother," he growled. "It is not good to drive me."

"It is for your good," said The Wasp. "The heat has made you a little ill."

"The heat?" howled the Russian. "The heat? It is the thought of revenge that has made me ill. It is the thought of how I will kill him! Come, I will show you how I will spring upon him!"

He unloosed a roar as he spoke and rushed upon Robert Henry Blane. Around them were the scared dwellers of the mud huts; the hot sun beat down upon the open space that the Russian had chosen as a battleground.

Blane sidestepped the rush. Ivan the Strong, his great arms clutching at space, blundered by and cannoned into the wall of one of the hovels. He howled with rage, and the hut folk fled into the palm groves.

Again the Russian rushed and again he missed. The Wasp handled himself like a matador dealing with a crazed bull. He waited till the man from Minsk was nearly on top of him, then he stepped out of the way with a quickness that fooled the other.

Ivan the Strong paused and eyed his opponent. "If I could get my hands on you I would crush you like an eggshell," he growled. "Let me take a grip on you, little brother! Let me take a grip!"

Robert Henry Blane smiled. Into his mind there flashed a picture of the Red Apache who had tried to strangle The Wasp in a back street of Lucerne. He visualized the astonishment on the face of the thug when the Texan had broken his grip by applying the counterhold invented by the Japanese wrestler Isuchi in the days of the Emperor Hideyoshi.

"Take a grip, Ivan," he said sweetly. "Come on!"

The crazed Russian needed no second bidding. He sprang upon The Texan Wasp, folding him in his huge arms. He gurgled with delight as he exerted his strength to crush his opponent. He was Ivan the Strong and he had great arms of steel.

Then, suddenly, the gurgle of the Russian was changed into a wild roar of pain. It was a roar that went out over the date palms into the desert. His grip loosened; The Wasp wriggled free, tripped him neatly and tossed him backward onto the sand.

Ivan the Strong lay for a few moments where he had fallen, then he lifted himself and looked stupidly at the American. "There was a holy man at Chernigov that my father told me of," he said simply. "No one could hurt him because he could break away from the grips they put upon him. Perhaps you have the power. I do not know. Lead, little brother, and I will follow you. It is the treasure that I want. The treasure that will take me home to Katchinka."

"We will find the 'source,'" said the unruffled Texan. "Then we will make our plans."

They plunged into the center of the palm grove, the villagers running before them, uttering cries of fear. The hut dwellers had witnessed the battle between the strange visitors and as they rushed from one tree trunk to another they wondered what piece of contemplated deviltry had made the two men friends again.

As The Wasp searched for the spot where the water welled up he reflected on the strange story that had brought him across the hot sands from Fez. He was convinced that the Russian's story was true. The song that the fellow sang was distilled belief. It had killed the jeers that Robert Henry Blane had turned upon it.

Ivan the Strong seemed to read the

thoughts of his companion. "Now that you are here you do not doubt?" he said quietly. "You feel, don't you, that the treasure is here?"

"Yes," answered The Wasp. "It is curious, but I do feel that it is here."

"Then that is good," said the Russian. "You Americans say that you have a hunch, but we Russians when we feel sure without knowing why we feel sure believe that our soul is speaking to us. My father's soul often spoke to him. He knew of the war many days before it happened. Many, many days."

In the very center of the date grove they found the "source." It was a great basin of limestone with a sandy bottom. In the basin was clear water—wonderfully clear—and through this water The Wasp and Ivan the Strong could see the miracle of the desert. The astounding and extraordinary miracle. Up through the sandy bottom bubbled the offering of the underground river, the splendid offering that fed the date palms on which the poverty-stricken people lived. For a few moments the two men forgot the treasure and stared at the mysterious happening.

Only for a few moments. The madness of the Russian was becoming more and more evident. The sight of the "source" made him slip the last little anchor of sanity and he raved of what the dying man had told him. It was all as the man had said. There was the limestone basin the sides of which had been polished to a glassy smoothness by the feet of the innumerable thousands who had climbed down daily through the countless years to gaze in wonder at the water that bubbled up from the sands. There was the strange red rock that thrust itself out over the pool and upon which the women stood when dipping up the precious fluid. There was the old palm that had, in loving adoration of the "source," drooped over the basin as if to protect it from the hot rays of the sun.

"The passage!" screamed the Russian. "The passage runs from the side of the basin! Come, we are fools to stand here!"

The two scrambled down the slippery side of the limestone basin, and from the grove came whimperings of fear. The hut dwellers were fearful that the two strong men contemplated some harm to the pool that Allah filled in his mysterious way.

The Texan Wasp, leading, paused near the bottom of the descent and pointed to a round hole in the limestone rock. A queer hole, evidently nibbled out by a torrent in the long, long ago.

Ivan the Strong regarded it for an instant then spoke in a voice that carried a note of awe. "I feel the throat of the pig that stole my Katchinka in my hands!" he said. "I do! I feel it now. That is strange, is it not? Come, little brother from America, the treasure is in the passage. Come!"

It was Robert Henry Blane who led the way into the strange hole in the wall of the limestone basin. And behind Blane crawled the mad Russian. A thoroughly crazed Russian now. He had lost all control of himself. He did not understand what was said to him, and he chanted without a pause, roaring out his verses in a manner that roused a million echoes in the dark passage.

"Stop, confound you!" yelled The Wasp. "Stop your singing! You will bring the roof down on us!"

But Ivan the Strong could not stop. In the throbbing darkness of the place he saw the village of his youth, Katchinka, and the fat landowner. He saw himself creeping through the night after his arrival at Minsk; he pictured himself springing upon the fat husband of Katchinka and strangling him with his strong fingers.

The Texan Wasp struck a match but its little pin point of flame could give him no idea of the place. He gathered up a handful of dried roots, twisted them into a rough torch and applied a match. Holding the torch in one hand he crawled forward on hands and knees, the Russian following. The roof of the passage was so low that it was impossible for them to stand upright.

Robert Henry Blane questioned the Russian as to whether he had formed any definite idea of the exact hiding place of the treasure, but Ivan the Strong could tell nothing. He simply knew that the treasure was in the underground passage that led away from the source, and more than that he did not know.

The Wasp examined the smooth walls of the passage as he crawled along. He searched for a niche into which the treasure might have been thrust. Slowly and carefully he searched; the Russian chanting madly.

They covered about ten yards of the pas-

sage when a sudden gust of cold air, blowing upward, put out the improvised torch. The direction of the wind startled The Wasp. He thrust out his hand and held the crawling madman.

"Take care!" he cried. "Wait! There is a hole!"

Clutching Ivan the Strong with one hand, Blane relighted the torch. Lying flat on his stomach he thrust it forward and downward. The floor of the passage along which they were crawling had ended abruptly and the Texan found that he was on the very lip of an abyss whose depth he could not ascertain by the faint light from the torch. Up from the place came a cold wind that throttled the little flame.

The discovery steadied the Russian. He paused in his singing while The Wasp made experiments. From somewhere far down in the depths came the sound of running water, a strange, unearthly sound.

Robert Henry Blane took a stone and dropped it over the ledge. His listening ears gathered up the information conveyed by the sounds that came back to him. The stone evidently struck a shelf of rock immediately below the lip of the hole. The keen ears of the Texan heard it roll along this shelf in a slow, hesitating manner, then the silence told him that it had come to a halt or dropped into space. For a few moments he thought that the stone had been arrested on the ledge, then up from the black depths came a faint *plop* that startled him. The missile had dropped into the underground river of the oasis!

The Russian had heard the *plop*. The time that had elapsed between the sound and the moment that the rock had leaped from the hidden shelf made an effectual muzzle for his song. He crouched on the rim of the pit and made curious gurgling noises.

The Texan Wasp had a mad inclination to laugh. He asked himself why he had listened to the tale of the ex-soldier of the Legion. Why had he come over the leagues of desert to test the truth of a story told by a man whom the desire for revenge had driven insane? And to the questions that sprang up he made his own answers. "Because No. 37 had you rattled," he answered. "The fear of arrest was upon you! 'Go southward, young man,' was the only advice that you would listen to."

Ivan the Strong began to speak in a disconnected manner. Ivan's hope was of a strangely tenacious kind that one had to hang, draw and quarter before it lost its vitality.

"There is no place to hide treasure in the passage," he murmured. "Little brother from America, you have searched and there is no spot where the thief could have put it."

"None," answered The Wasp.

"Then what did he do?" questioned the Russian. "What did the thief do? Why he found the shelf of rock that is immediately beneath the ledge on which we are sitting. He found it and he placed the treasure there. My eyes seem to see in the dark, little brother! I see it there! I see it! We Russians can see things that are not known to others. It is there beneath us! Katchinka mine! Search, little brother! Search!"

The Texan Wasp dropped another stone over the lip of the abyss. It gave back the same report as the one that had preceded it. There was the immediate collision with the shelf beneath, the slow rolling sound that told of a slightly sloping surface that was apparently four or five feet across, then the silence and the *plop* that came up from the immeasurable depths in which the river flowed.

The Wasp calculated the distance of the shelf from the edge on which he sat. Lying on his stomach he thrust the torch down into the darkness. He thought he could detect a shining surface that might be the wet ledge, but he could not make sure. He dropped another stone. The sharp sound of a collision with rock came to him an instant after the stone had left his hand and plunged downward.

Robert Henry Blane spoke to the Russian. "Take a clutch on my shoulders and I will drop over," he said. "Lie on your stomach! Now hang on!"

Slowly and carefully the Texan slipped over the edge of the abyss. His legs dangled in space. His strong hands gripped the lip of the pit. Inch by inch he let himself down, his feet searching for the foothold that the missiles had told of. Lower and lower. His waist was on a line with the edge of the abyss, then his shoulders. At last when he had told himself that he had made a mistake about the distance that separated the hidden shelf from the top of the pit, his feet touched it. He loosened his

grip on the edge above him and stood on firm rock.

With the Russian still gripping the collar of his coat Robert Henry Blane relighted the torch and examined the shelf. It was just as he had pictured it. It was about five feet wide and it sloped slightly. Also it was wet and slippery from the damp mist that came up from the depths.

The Texan unloosed the hands of the Russian and stooped. If the treasure was anywhere the ledge was the place that a careful thief would have chosen as a hiding place. Again the voice of the Russian broke the silence.

The light of the torch flashed upon a white object. The Wasp picked it up and examined it. It was the end of a tallow candle.

The Texan's jaws tightened as he dropped upon his hands and knees. The desire to break into mad laughter again came to him. A remark made by Betty Allerton in the long ago flashed across his mind. The girl had told him of the benefit the world would derive from his intelligence. His intelligence! He could not restrain the laugh. His intelligence? He laughed loudly. He had no intelligence! He was a fool who had followed a madman on a will-o'-the-wisp hunt through the hot sands.

The laugh of The Wasp stirred the Russian on the edge of the abyss. Ivan the Strong had slipped again into the high stages of lunacy. He called out to the Texan.

"The treasure is there!" he screamed. "Ah, I know that it is there! There is enough for us both, little brother! Oh, the fat pig! I feel his throat in my hands! Tell me, little brother! Tell me the treasure is there!"

Robert Henry Blane was on his knees beside a little depression in the ledge. A dry basin at one time, but now filled with water that had dripped into it from the wet wall of rock. And Robert Henry Blane was dragging from the basin bits of pulpy matter that had once been valuable. Very valuable. Very, very valuable. He made soft, squashy piles of this pulp. Little pyramids that were similar to other little pyramids that had been made by another searcher who had visited the spot before The Texan Wasp and Ivan the Strong.

And Robert Henry Blane knew what it was that he was fishing from the basin of rock. Knew it well. It was the pulp of bank notes! The soft white pulp of bills that he reasonably supposed were of big denominations. Good American money had been made into a fine stew by the water that had dripped from the wall into the depression in which the bills had been placed! The water, dripping from the limestone rock, had possessed itself of cleansing properties. It had eaten from the pulp every vestige of print and left it white as snow!

The cries of the Russian interrupted The Wasp in his dredging operations. Ivan the Strong, peering over the ledge, could not see clearly what the American was doing, and fear lest he would be defrauded of his share swept into the Muscovite mind.

"You were to get thirty per cent!" he screamed. "You must not take more! Give me the treasure! Give it to me here!"

Robert Henry Blane scooped up two handfuls of the soft pulp, rose carefully, lifted his arms high and dumped the wet mass on the edge of the abyss. "There," he cried, "take as much as you like! I'm a generous fellow and I'm willing to give you my share as well as your own. Give my regards to Katchinka when you get to Minsk."

"What—what is it?" gasped the Russian.

"American bank notes," answered The Wasp. "Your friend hid them in a hole in the rock but the water got in and turned them into pulp. I suppose that lump represented many thousands of dollars."

Ivan the Strong clawed at the wet mass. He prayed and cursed in turn. He cried and flung himself on his face. His agony was so evident that Robert Henry Blane tried to comfort him.

"We would not have got it if the water had not spoiled it," he said. "Some one else has been here before. Possibly a dozen other searchers. Treasure, my friend, has a thousand tongues. It screams to the world. It sends out little wireless messages that are picked up by scores and scores of people. I should have known that when you told me your story. As a matter of fact I did know it, but just at the moment when you came along with your little tale I had a desire to go somewhere that wasn't quite a resort, so the trip into the desert appealed to me."

The governing heads of the province of Algeria are imaginative folk. They dream of one day connecting Oran and Algiers on

the north with Timbuktu on the south. To keep the dream alive they have thrust a line of rail deep into the bad lands to the southward and day by day they nibble into the sands.

The line runs as far as Colomb Bechars, the mud village whose narrow streets are covered with palm fronds to keep out the Saharan sunlight. One train a day goes southward from Oran to Colomb Bechars; one train a day goes northward from the desert to the civilized belt along the Mediterranean. The desert laughs at the line. It is the little tickling finger of man thrust into the ribs of the White Witch of the Wastes.

Some day, say the Algerians, there will be big expresses pounding down to Timbuktu, expresses with fine cars filled with delighted and well-cared-for tourists. And the White Witch with the ten million breasts of wind-smoothed sand rolls over and kicks her toes as she listens to the words. "Some day!" The Witch wriggles her thousand-league limbs and a dozen caravans making northward from the point toward which the iron rail is slowly crawling are smothered in the storm produced!

It was toward this feeble tentacle of civilization that Robert Henry Blane and Ivan the Strong moved after the discovery of the bank-note pulp in the cavern of the oasis. A long and terrible journey. The Iliad of Ivan the Strong had grown weaker with each day that passed. The White Witch did not love his song. She loves the silence. The Russian grew dumb under her thrusts. He rode with head thrust forward —rode in turns with Robert Henry Blane on the one sorry camel that The Wasp had been able to secure in a village on the way. Meal and dates, dried goat flesh, and cheese whose odor called to high heaven were the delicacies of the journey.

Ever before them was the rail. They dreamed of it. In wild mirages of noontime they saw its flashing length; their ears joining in the conspiracy with their eyes brought to them the sound of noisy puffing. They pictured the little fortified stations that protected the adventurous steel as it bored into the desert.

A crazy man guided them on part of the journey to Figuig. A crazy man who ran before them, barefooted and bareheaded, and made numerous prostrations with his face turned toward the east. He showed a liking for Robert Henry Blane, but he feared the Russian. The Wasp examined the fellow's feet. The soles were so hard that he ran over camel's thorn without suffering in the slightest degree.

And, strangely, as The Texan Wasp came closer and closer to the iron rail that had been driven into the bare ribs of the desert the fear which had sent him out from Fez on the mad expedition returned. It was more appalling than ever. In the journey southward he had found a little relief from the depression that had clutched him after the wild night flight over the flat roofs of Tangier, but now as he came closer to the tentacle of civilization the great dread returned in a manner that puzzled him. Again came the dreams of the French penal settlements—the Isles du Salut in French Guiana where mold forms on the clothes of the convicts; the nickel mines of New Caledonia from which maddened men attempt to escape by floating on crazy rafts across the shark-infested seas between the island and the coast of Queensland!

"Why worry?" he asked the inner self that spent so much time in picturing a black and dismal future. "I'll never rot in the swamps of Cayenne or work in the nickel mines of Noumea."

"Lots of things happen," counseled the inner self. "Go slow! Keep out of the trouble zones. The desert is tranquil."

The Wasp considered the possibility of remaining a little while at some small village along the railroad. At Beni-Ounif, toward which he was heading, there was a small hotel, and he told himself that he might stay there till the unexplainable hunch regarding danger had left him.

They hurried on. The man with the feet that defied the camel thorn deserted. A voice called him from the wastes—a voice that The Wasp and Ivan the Strong could not hear. The guide appeared to be conversing with some person close to him, then, as the two white men watched, he turned and trotted off across the sands. The White Witch of the Wastes had called him from his self-appointed task.

A great fighter was Robert Henry Blane. Steadily, unflinchingly, uncomplainingly he went on. The Russian wished to lie down in the hot sand and die but the Texan dragged him to his feet and drove him forward. Ivan the Strong protested. He cried and cursed. He said he did not wish to go

back to Minsk. He spoke harsh words about Katchinka, but The Wasp was adamant. The fighting look was enthroned in the cool gray eyes of Robert Henry Blane, the strange white scar on the right jaw showed continuously. He was scrapping for dear life against the desert.

They crawled into Beni-Ounif on an afternoon when the westering sun grilled the little village and there they found rest. There was a train northward in the morning and on this train The Wasp intended to put the Russian. For the moment he would remain at the little hotel.

Before the door of the Hôtel du Sahara stood the sorry camel, waiting a purchaser. Arabs walked around the beast, jabbering excitedly. They told each other that a mad foreigner wished to sell the camel for anything that offered. The mad one had no price; he just asked the buyer to make an offer.

Robert Henry Blane, standing at the door of the hotel, watched the milling Arabs, and as he watched a tall, sun-tanned young man broke from the crowd and approached the Texan.

"What will you take for the prohibitionist?" he asked with a smile.

The Wasp laughed. "If you tell me what you want him for I'll give him to you," he said.

The young man seemed a little startled. "I cannot tell you that," he said slowly. "You see, it's a private matter and I've promised some one not to tell. It's very private. But I want a camel and I'm willing to pay a fair price for your beast."

There was a little silence; The Texan Wasp regarded the young man carefully.

"You are an American?" said Blane.

The young man nodded.

"Might I ask your name?"

"Smith," replied the stranger. "George Smith."

Again there was a short lapse in the conversation, then The Wasp, with an amused grin, spoke. "Well, Mr. Smith," he said, "I'll modify that offer of mine. I'll make a guess as to what you want the camel for, and if I guess right you get the animal for nothing. If I guess right, mind you! I'll take one guess and if it's the correct one you just lead old Jim Camel away."

"Oh, that's nonsense!" protested George Smith. "I want to pay and——"

"That's all right," interrupted The Wasp. "You'll pay if I don't hit your mission with one guess. I'm not asking you to tell me. You needn't say yes or no. If I'm right take the camel away; if I'm wrong pull out your pocketbook."

"But I might lead you to believe that you were right no matter what you said," stammered the young man.

Robert Henry Blane regarded the sun-tanned youngster. "You and I are probably the only two Americans within fifty miles of this place," he said. "I guess we're not going to lie to each other."

The younger man flushed. "Go ahead and guess," he said.

The Texan Wasp looked out across the darkening wastes. From the native village—the *ksar*—came mad cries and yells as the wretched folk fought for the entrails of a sheep that had been killed. A spur of barren hills bit into the blue of the sky.

Robert Henry Blane spoke: "You are going treasure hunting," he said softly.

The young man started, looked hard at The Texan Wasp, made a few steps in the direction of the camel, stopped and grinned. "You—you hit it," he stammered.

"Come inside for a moment," said The Wasp. "The camel can wait. I've done a little treasure hunting in my time and I know quite a bit about the business. And I've got a Russian inside who fooled me with a strange tale. A rather wonderful tale. This fellow met me at Fez and he told me a yarn that brought me down here. He was a soldier of the Legion and he said that not a single person outside of himself knew the tale, but do you know"—Robert Henry Blane paused and looked keenly at the young man before him—"I've got a belief that every soldier of the Legion knows the tale and is firmly convinced that no other soldier knows it! Come in and talk. This Russian's story might amuse you."

Hours later a water carrier of Beni-Ounif bought the camel for a song. Ivan the Russian had told the story of his visit to the underground river of the oasis, and Mr. Smith, who had listened intently to the tale, had gone out into the night and consulted with some one who was hiding down a back alley for the very good reason that he had no discharge papers and did not wish to come face to face with hawk-eyed officers of the Legion who would have recognized him.

He, Smith, shook the hand of Robert Henry Blane and stammered out his thanks. "I've got to thank you for a lot," he said. "I—I think I'll go northward by the morning train."

"I might see you to-morrow," said The Wasp. "I thought of staying here for a while to rest my nerves, but now—well, I might go northward in the morning."

The Texan Wasp sat for a long time after the young man had departed. He pondered over the extraordinary feeling of depression that clutched him. He thought of young Mr. Smith. The young man had said he would take the morning train but Robert Henry Blane was doubtful if he would. The youngster required a shepherd, a strong, hard-jawed shepherd who would keep him out of harm's way.

"Some one like myself," commented The Wasp. Then after a pause he added aloud: "This feeling of danger is all nonsense. I'm going back to the white lights and the gay places. I'll take a chance. The mines of Noumea cannot be much worse than this place."

He strolled across to the railway station and asked the telegraph operator if it were possible to send a very urgent message over the wire to Fez. The clerk demurred but Robert Henry Blane had a way with him. He told a beautiful little story that nearly brought tears to the eyes of the operator, and the wire went forward. It read:

MISS MARY GRANT, HOTEL BELLEVUE, FEZ, MOROCCO.

If possible meet me at the Arzew Station, Oran, Tuesday morning. Train from Beni-Ounif. Not certain, but I think I have news.

ROBERT HENRY BLANE, of Houston, Texas.

The Texan Wasp called for young Mr. Smith on the following morning. He incidentally administered a sharp clip to the ear of a red-eyed deserter who was annoyed because a believer in his story was being taken from his clutches. He walked with the young man to the train and kept a sharp eye upon him during the long ride.

When the little desert train pulled into the station at Oran, Robert Henry Blane was the first to swing from the paint-blistered coaches. He glanced around and caught the eye of a sweet-faced girl who stood waiting expectantly. The Wasp bowed and made a gesture toward young Mr. Smith who, oblivious of everything, was daydreaming on the rear platform of the one first-class carriage.

Young Mr. Smith received a surprise. As he turned to descend the girl sprang upon him and folded him in her arms. Robert Henry Blane laughed softly. He knew that he had made no mistake about the soft Southern accent of the man who had stammered out the words "George Smith" when asked his name. Americans are scarce in the Sahara.

Ivan the Strong stood for a moment watching the brother and sister. The affectionate greetings brought to the mind of the Russian thoughts of Minsk and the far-away Katchinka. He forgot The Wasp and went off, chanting softly the Iliad that he had constructed about his own troubles and travels.

Robert Henry Blane passed the exit.

And then, in the bright sunshine of Oran, disaster swooped down upon Robert Henry Blane. Something hard and hostile was thrust against his ribs from the rear, and a voice that was as pitiless as the whine of a flying shell gave an order. "Don't move, my good friend from Texas," came the command. "Don't move or I'll send you on a free ticket into eternity!"

The Texan Wasp halted as ordered. He turned his head slightly and looked into the cold, merciless eyes that were like frozen hailstones. He glanced carelessly at the short, big-nostriled nose, at the chin that had thrown peace to the winds. He laughed softly.

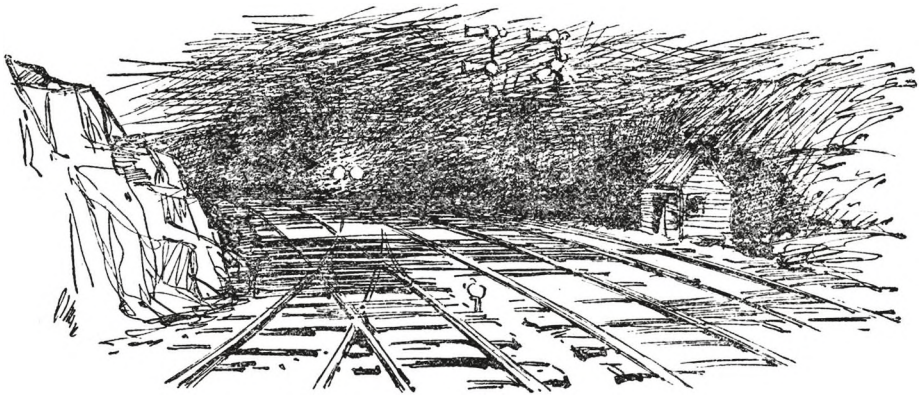
"You read my telegram," he said sneeringly. "Bright little chap!"

"You led me a dance," growled No. 37, "but I swore I would rope you in on account of the trick you played upon me at Algiers. You're a clever chap, Blane. You might have done big things if you hadn't turned wicked. Might have sat in high places."

"Some one said that to me once," said The Wasp quietly. Then, after a pause, he added: "Some one whose claim to beauty was as great as your claim to ugliness."

The man hunter growled. "Step for the coach," he said. "And no tricks. My gun is as careless as anything ever carried by a Texan sheriff."

Another Texan Wasp story in the next number.



Switch Lights

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "The Man the Cook Made," "The Jane—By Act of Providence," Etc.

For some men the line seems always open for the run; against others the signals are continually set, and they pass their lives in siding. Why?

THE little page, a cameo of Mercury, chanting a name through lofty rooms, a message in his hand; a spidery, silvery old gentleman straining from the depths of his chair to listen wistfully. Then the hollow pattering of autumn night's rain on the broad plate window, and the name is lost.

"No matter," said Con O'Connel, oldest member at the Engineers', " 'twould not be my own name anyway."

The two younger members sitting at the fireplace with him smiled indulgently.

"And why do I listen?" mused the old gentleman. "There will nevermore come call boy for Con O'Connel on autumn night, with me running after him for the trainmaster's office, dressing in the rain. And there to hear the tale of plunging engines and shattered coaches, or track or bridge gone out on flood water."

"Then you did not begin railroading as civil engineer," observed one of the young men curiously. "Yet I have heard of your work from men of the best schools——"

"My own schooling was in the division office," said Con, "but before that I was in the wrecking crew, and then the bridge department. It is a story how I changed to the engineers; I could see the main line of my life far ahead, and then suddenly I was headed into a new lead as a train may be by a switch thrown almost under the wheels. Never do I think of it but I am minded of Carrigan of the old P. D. and his queer fancy of the switch lights which changed the fortunes of the great railroad itself."

"I would like to hear how you went into the engineering end," said the lackadaisical young man politely, but the other one raised up, following the old gentleman's gaze through the window as the red orb of the traffic tower at the avenue corner changed to green. He said that he had often seen O'Connel watching that light, and Con nodded.

" 'Tis the same symbol on the great city avenue as Carrigan saw in the yards at Barlow," he said.

"I believe," said the second young man thoughtfully, "that we should begin with the tale of Carrigan and the switch lights."

"That is the first chapter of my own, and of many stories," agreed Con O'Connel, and, cocking his eye occasionally at the tower light on the avenue, divulged his memories in a voice rolling and sweet as the bells of Shandon.

Who know the end as they drive on the avenue? The tower lamp reddens, they halt at the crossing, all marked up on the

trainboard of destiny, waiting orders. And what may happen in those moments that would not have happened had they beaten the signal? A moment late or a moment too soon, is not the moment on time, as any railroad man will agree; 'tis little we know! Well, Carrigan who tended the switch lamps in the old Barlow yards before towers were invented would caution his friends in this same vein.

For one, he cautioned his neighbor, the locomotive engineer as they smoked in the dooryard of an evening. "Ah, Grogan," he warned, "all life is a switching yard and a man can never be quite sure that he will be let through on his run till the signal be quite passed."

"An engineer can see ahead that the main line is his own, if he is not color blind," said Grogan.

"You have your orders, but the man at the signal also has his orders," replied Carrigan, "and may take your right away from you by a twist of a lever. And so it is in life where all have orders but few get through; some have nearly every signal set against them."

"Why is that?" asked Grogan, scratching his head, but Carrigan was puzzled to explain, and stopped young Donald Carney who was hurrying by on his way back to his law office, though 'twas after working hours for all the other business men in Barlow.

"You must look behind the signalmen for an explanation," said Carney when the question was put up to him as a smarter man. He had stopped in his swift stride with his short, heavy, athletic body at rest for the moment's neighborly conversation which would be all the recreation permitted for that day. His face was swarthy and straight-featured and Mrs. Carrigan, in her rocking-chair on the grass plot, thought him a handsome young man as he raised his hat to her and scanned them all with his humorous black eye.

"Behind the signalman," said Donald Carney, "is the dispatcher at his train sheet, and behind him still are the rules and bulletins of the management that certain trains with certain loads have precedence. So in life, I should say, Carrigan, it is the man bearing the most important goods would be let through."

"True for ye," said Grogan and Mrs. Carrigan, but Carrigan thought there was more to the puzzle than had been solved.

"Few men there be with anything of importance to deliver," said he dryly; "and I am not speaking of them. But of all the great crowd of mankind, why should some always have right of way and others spend their lives in siding?"

"Sure, Mr. Carney means 'tis for the saints to decide," said Mrs. Carrigan with indignation of Carrigan's ignorance.

"I would not say they are entirely to blame," said Carney with a queer expression hard as a flash of lightning twinkling over his face, "for any man not getting through to success. For they must trust human agents y' know to carry out their orders in this world. And men are careless and make mistakes or have favorites—even dispatchers. I should say that the ordinary man who arrives is the man who learns best how to take advantage of the carelessness and mistakes or friendship of the others."

"Ye have it," said Grogan, but Mrs. Carrigan was more puzzled the more she listened.

"Sure, if Carrigan would only ride a horse instead of a hobby he could get off of it," she said. "As it is, he wants everybody to mount the hobby behind him and ride in circles. I hope next time he stops you, Mr. Carney, he will have a subject more worthy your notice." At which the group of them dispersed laughing—all but Carrigan and ten-year-old Danny who had listened holding to his father's hand, his little forehead puckered with interest.

And Carrigan shook his head above the boy and fixed him with his honest blue eyes. "I will think it all out by the time you reach the years of understanding, and explain to ye," he said.

So, though Carrigan quit speaking of his fancy, he devoted himself to solving the puzzle and at evening would stand at his doorsill and look across to the lamps of the switches, twinkling like the witch fires his grandmother, and her of Galway, had told him of at old bedtimes. In the drive of rain or white surf of the blizzard drifts he pondered the switchyard, and now he must hurry along his solution of the puzzle, for Danny was arriving at years of understanding and Carrigan had the growing pain in his lungs which warned he would not see his boy as a man.

"Sure, a year passes by like a firefly," thought Carrigan as he would plod about filling the lamps and doing the inspecting

he had to do; "like a firefly with a little flicker on the dust and it is gone."

For a long time he said nothing about his sickness and Mrs. Carrigan would complain that he had no ambition, and as the boy came to twelve and thirteen he felt the shame of the father who was sidetracked.

Several times Carrigan took him to walk in the yards at night, hoping for inspiration with him along, and once they came on the car of President Merrill, shimmering like a big jewel with brass and varnish and a yellow glow of lamplight at the core of it. In the core as seen through the open door sat a lady in white reading with a little girl listening. And in the turban of the girl's yellow hair her face was that of an elf, mischievous and with keen eyes that darted their glance at Dan as he lingered a moment on the track at the rear of the car.

The boy passed on into the dusk and 'twas long before he saw her again, yet he did not forget the elf who lived in the splendid car like the throne room of the P. D. and darted a glance at him in the outer dusk.

"If Donald Carney would pass once more I might have the excuse to stop him and talk further on the switch lights," thought Carrigan. But Carney came by no more, for now he was local attorney of the railroad and lived uptown at the hotel. The uncle who had raised him would call on him there and bring back tales of his success and power to the neighborhood.

"Sure, maybe Donald is profiting by the faults and mistakes and favoritism of others and is right after all," thought Carrigan, and at last, before taking down with his sickness, strolled one evening with Dan along of the roundhouse.

"Ye have now come to years of understanding," he said, "and I will explain to ye that the Carrigans are no shanty family, though I say nothing about it at home. Highly born I am, if the truth must be told," he said, "and had an uncle in Dublin who was a counselor and had connections with the Castle. And yet ye find me at Barlow, only an inspector and switch tender —because always the signals have been set against me."

"Why is that?" asked Dan.

"I do not know," admitted Carrigan. Then he told the boy honestly what Donald Carney had said about succeeding in life.

"And he is succeeding," said Dan, shrewd for his years; and pointed out that a man must depend on friendship and on the mistakes of others to get along.

"I do not know how to advise you, though I had hoped to solve the puzzle before you came to years of understanding," said Carrigan. "Now you know what Carney believes and what makes him a success; and after further thought I will try to explain why the signals were set against me so that I failed. Those two opinions together should save you the trouble of learning by experience."

But divil a penny would Dan have given for the opinion of his father, and looked with contempt on the oil-blackened hands and shoulders bowed by the hard work of failure.

For the few days afterward Carrigan poked into every nook of the neat cottage and garden and sheds, where, if justice be done, he had cared well for his wife and boy by tremendous industry. And then he laid down on his bed for three days, puzzling over the opinion he was to give Danny, and died while the boy was at school in the afternoon.

"Sure, poor father had something to say to you," Mrs. Carrigan told the boy when he was called home, "which he had not seemed to think of till he was taken worse. I asked him to say it to me and the doctor who came in at the moment by good fortune told him he must go quickly. But he only smiled and the last words of him were that plain: 'Sure, I will tell Danny when he comes anyway,' and he said good-by and God bless his good wife, like the Christian he always was, and was gone."

Danny thought with awe of the dying man's words as he wiped the tears away with his fists. "What could he mean?" he asked, and his mother shook her head, not daring to speak to the boy of the dead coming back in a vision with his message.

Dan, of the practical balanced mind even as a boy, was not one to see visions, but as he watched that night in the cottage parlor along of a neighbor he thought: "Sure, father has explained that I have come to years of understanding; and he said dying that he had something to tell me when I came." And the boy took the lamp and, carrying it into the dead man's room, held it so the ray fell on the sheeted form.

He saw a marble mask of a face, with closed eyelids and unwhispering lips; he saw

the stained knotted hands which toiled no more for himself and his mother, and was filled with remorse that he had not clasped them oftener in gratitude. But still he held himself steady and waited with only the drumming of his heart heard in the silent room.

And as he gazed Dan saw an expression of peace and wonder and triumph steal into the face as the marble of death became transparent, and Dan knew that Carrigan was explaining the little matter of life which had puzzled him so long. So he told Dan in silence what he had to say, and the boy knew that he told, and that it was a secret of the last importance.

"He is telling me—yet I cannot understand," thought the boy, and the neighbor following in took the lamp from his hand, and led him away trembling at last.

"He thought I could understand," pondered the boy watching through the night, "and I will some day." He had a groping dread of all that would happen before then as though he might come to understand too late, and the cock crew, the lamp was put out, and so Dan came into his first day of manhood with all its puzzles to solve for himself. Queerly enough, the little girl of the private car had come into his musings on the switch lights that night so that he never thought of them afterward without thinking of her too. Only a few days from this time he saw her again and the two became acquainted.

Now that Carrigan was gone his family found that he had provided for them better than they suspected, the estate amounting to five thousand dollars in savings and insurance money.

Widow and son agreed that it was a wonder so thrifty and industrious a man should have been such a failure, but when Dan repeated his last conversation with his father the widow was roused to a respectful interest.

"So Carrigan was highly born and had an uncle who was counselor of the crown and connected with the Castle," she said; "and all those years kept to himself the facts which, if properly spread, would have given him distinction among the neighbors, who are little better than bog trotters, though well-meaning ones."

She thought the neighbors should share this news in justice to the family, and in her widow's weeds proudly circulated the news of Carrigan's ancestors who themselves did not lose caste in the telling.

"'Tis a matter of family pride," she explained to Dan after a time, "that you should follow the career of Sir Carrigan of Dublin Castle and now that you are through the public school I have planned that you will take up the law in the office of Donald Carney."

Dan shook his head in doubt, and his mother said: "If as my husband claimed you are indeed of the Carrigans who are kin to the grand counselor, you will go boldly in to Carney who has no ancestry at all, barring the Flanagans that brought him up." And seeing that Dan still hesitated she called through the window to Mrs. Grogan, who hurried in.

"Now that Dan is through school nothing can hold him back from the career of the grand counselor," she said. "This morning he is on his way to Donald Carney to secure a job in his office and I invite you to tea with me and we will wish the boy good luck of his job when he comes back."

"To secure a job with the great Carney!" exclaimed Mrs. Grogan.

"He is that bold," assented Mrs. Carrigan with a shrewd look at Dan, who rather than be humbled before the neighbors set his jaw and started. And at the top of the yard near the station he came on President Merrill's car on a siding and found a chance to give his boldness a try-out with great people. It being a damp morning, the car just released by the switch engine was sliding with brakes set into a bumper, when Dan ran up and brought it to a quick stop by kicking off the hand brake and setting it slowly. Mrs. Merrill in the doorway thanked him, and having an interest in her husband's men asked the nice-looking youngster with gray eyes how he got along at railroading.

Dan explained that he was not an employee, and Betsy Merrill, now fifteen years old, came to her mother's side to scan him impudently up and down with her black eyes. A confused remembrance of his father's words, and himself standing by the car in the dusk and staring into those same eyes brighter than all the switch lights, came to Dan. And as if watching there for a signal which would either let him by or hold him, or ditch him, he boldly told where he was going and why, not neglecting to mention the Dublin counselor.

Mrs. Merrill listened smiling and a little surprised too, but suddenly Betsy spoke to him. "I know Mr. Carney," she said. "He will give you the place."

"To help along I will give you a note of introduction," said Mrs. Merrill, but Dan, now assured of right of way, thanked her and replied that it was better he should act for himself.

"You can tell us you succeeded on the way back," said Betsy.

Half an hour later at the law office Dan made his way in to Carney and standing before the desk told his business politely and straightforwardly.

The lines of craft and good humor which come together in faces like Carney's deepened as he listened. "Carrigan your father I knew, and I remember a conversation with him," said Carney. "I take it one switch tender is enough in the family, but two grand counselors are not too many. Have you worked before? Have you references?"

"I am out of high school, but could have brought references from Mrs. President Merrill," answered Dan.

"And why not?"

"Sure, she knew nothing about me except what I told her," said Dan.

"Neither do I."

"But you can make me prove it," said Dan.

"And if I do?"

"Then I am a lawyer," said Dan, and Carney, who was supposed to have no interest but to win money and political power, laughed that the boy had beaten his cross-examination.

"I see you are one of the lucky boys," he said, "who have the track lined up and cleared from the beginning. Your mother to back you, the railroad president's wife to recommend, and the general attorney to trust you with this lamp——"

"Why a lamp?" asked Dan with curiosity.

"'Tis the midnight lamp," said Carney, narrowing his eyes, "which I have kept burning many years, and now that I can afford to sleep of nights it has no one to tend it, like a lighthouse among the reefs of the law. These," he said, pointing to the rows of books, "are the reefs, where many a career is wrecked."

And to his astonishment the boy went over to investigate, and being shown one book of elementary law, read fascinated till dusk and would have lighted the lamp then but Carney took away the book and turned him out.

"Come back in the morning," he said. "You are a second grand counselor." And for years thereafter called him that when in a good humor.

Dan reported at the car on the way home and Betsy nodded in a matter-of-course manner, to the mystification of her mother, and went on reading her book. "Good luck, Grand Counselor, the Second," smiled Mrs. Merrill, and at home where his mother still waited with confidence, and Mrs. Grogan had gone and come again, he was saluted by the same title.

Now, Carrigan, the switch tender, went the way of the forgotten, having installed the Dublin counselor. A happy exchange for Dan and his mother, for Carrigan, stooped and plodding, had been a figure of failure casting a gloom over them; but the counselor was like a shiny new idol moved into the dreary, ruinous temple of their lives.

"He must have been a great lawyer and politician and therefore like Donald Carney," said Mrs. Carrigan. So it was agreed, and ever afterward he appeared to them not as a Carrigan at all, but as a man of crafty, humorous face with thin hair and greedy bold black eyes. In short, by the strange twist of circumstances, y' understand, they gave the successor which Carrigan had installed the personality of the very man whose theories he doubted.

Dan accepted Carney as his idol and Carney's policies were his superstition. Success came of it; in a few years he was admitted to practice, a few more and was junior partner, active in Carney's legal affairs, and his right hand in politics.

Several times in those years he met Betsy; for Merrill, being a working president and organizing his system for big combines had at last moved general headquarters to Barlow.

"From the first time I saw you," Dan told the girl once, "in the dusk of the yard, I had the queer notion that I would never get anywhere unless you set the signal for me. And later when I met you in the car on my way to Carney's office, I knew I would get my job because you said so."

"Well," she answered calmly, with her elfish slant of eye, "are you after me to set the signal with you again?"

On the several occasions they had met of late years about the offices there had been a nod or a word, but now the brilliant young attorney was quite a different figure from the unknown son of the switch tender and they had dropped into friendly chat as a matter of course.

"And when and where are you taking your run now?" she asked, for Dan had not answered and was looking at her with astonishment.

"I had not thought of that," he answered, his gray eyes still wide; and Betsy looked back at him curiously with a flush and frown. "But wait," he said. "I begin to know that I must not stop short of where you are waiting."

"Why should I wait? And that would be too long a run for you."

" 'Tis not so long a run," he said boldly. "I will be assistant general attorney."

"You should be general attorney at the least." The exchange between them had been swift and breathless and the girl drew back with a mocking frown.

But Dan pressed hard in her tracks. "You have set the signal," he said, and the two turned from each other with something quite new and amazing to think about.

" 'Tis queer you should be in love with her and thinking of her only as a switch tender," said Mrs. Carrigan, now an old lady, when that evening Dan told her of his experience. "I was in love with your father, who never turned out any better than a switch tender; perhaps 'tis in the blood."

"It must be," laughed Dan, "though divil a switch father set except against you. Now with Betsy it's different. 'General attorney at least you must be,' she says, and I answer, 'You have set the signal.' "

"That means you must either run around Mr. Carney or run over him—well, perhaps the grand counselor would have done so," said Mrs. Carrigan, but Dan shook his head.

"I would not crowd out my chief even if I could," he answered, and though there seemed no other way for him to climb, yet he felt the same confidence of success that emboldened him when Betsy had told him as a boy: "You will get the job."

That night Carney came into the office, as he sometimes did, to look with satisfaction on his protégé at the midnight lamp, and tell some shrewd anecdote of politics or law. But now he tapped with his finger tips on the table and as Dan looked up from his books said: "Put them away; shall a man risen as high in the world as you be a slave? Leave the midnight studies for your junior."

And Dan, without answer, stacked away the books, thinking: "I am past another signal."

"You are now assistant general attorney," said Carney.

"And you go to the top," grinned Dan.

But Carney did not grin. "The top? Where is that?" And shook his head. "I am only general attorney with a great fight on my hands, for the man I have bumped is the man of Vice President and General Manager Ryan. By the grace of a friend or two among the directors, and sudden pressure on President Merrill, I have my appointment. But Ryan too has friends above and will fight to have his henchman reinstated."

"True, of course," said Dan, and whistled his dismay, for Ryan had been intrenched for twenty years and seemed too great a power for Carney to bring down. And he was a willing fighter and knew as all did in the old railroad rows that if a high official's henchman lost out the high official was due to go next. "But President Merrill is bound to back you—his own appointment," said Dan.

"He was under pressure," said Carney craftily, "and it strikes me that he would be glad to see such a row between Ryan and myself that there would not be room for us on the one railroad."

"In short, he would call on the directors to oust you both in the interest of harmony," said Dan.

Carney rubbed his hands. "This first indirect blow of mine must be followed up quickly by one at Ryan himself—and it must be a deathblow," said Carney.

"It is not every general attorney who packs a deathblow for a general manager," reminded Dan.

"Whist," said Carney, leaning forward—and went into the matter of one of the stock-jobbers' railways of that day, whose several divisions, never linked together, lay southwest of the P. D.

The best built of these divisions was nearly a hundred miles long and had been equipped and operated as a come-on to the investor. One of its termini was a city on the P. D., the other at the crossing of a small east-and-west system, rich in coal. The policy of the P. D. had demanded the

purchase of this coal railroad, and as the connecting link the hundred-mile division of the stock-jobber road which was now in receiver's hands and for sale.

"The negotiations for the link have been in the hands of the general attorney and Ryan," explained Carney. "Of course, nobody but the P. D. would have any use for it and they have been beating down the receiver's price."

"D'ye mean to tell me we have control of the coal road and are still only negotiating for the link?" said Dan, in disgust of such bungling. "It is lucky for us," he said, "that nobody else could have any use for the link or they might bid it in and compel us to build a hundred miles of new track."

"Nobody wants it," said Carney. "How would you like to have it?" And he spread out the receiver's deed made to Daniel F. Carrigan; the consideration was five hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Dan owned a railroad one hundred miles long. "I take off my hat to ye," said Carney. "So now we have the deathblow to Mr. Ryan," he added, "for the directors cannot protect an official who would blunder like that."

"You've got him," said Dan, though still half in a daze. "But where did that money come from? And why was the sale made in my name?"

"So you would own a railroad," explained Carney. " 'Tis a great expense to run one," he reminded, "and you will likely want to sell it again in a few days—but take a friend's advice, not under one million two hundred thousand! No! Less than that would be a sacrifice; and your backers must be considered. There are two of them, if you want to know," and Dan had no trouble guessing that they were the two directors already mentioned.

All at once he began rising to the importance of his position in the secret councils of great officials. "I understand," he said, "but you take a big chance on me, don't you? Suppose I sold out and didn't choose to divide the proceeds."

"You can only sell to the P. D. directors who are controlled by your backers in the venture. And if you tried to hold on a few days would put your road back in the receiver's hands."

"Air-tight," laughed Dan. "I see I have no chance to do you." And then took up the more serious phase of the transaction. "But I'll be marked as an employee who held up the company; why didn't you use your own name?"

"I had already taken a little part in the negotiations; it might be called a breach of trust. In your case 'tis only enterprise to get out and find a backer and beat us to the bargain. Another thing," said Carney; "only a few know you and they are either your partners or will be glad to pay the price and keep the whole bungled job out of the knowledge of their stockholders and public. When you put one across on the manager, you also put it across on the directors."

"But see here," said Dan, "I've worked for the P. D. a long time; don't you suppose I have any conscience, to drive such a bargain?"

"Sure; that is what I am paying you fifty thousand dollars for!" laughed Carney.

"Fifty thousand! Assistant general attorney!" thought Dan. Remembering the words of Betsy Merrill as a prophecy, the thrill of power like that of immortality which comes to a man with his first big success, lifted him to his feet. At last the son of the forgotten switch tender stood eye to eye with the shade of the grand counselor.

Indeed, Mrs. Carrigan said as much when he got home and woke her to tell the great news.

After that he sat solitary, smoking and dreaming as never before of Betsy Merrill waiting for him, not so far away now, for anything was possible with the start he had in his profession and fifty thousand dollars. The fact that he could cast around his eye and see the humble things he had been born to also pleased, for divil a humble home is so pleasing as when leaving it for a better.

The son of a failure; a switch tender's boy. A moment he thought of old Carrigan and the last unspoken message; there was the same lamp which as a puzzled boy he had held up to look on his father's face. But now he had a message from the big world, he listened to the congratulation of the grand counselor.

Marked up on time, the signals with him, he saw the line open to the grand terminal where only great men arrive.

Perhaps 'twas by accident that Betsy Merrill and himself met in a corridor leading to her father's office next morning, or

they may have been spying out for each other. She had heard the news of the shake-up in the legal department and already there was a hush throughout the headquarters building and officials looked at one another warily until the line-up was known in the row about to result. There would be accusations of all sorts flying between Ryan and Carney as to the conduct of their departments and the small fry would be involved as witnesses. But there being no doubt of the part Dan would play, he came down the corridor with a ringing step when he saw Betsy at her father's door.

"What do you say now?" he asked.

"What I said yesterday," laughed the girl in mockery.

"Things are different to-day," said Dan, and walked with her to the platform, talking by the way.

And here it chanced that Ryan himself came by, a big man and overbearing from long authority. Seeing Dan with the president's daughter, he paused, taking them in. "So you are assistant general attorney this morning," he said, pointing at him. "How long do you expect to stay in office?"

"As long as Carney is chief," replied Dan quietly.

"Hark, young man," said Ryan. "I have been general manager many years and will be till I resign. And Carney will never be general attorney after to-day."

"You will have to settle that with the president, Mr. Ryan," said Dan.

"There has been fraud practiced on the president," said Ryan; "and I know where he will stand at the show-down. But with Carney fired, we will need an assistant here. So I tell you in good part, keep a rein on your tongue!"

"That I will not," answered Dan, "but, win or lose, throw in with the man who made me."

"No man made you," said Ryan, gritting his teeth, "least of all this Carney. 'Tis the railroad, the old P. D. has made you all you are as it made me." And with a last black look of warning he passed on.

"It is too bad—this fight breaking out with so many big plans on hand," said Miss Merrill, not so mocking now. "I—I believe even papa is worried."

"He need not be," said Dan proudly; "whist—yonder goes a manager to his fall; and who else would know if not me?"

She scented the mystery and commanded him to explain, like the little aristocrat she was.

"I will tell this much," said Dan, still angry with Ryan; "that man has built up his own prosecution; no board of directors can acquit him."

Then for the first time she pleaded. "Please, Mr. Carrigan—oh, Dan——"

"And you will wait for me? I will yet be chief of my department, remember."

For the first time the girl studied him with thoughtful eyes. "I believe so—that is all I can say; all I know." And then: "Yes; why shouldn't I say yes who have long liked you? And when you come to my own level, an ambitious, winning man—why shouldn't I marry you?" For the moment he was chilled, for this was not an answer of the heart, and her eyes were those of one who bargains. But he had her promise and so in return told of the trap about to be sprung on Ryan.

And it was while she listened that she shot him admiring glances from her sharp mischievous eyes, and as they walked on took his arm. "'Tis a big game and you play it boldly; I was not sure of you," she said; "and it shall never be said that Betsy Merrill married anything less than a man who would go to the top."

After they had parted, Dan thought with a sigh: "I wish she thought less of the top and more of the man. Still, an ambitious man should have an ambitious wife."

All day the headquarters building hissed with rumors, the only outspoken voice being that of Ryan. "'Tis like the rumble of guns being brought to bear," thought Dan in his office down the corridor. Carney did not appear that day, being uptown at a commercial wire concluding arrangements for the show-down with his backers in the directorate, and other officials gave the attorney's office a wide berth. "Sure, they have already picked us as losers," chuckled Dan, but all day the rumble of Ryan's voice annoyed him. At last he put a curse on him and slammed down his books, for over and over again he found himself setting the words Ryan had spoken that morning to this distant overtone.

And at dusk when the building fell silent Carney stole in and found his assistant sitting at his desk in the shadow like a man under a spell.

Carney lighted the gas with a sneering laugh. "Come out of it; we have them,"

he said, but Dan sunk deep in his chair, and pondering, took no heed of this.

"Ryan said that the P. D. made me, as it made him," muttered Dan. "Then I am nobody's man but the railroad's."

"You are muttering in your sleep," said Carney with impatience. "Now bring the deed from the safe and we will draw up the one making the link over the P. D. A meeting of the directors has been called in New York and the purchase will be arranged tomorrow."

Ponderingly Dan moved to the safe and opened it and spread the deed on the table. "Now copy the description of the properties," said Carney. "I will read them." And he did so and Dan copied till the purchase sum was named. "One million two hundred thousand," said Carney.

Dan looked across; the general attorney was licking his chops over the sum, his eyes were greedy, his whole face puckered like the muzzle of a wolf. 'Twas queer that Dan should study so closely the idol he had praised for many years, the type of the grand counselor; the man who had made him.

"But Ryan said the company made me," he thought; all day the distant rumble of the big general manager had pounded the words on his brain. Suddenly he laid down his pen and walked to the window, where he noticed without interest that Merrill's car had been brought down the yard for the eastbound.

"Funny, Carney," he said without looking around; "but I don't like to write in the figures." At the impatient curse behind him, he added: "Ye see, Ryan said——"

The curses behind him rose like the snarls and howls of the pack, in the midst of which he was reminded of his treachery. "What would you have been without me?" said Carney. "A greasy switch tender like your father; a failure!"

Dan saw Betsy Merrill moving in the lighted car. "A failure?" thought Dan, remembering in a panic the lofty ambition of the girl and her words of the morning. He turned and took up the pen to resume writing, but the twisted, greedy, crafty face stopped his glance again.

"Write!" commanded Carney. "What are you staring at?"

Dan thought: "Yes; I would likely have been no better than a switch tender," and the face of old Carrigan coming up between Carney and himself, his eyes opened wider and wider with an uncanny glare. The dead man's face he saw as he had seen it under the lamp long ago; the marble of death becoming transparent, the unspoken message appearing in his face.

"By the saints," said Dan in his deep voice, to the petrification of Carney; "he was not held in siding as he thought; he was sent through, he delivered his run." Old Carrigan had himself died in the Grand Terminal of life, never knowing he had arrived till his last hour. The peaceful triumph of his expression was message enough.

"And his boy," said Dan Carrigan, "has arrived at the age of understanding." And he tore up the deed he had been writing, shaking off the grasp and blows of Carney with indifference.

"In the matter of Ryan, you have your way," said Dan, holding the other at arm's length with his open palm. "His enemies will oust him for his blundering. But the link shall be transferred to the P. D. for the sum paid to the receiver. You who make your way, Carney, by the mistakes of others, will not do so by mine."

He put the receiver's deed in his pocket, driving back Carney, the madman, by a blow, and went out to the president's car.

Only Betsy was there, and he gave her a brief message to her father who would know how to handle the link. He put it in this light: "Y'understand, this transaction involves nobody in a disloyal move to hold up the company. The two directors and Carney engineered it to show up the general manager; they ask no profit; that is the sum and substance."

The girl was wild with ambition and love of money, President Merrill never being too well supplied for all his high office. "So you quit," she said. "Your fifty thousand, your very job gone glimmering!"

"Ryan was right; the P. D. made me," answered Dan; "and after thinking it over I would rather try to build my own practice than to be general attorney at the price of disloyalty. 'Twas the memory of my father strengthened me."

"And he was a switch tender, was he not?"

"He was; and a good one, Miss Merrill."

She laughed at him. "I see in this your chance to pick up fortune and promotion by a side game, just as all the officials do—except my foolish father, perhaps."

'Twas a sorrowful Dan who heard her last word: "Then as far as I am concerned the signal is set against you."

Still when he walked away along of the track the girl moved slowly to look after, lingering on the platform of the car and straining her eyes into the dusk. A switch engine was shunting cars on a make-up track near by, but she did not even hear the crash of drawheads. Dan Carrigan had gone out of her life, and where he vanished a switch light glowed red as danger. Her eyes, fixed on it, saw the change of colors—red—green—red, almost in an instant, then the black rearing bulk of a car in the headlight of the switch engine beyond. At the crash she found herself running to the spot where two men struggled and one was cursing with the snarls of a wolf.

"Who is it—Dan?" she cried out, and Dan, his leg broken by the sidewipe of the car held himself upright by the other's throat, laughing.

"Dan," he said, "and the man who was for letting the car of a flying switch in on the president's car, thinking I was still there."

She pressed close, terrified by the struggle and asking: "Who is the man?"

"Look yourself; it is Carney," answered Dan Carrigan; "and it is such a thing that you would have me be." With that, he threw Carney away, crumpling up himself, and passed out.

But he came to, with the friendly switch light shining by, and his head on the lap of Betsy Merrill, crying and praying over him by turns.

Look for more stories by Calvin Johnston in future issues.

HOW NOT TO TREAT THE FLAG

THE American Legion recently called a conference of various patriotic societies for the purpose of formulating a code for civilian use of the American flag. Flag etiquette in the army and navy is prescribed by regulations but until the present code was drawn up there was no guide for the civilian, and many well-meaning people got themselves in hot water by using the flag in what others considered a disrespectful manner.

Here are the things that the conference says you shouldn't do—and some that you should do:

You shouldn't dip—lower—the flag of the United States to any person or thing—on land. At sea the dipping of national colors by passing ships is a time-honored mode of friendly salute. You shouldn't display the flag with the union down, except as a signal of distress. No other flag or pennant should be placed above or to the right of the flag, nor should the flag ever be allowed to touch the ground or trail in the water. No emblem or lettering of any kind should be placed on the flag, and it should not be used as drapery—use bunting for that purpose. Do not fasten the flag in such manner that it is likely to be torn. If you want to use the flag on a motor car or other vehicle affix the staff firmly to some part of the vehicle—don't drape the flag over the hood, top or sides of a vehicle or boat. Don't use the flag as a cover for a speaker's table and don't use it as a ceiling covering. If you want to use the flag on a float in a parade, affix it to a staff. Don't use the flag as a part of your costume—even if you are a boxing champion. Don't embroider it on cushions or handkerchiefs and don't print it on boxes or paper napkins. Never use it as an advertisement and don't fasten an advertising sign to a flagstaff from which the flag is flown. Keep the flag clean. When it is no longer fit for use, destroy it privately—don't throw it out with the trash and risk it being used for some unworthy purpose.

In other words, don't consider the flag as a cheap decoration, but as the emblem of your country.

Uncertainty often is displayed by citizens at the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag, or when it passes in a parade. The correct procedure for men is to face the flag at the soldier's position of "attention" and hold the hat at the left shoulder in the right hand. Women should face the flag at "attention" and may salute by placing the right hand over the heart.

Four Bells

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "Anchors Aweigh," "First Down, Kentucky!" Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Teresa Fernandez knew what had happened to the saturnine Fajardo. The sharks of Cartagena knew. Nobody else had so much as an inkling. Neither the sharks nor Teresa harbored any regrets in the matter. The sharks were not troubled with consciences and Teresa felt herself and the world well rid of him. He had killed Richard Cary and her happiness. Guilt was written all over him. She had pulled the trigger and the sharks of Cartagena had wiped out the evidence of retribution. She had fled—not from the consequences of her act, but from her grief. Cartagena held too many memories, once sweet, that had turned bitter. But in the end she returned. For a doubt was growing in her mind, a doubt that Cary was dead. She felt that she could never be at peace until she knew to a practical certainty. Cartagena was her childhood home. Her uncle dwelt there, old Ramon Bazán. Perhaps Bazán, who had met and liked this great American whom she loved, could tell her something of the fate of the *Tarragona's* second officer. As a matter of fact, Papa Bazán knew the whole story. He had it from the lips of Richard Cary himself. He knew how Cary had killed four of Fajado's bravos, only to be laid out by a fifth; how he had broken from prison and crawled away into hiding; how he had returned to Cartagena to be sheltered by Bazán himself, and how he had fumed and fretted at the separation from Teresa and the impossibility of getting word to her. Bazán knew everything Teresa yearned to know. But when she reached his home he was not there. Even the servants were gone. She learned from neighbors that the old man had departed on a crazy sea-trading venture aboard an ancient hulk of which he had possessed himself. That was all the positive knowledge she could come at. But in Bazán's home she found something that made her heart beat fast. It was a pipe, a pipe she knew well. It was Richard Cary's pipe. Hope told her that Dick must have been there—recently. Fear counseled her that the pipe meant nothing. Perhaps he had left it there during a visit some time before his disappearance. Was he indeed alive? Or was this a trick of malicious fate, bent upon torturing her? There was one way only to find out. She must run down Bazán and the *Valkyrie*. If Cary lived he was aboard the *Valkyrie* with her uncle.

(A Five-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XVII.

TERESA, HER PILGRIMAGE.

ACROSS the Isthmus to Panama! It had been a golden road for the ancestors of Teresa Fernandez to follow to the South Sea. It seemed a propitious road for her to follow in quest of Richard Cary who had talked to her as though he himself had harried these same ancestors from Cartagena to Nombre de Dios.

Early awake next morning, she felt less unhappy. It was not so much like groping in a blind alley. Those scraps of paper that had eddied in the breeze? She found a few more of them but they told her nothing. She accepted it as a decree, perhaps

of punishment. Not knowing whether Richard Cary loved her, in fear that he had died, she must set forth on her arduous pilgrimage.

The good Señor de Mello would think it strange of her to go as unceremoniously as she had come. Anxiety for her uncle's safety, the desire to persuade him to quit his senseless wanderings, the fact that he was in the company of such an unsavory mariner as Captain Bradley Duff—this would have to serve as her pretext. What other people thought of her was, after all, of no consequence.

In the harbor she had noticed an English steamer waiting for a berth at the wharf. It was the coastwise boat that picked up cargo and passengers here and there and went on to Colon. This was a slant of good fortune. Teresa was out of the house before the offices and shops were open. Over her rolls and coffee in an untidy little café she scanned a newspaper for the shipping items. The English boat was expected to sail some time during the afternoon. It seemed best to go on board as soon as possible. After some delay she found the agent and secured a stateroom.

Then she went to the bank. Señor de Mello was just arriving with his green umbrella. In his private office she explained her sudden decision as well as she could and showed him a letter of credit. She wished to draw some money, a considerable amount for a woman to carry with her. Some emergency might arise before she could present herself at another bank.

Señor Alonso de Mello stared at the letter of credit. It was for two thousand dollars, many times as much as the niece of Ramon Bazán had required when intending to visit him in Cartagena. It was, in fact, every dollar of Teresa's savings, her precious anchor to windward. The banker looked up to say, in his bland, paternal manner:

"I am not one to pry, Teresa, but there is something in this that I fail to understand. Why this large letter of credit? Did you expect to travel farther than Cartagena? For transferring your funds a draft would have been proper. Ramon's wretched voyage frets you, but you anticipated nothing like this. We are very fond of you, as you know, and——"

"Then you will have to trust in me, dear Señor de Mello," pleaded Teresa. "You have known me all your life. I have tried to do what seemed right."

"No question of that," he assured her. "Sometimes I wish my boy Antonio might have—tut, tut, I may say too much. You will write me from Panama? And permit me to give you a letter to my agent commending you as though you were my own daughter."

Teresa's eyes filled with tears. She had little more to say. When she walked out of the bank she was still feeling the stress of emotion. A dapper young man in the uniform of a lieutenant of police stepped up to accost her. Apparently he had been waiting at the entrance. She trembled. Her lips parted. She was falling, falling into some black abyss. Her courage lifted her out of it. She did not faint. What was the lieutenant saying?

"To meet the Señorita Fernandez makes the day radiant. May I have a few words with you? It is a matter that has been waiting some time."

"As you will," she murmured, forcing a smile. "It tires me to stand. Shall we sit in the reception room of the bank? At this early hour it is seldom in use."

The lieutenant bowed. He was a gallant fellow with an eye for a pretty woman. He sympathized with the señorita. She was, indeed, feeling indisposed. A glance at the closed door behind which Señor de Mello sat at his desk, and Teresa inquired:

"Your errand is what?"

"It is that eccentric old uncle of yours," answered the lieutenant of police.

"Ah, and what of him?" said Teresa. The hand of fear released its strangling clutch.

As through a mist she gazed at the lieutenant who replied, "I take the liberty of informing you, as his niece, señorita. It may be of interest now that you have found him gone. I had the felicity of seeing you drive to his house yesterday."

"And you wish to tell me something about his voyage?"

"Yes. On the night he embarked in that wretched steamer of his I was leaving a party of friends. It was quite late. A carriage came tearing along like the devil. Too fast, I thought. So I stepped out and halted it. Your uncle sat beside that Indian boy of his who was driving. The carriage was filled to the top with bags and valises and blankets. A reproof was all I intended. And it seemed worth looking into,

this driving so fast late at night. I recognized your uncle and was about to say something pleasant but he seemed immensely startled. He nearly tumbled from the seat, like a man stricken with illness. The boy caught hold of him and they went on through the gate. His steamer sailed the next morning so I suppose it was nothing serious. His health interests you, I have no doubt, Señorita Fernandez. I said to myself that old Ramon Bazán should have stayed in his comfortable house if he was as feeble as that. Have you heard from him?"

"Not yet," replied Teresa. "It is wonderfully kind of you. What else could be expected of an officer so polite and good-looking? Yes, my uncle must have been ill. It was his heart. He is taken like that when excited or frightened."

"He has my prayers," exclaimed the lieutenant. "It must be lonely for you. I am at your feet. Any service in the world that——"

"You would be my cavalier?" smiled Teresa, with a sparkle of coquetry. "Alas, I shall not stay long in Cartagena. If you care to call—say, to-morrow afternoon."

"And you will be alone?" he demanded, too impetuously.

"Yes, I shall be alone to-morrow afternoon. Your devotion to my uncle has touched my heart."

The lieutenant bowed himself out. He had made an impression, so he flattered himself. It had been a clever excuse to win the favor of a girl who had inspired his passionate ardor. Teresa lingered in the reception room of the bank trying to read the riddle of a doddering uncle who had been driving at furious speed to board his ship late in the night. Why had he almost died with one of his heart attacks when an affable lieutenant of police had merely halted the carriage to question the driver? Uncle Ramon must have been mortally afraid of being detected in some secretive stratagem.

"It is naughty to have fooled the lieutenant into calling to-morrow afternoon, but he deserved it," mused Teresa. "Handsome doll with a wooden head! Why didn't he poke inside the carriage? He might have found something under all that baggage. My trip to Panama looks wiser than ever. I shall never rest until I find out why my uncle was almost scared to death."

Haste was not urgent so Teresa walked several blocks at a leisurely gait in search of a carriage. She stopped to look into the dusty window of a pawnshop. It occurred to her that her pilgrimage might lead her into unpleasant places. In the sailors' haunts of tropical ports a woman ran certain risks. She could not think of carrying another little automatic pistol in her pocket. The very sight of one in the pawnshop window made her shudder.

Idly standing there she caught sight of another weapon which strongly attracted her fancy. It was an antique dagger, resembling the misericord of the age of chivalry, such as knights in armor had worn attached to the belt by a chain. On the tarnished handle of this relic a crest was still discernible. The blade had rusted thin but the double edge could easily be ground sharp. It was a small weapon, only a few inches long, contrived for a thrust between the joints of a corslet or neck piece at close quarters.

In the rubbish of a pawnshop in a side street this dagger had escaped the search of collectors. It had come from some ancient house of Cartagena, a weapon that might have clinked on the steel-clad thigh of a conquistador. Teresa bought it for a peso. The pawnbroker rummaged until he found a sheath of embossed leather into which the dagger could be slipped. A ribbon could be sewn to the sheath, a ribbon long enough to pass around the neck. Then the dagger could be worn inside a woman's dress. Misericord! The sad heart of Teresa and a dagger next it!

Returning to the house she decided to leave her new clothes there. This cost her a pang but it might be a rough road and a long one. A battered little sole-leather trunk, unearthed in Uncle Ramon's storeroom, would serve her needs. In her hand bag was Richard Cary's brier pipe.

Two days after this a trim young woman very simply dressed in white found shelter in an old stone hotel near the plaza of Panama. Her fastidious taste would have preferred the large American hotel on the Ancon hill in the Canal Zone but this was too far removed from the crossroads of merchant mariners in drudging cargo boats. She was familiar with the noisy streets of Panama through which flowed a mixture of races from all the seven seas.

The afternoon was growing late when Teresa began her quest. It led her first to the bank in which Señor de Mello's agent

had his office. He was a native of the city and in close touch with west-coast shipping. To Teresa's dismay, he informed her that Ramon Bazán's steamer *Valkyrie* had not been heard from since leaving the Balboa docks. It had not arrived at Buenaventura only three hundred miles down the coast. The weather had been unusually fair with no heavy winds. Already a week had elapsed.

The steamer carried no wireless but had she been disabled some other vessel would have reported her by this time. They were coming in every day. In such good weather and near the coast the *Valkyrie* could not have foundered without trace. Her boats would have taken care of the crew. Furthermore, cable messages of inquiry sent at the request of Señor Alonso de Mello disclosed that no steamer by this name was expected at Buenaventura. The shipping firms and export agents in that port had made no charter arrangements nor had there been any correspondence about cargo. Steamers of the regular services were taking care of all the freight offered at this season of the year.

"Then my old uncle never sailed for Buenaventura. And he had no intention of going there," commented Teresa.

"He must have changed his mind," suavely observed the agent.

"That is a weakness of his, señor. Did you happen to meet him while his ship was coaling at Balboa?"

"Yes, Señorita Fernandez. He came into the office to draw funds to pay the Canal tolls, having arranged a credit for that purpose. He had little to say and seemed quite feeble."

"He would seem that way, at parting from so much money. Did he bring his captain with him?"

"No. I don't know who commanded the steamer. I am extremely sorry but I have to take a train to Colon late this afternoon to be gone until some time to-morrow. After that I shall be delighted to go with you to Balboa. The records will tell you who the captain was and there may be other details. I am acquainted with the officials and it will expedite your affairs. A young lady may feel a certain awkwardness——"

Teresa was cordially grateful. There was no more to this interview! The situation had taken on aspects more complex and inexplicable than ever. As a seafarer herself she accepted the theory that the *Valkyrie* had met with no disaster while bound down the coast to Buenaventura. The vessel had steered some unknown course of her own to another destination. From the beginning her tortuous uncle had schemed and lied to mask his real purpose, whatever that might be. It had not occurred to him that any one might try to follow him.

At Balboa, Teresa might be able to discover whether Richard Cary had been in the ship. This was of transcendent moment to her. But even were it true her penitential pilgrimage was no more than begun. It was necessary to meet him face to face. Her own soul was at stake. What had happened to Ricardo that night in Cartagena when he had been missing from his ship? What of the guilt of the dead Colonel Fajardo?

Teresa walked the floor of her room in the Panama hotel. What she said to herself was like this:

"Supposing Ricardo is commanding this Flying Dutchman of a ship. Where has he gone? No records in the Canal office can tell me that. A wonderful comfort, if it is the will of God to let me know Ricardo is alive and strong. But what of me? Ah, what of poor me? There must be some way of finding out, here in Panama, but how can I go into the places where this Bradley Duff and the sailors may have babbled with the liquor in them? Do I look like one of the wretched girls in these dirty cabarets?

"It is hard to keep a secret in a ship after she has left her own port. Something seems to whisper it, a look, a word, a feeling. Perhaps my Uncle Ramon muttered in his sleep as he often does at home. He is too old to play such a hand as this for very long. Look what it did to him when he was frightened by the lieutenant of police! And if he loses his temper he may say too much. If those Colombian sailors got it into their heads that the voyage was to be longer than to Buenaventura it would be like some of them to desert such an unseaworthy vessel in Panama. One thing I do know. I can never sit here and wait with folded hands for the *Valkyrie* to come back to the Canal. It might be weeks and months or not at all."

To be a roving woman where sailors resorted in this and perhaps other ports of the Spanish Main was both hampering and repugnant. It made a difficult task unen-

durable. Unwelcome attentions, insults, even perils might be her lot. Not that Teresa flinched or hesitated but it was possible to make the path easier. The most hopeful clew was Captain Bradley Duff. He was almost certain to have had disreputable friends in Panama. Birds of his feather flocked together and they were always thirsty. Likely enough there had been money in his pocket to make him popular. He would be the boisterous good fellow, greedily sociable, anxious to parade the fact that he was no longer on the beach. And what he knew he would be apt to confide to this companion and that.

She thought of a method that might accomplish her object. It appealed to her as feasible. Some daring would be required to carry it off but she was not one to lack faith in herself. At the masquerade ball in Cartagena two years ago she had played the part of a young man so well that the girls had boldly flirted with her. Her hair had been hidden by a huge sombrero adorned with silver braid.

Her hair was her crown and her glory. If she decided to play the part in Panama it would have to be sacrificed. But what mattered a woman's vanity now or her desire to be thought beautiful if she had lost her lover and knew not where to find him?

Teresa went shopping in Panama. It was rather amusing. A boy trudged behind her with a large, shiny new suit case in which the various purchases were stowed. He followed her to a side entrance of the hotel and so to her room.

Having dismissed him and locked the door Teresa sat and looked at herself in the glass. Good-by to the girl who had been so proud of Ricardo's admiration. She let down her black hair. It flowed over her lovely shoulders. Snip, snip, the wicked new shears severed the tresses. Her hand was unsteady. It was a dreadful thing to do. Even the sight of bobbed hair made her feel like swearing. This was much worse.

A ragged job it was when she gloomily surveyed the result. Carefully, tenderly she gathered up her tresses and wrapped them in a silk scarf. She could not bear to throw them away. Presently she was slipping a belt through the loops of the linen trousers. She scowled at the canvas shoes. The clumsy pattern disguised a narrow foot and an arching instep. The soft white shirt with a rolling collar was open at the throat. A loose coat of gray Palm Beach cloth completed the costume. The brim of her own Panama hat was bent down in front with a touch of jauntiness.

Teresa surveyed herself with a critical scrutiny. Her girlish bust and slender hips were unobtrusive. What she saw in the glass was a supple youth as straight as a lance, a youth with an oval face and dark eyes too somber for his years. At a glance he resembled a hundred others who strolled in the plazas or sat at the café tables of any Spanish-American city. His name was Rubio Sanchez, so he was informed as the farewell message of Señorita Teresa Fernandez before she made her exit from the stage.

The young Colombian, Rubio Sanchez, busied himself in the room a little while longer. Then he sauntered down to the lobby in which men loafed and smoked and talked of many things. It was near the dinner hour. Behind the desk the night clerk was on duty. He had been denied the pleasure of welcoming Señorita Fernandez in the afternoon. The slim, debonair youth from Cartagena sauntered over to say to him in a voice of a pleasant contralto quality:

"The lady, my sister, wishes to leave her trunk in storage. I will pay her bill. Here is the key. Have your porter bring down the suit case. I will look after it for her. She has been sent for in haste. An uncle old and sick needs her."

The clerk was an obliging person. He expressed his regrets and arranged matters promptly. Young Rubio Sanchez and his large, shiny suit case presently departed in a one-horse hack which was instructed to proceed until told to stop. The passenger sat indolently, a cigarette between his lips.

What made him alert was the blazing electric sign of "The Broadway Front" which seemed to be a pretentious lodging house with a saloon, restaurant and dance hall on the ground front. It was the most flamboyant place of good cheer along the street. It loomed like a beacon to draw the wandering footsteps of sailormen weary of the sea. Captain Bradley Duff and his shipmates of the *Valkyrie* could never have passed it by.

Rubio Sanchez, a blasé young man who knew his way about, halted the hack and swung his shiny suit case to the pavement. Here were rooms to rent. The building was new. It looked neither dingy nor dirty. It would do for the night, or until fortune beckoned elsewhere.

He spied a barber shop next door. It occurred to him as advisable to finish what the shears had so awkwardly begun. The barber eyed him critically with a smirk of amusement. Never had he beheld such a ragged hair cut. Rubio Sanchez curtly told him to make it smooth, leaving enough to part. The barber laughed and asked in Spanish:

"Was it chewed by the mice, señor? You had been letting it grow very long."

"Not as long as your clacking tongue," was the retort. "Shall I cut that for you?"

The barber goggled at the slender youth in the chair but held his peace. It was not good to jest too far with one whose voice was so cool and hard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A YOUNG MAN MAKES ODD FRIENDS.

In the American bar of the Broadway Front the mahogany counter ran the length of the room. Mirrors glittered behind it. Here was a shrine of Bacchus, extinct in its native land, in which the rites of the ritual were faithfully observed. The presiding genius was a florid Irish bartender in a crisp white jacket with a flower in the lapel. Assisting him were three acolytes native to Panama. For them the lowly service of pulling the shining handles of the beer pumps, cracking ice and washing glasses. With the skill of an artist and the speed of a prestidigitator their master hurled cocktails, fizzes and punches together and served them to the votaries who rested one foot upon the brass rail in the traditional posture of those about to offer libations.

Women were excluded from this room. Across the hallway was the café, the dancing floor, the stage where entertainment more frivolous was provided. The mahogany bar and the little tables were sacred to the wit and wisdom of the sterner sex, to the discussion of weighty matters to which Mike, the paragon of bartenders, would always lend a sympathetic ear. He was a friend and philosopher of a vintage much riper and rarer than the stuff he sold.

Alone at one of the tables sat a pensive young man of delicate features whose black hair was smoothly parted. At this moment he was reminding himself that his name was Rubio Sanchez. He sipped a claret lemonade through a straw and eyed the passing show with a trepidation not easily masked.

The bar was crowded. American soldiers from the Canal Zone garrisons hilariously rolling the dice for the drinks, tanned bluejackets from ships of the Pacific fleet, dapper Panama merchants, brisk Yankee salesmen spreading the gospel of safety razors, sewing machines and porous underwear from Mexico to Peru, solid master mariners and mates who held aloof from the rabble of landsmen.

The solitary young man, Rubio Sanchez, was unmolested. No one even noticed him. The sense of panicky uneasiness diminished. He perceived that it was urgently advisable for him to make the acquaintance of Mike, the suave and genial divinity behind the bar. He was the very man to have stowed away the garrulous gossip and confidences that were forever dinned at him. The place was repellent to young Rubio Sanchez but not as shocking as had been feared.

Disorder was smothered before it started. A lifted hand, a word of reproof from Mike, or a threat to summon the boss, and quarrelsome topers subsided. This threat of summoning the boss seemed to be most effective. Unseen, he exercised a potent influence.

There would be no opportunity to engage the attention of the persuasive bartender until the crowd had thinned. Rubio Sanchez lingered and looked on with the curious feeling that a kindly star had guided the pilgrimage to this Broadway Front. It was like a comforting intuition.

In the company that swirled along the bar was a boyish bluejacket, clean-built, jolly, with the red bars of a petty officer on his sleeve. He looked winsome and unspoiled but eager to see what life was like. His two companions were older and harder navy men. It was his money that carelessly paid for the rounds of drinks. He displayed crumpled bills by the fistful. It was like so much trash that burned holes in his pockets.

An argument arose. His companions had another engagement for the evening. They conferred with their heads together. The youngster laughed and refused to be dragged along. He was heard to call them a pair of boobs. They borrowed money of him and rolled out to charter a seagoing hack.

The youngster stood undecided what to do next. It was early for the music and dancing in the cabaret across the hall. He drifted over to a table, sprawled in a chair and glanced around the room. Two or three

penniless loafers would have joined him but he curtly told them to beat it. The young South American sitting alone with a lemonade and a straw impressed him favorably. He sauntered over, the round navy hat balanced on the back of his head, and affably remarked:

"Hello, kid! How's tricks? Don't you go drowning yourself in too many buckets of that pink lemonade. What you need is one of Mike's vermouth stingarees. I'll buy."

"Too much sting in it for me," said the black-haired Rubio Sanchez, with a shy smile. "A little claret and vichy this time, if you don't mind."

"Suit yourself, buddy. I'm no souse myself. What's your game? I don't see anybody to play with but that bunch of damn doughboys lined up against the bar. God may love the army but I pass. What's your home port? You were born under a coconut tree somewheres."

"Colombia, but you can't lose me in New York," replied Rubio. "I used to sail there."

"You don't look husky enough. What's your ship?"

"A cargo boat in the Pacific trade but she left me on the beach." It went against the grain to deceive this warm-hearted, attractive navy lad. In fact, there was no reason why he should be kept in the dark concerning the vanished *Valkyrie*.

"Gee, you are out of luck," impulsively exclaimed the boyish petty officer. "What's your name? Rubio? Hey, Rube, if you need any coin I've got a bundle. You're a good kid. I can size 'em up. Steve Brackett, gunner's mate, second class, is what they call me. I'm off the destroyer *Patterson*. We've been chasing a division of seaplanes that made a flight down from San Diego."

"You ought not to carry so much money," seriously advised young Rubio. "Panama is just looking for fellows like you. I have money enough, thank you with all my heart."

"Let 'em try to ease me of my roll," bragged the gunner's mate. "I'm not such a soft mark for these spiggoty crooks. On the level, kid, I ought to convoy you. For a sailor you sure do look timid and tender."

"Is that so? Here, let me take your hand," smiled the soft-spoken young Colombian. Steve Brackett extended a brown, calloused paw. Before he could close it the fingers were squeezed in a quick, nervous grip that made him wince and cry out. He wrenched them free and exclaimed:

"Easy, kid! Do you want to cripple one of the best gun pointers in this man's navy? Huh, you are the deceivin' guy. How do you get that way, with a wrist as small as that and a hand like a girl's?"

The training of a ship's stewardess might have had something to do with it but Rubio fancifully explained:

"There were some great swordsmen in my family one time. Listen, Steve, do you know this nice, polite bartender? Tell me about him."

"Who, Mike? They don't grow 'em any better. Sure I know him. I was here in a cruiser for the fleet maneuvers last winter. The navy swears by Mike. Stick around and you'll hear him bawl me out if I'm liable to overstay my liberty to-night and get in trouble. He's a regular daddy to us young gobs."

Just then the musicians in the café across the hall began to bang and blare and tootle in a barbaric frenzy of syncopated discords. The voluble patrons of the bar deserted it almost to a man. Mike was given a respite to put the shrine of Bacchus in order and to rest his weary frame. Having instructed his assistants he donned a fresh jacket and apron and found a chair and a newspaper at a little table near the bar.

"Come on, Rube, if you want to chew the rag with him," said the gunner's mate. "Now's the time. This cease-firing interval won't last long. Some of those rum hounds will be romping in as soon as they dance 'emselves dusty."

Rubio Sanchez complied with a fluttering timidity. This genial, sophisticated bartender had an eye like a hawk. For him the proper study of mankind was man. He removed the glasses from his fleshy nose, puckered his brows and heartily exclaimed:

"Glad you shook them hard-boiled pals, Steve. They ain't your class. An', mind you drink no more hard stuff to-night, understand?"

"All done, Mike. Meet my friend Señor Rube Sanchez, a sailorman like myself."

"Howdy, señor. Set down, boys. What's on your chests? I'm flattered to have you prefer me company to the dancing in the cabaret yonder."

Rubio's clear voice trembled but it held its contralto pitch as he said:

"I have an errand of much importance to me, Mr. Mike. I want to find a steamer that belongs to my uncle, Señor Ramon Bazán of Cartagena. He is an old man as wrinkled as a monkey. He sailed in this vessel which is a little tramp named the *Valkyrie* and flies the flag of Colombia. She was at Balboa not long ago, bound to Buenaventura, but she didn't go there at all."

The benevolent Mr. Mike was interested. He laid down the newspaper and assumed his habitual manner of patient and tactful deference.

"Well, well," said he, "'tis comical to have a steamer go playin' hookey with itself, ain't it, Señor Sanchez? And you've tried the other coast ports, north and south of here?"

"Yes. The vessel is nowhere on the coast, Mr. Mike."

"So you're adrift and forlorn without this uncle that looks like a monkey? The *Valkyrie*, hey? Who else was in her?"

"Captain Bradley Duff, for one," replied Rubio. "He is pretty well known."

"Bradley Duff?" said Mike, with an air of reflection. "He was in jail in Panama a year ago an' I paid his fine for him. The spiggoty cops run him in for disturbin' the peace. A first-class skipper was Bradley Duff till he piled a fine steamer up when he was pickled, an' that busted him."

"My uncle was crazy when he hired him," said Rubio, "but in Cartagena he could find nobody else."

"I dunno about that," observed Mike. "A man may be down but he's never out. I'd never apply it to Bradley Duff if I hadn't seen it with me own two eyes. Your old uncle made no mistake, surprising as it may sound. Not long ago, was it? Right you are, Señor Sanchez. In walks this same Bradley Duff an' you could ha' knocked me down with a lemonade straw. He was clean and smart as new paint. Blue serge coat buttoned over that fat stummick of his, a chief mate's stripes on the sleeves, white duck pants, cap cocked over one eye. He slaps his money on the bar an' drinks a bottle of beer."

"Was he alone?" asked Rubio, leaning forward.

"Alone he was an' minding his own business. Strong men used to flee when he came into a barroom, for it was him that could talk your ear off, boomin' an' droolin' along by the hour. Well, we passed the time o' day an' I handed him a few compliments an' another bottle of beer on the house. All he told me was that his ship was the *Valkyrie* an' he was chief officer. Never a word about where he was going nor what for. Something is in the wind, I says to meself, but I'm not slick enough to pry it out of this human clam of a Bradley Duff.

"He sets down for a spell, very dignified, buying no more drinks, as indifferent as if him an' booze had never been introjuced. Then he looks at the clock, says he's due back on board and pounds out. 'Twas like one of these juicy young gobs on liberty. The discipline of the ship was not to be trifled with. Something powerful had put the fear of God into Bradley Duff. As the Good Book says, whilst the light holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may come home to roost."

The young Colombian had harkened to this harangue with strained attention. His slim fingers were playing a tattoo on the table. Forlorn and adrift he was, indeed. The cup of hope had been dashed from his lips. Again he was groping. There was to be no escape from the blind alley. He brushed a hand over his short black hair so smoothly parted. The gesture was a tragic symbol. The sacrifice had been to no purpose.

"Did you ask him who was captain, Mr. Mike?" faltered Rubio. "Did any other officers come in?"

"Nary a one. And from what he said the crew was held pretty close. I might have asked him more questions but I was busy at the time. Somebody had shut him up tight. He heard his master's voice, did Bradley Duff."

"And you—you didn't see a very big, splendid young man with bright yellow hair—a man you could never forget, Mr. Mike? He may have been the captain of the *Valkyrie*. A wonderful-looking man; there is nobody like him on this coast."

"You lose, son," said the sympathetic Mr. Mike. His expression betokened surprise. "To the best of me knowledge there has been no young man like that hereabouts. It is him you're after an' not the old monkey of an uncle?"

"He—he was very kind to me in a ship, Mr. Mike when he was the second mate. I—I wish I could see him again."

The profound wisdom of the veteran bartender prompted him to study the slender, drooping youth whose emotion was so unexpected. The boyish gunner's mate had been keeping silent with the courtesy of a lad who had been taught to listen to his elders. Now, however, he eagerly exclaimed:

"All right, kid. I didn't want to butt in. Now you pipe down and give me the deck. It seems to mean a lot to you to find that ship and the big guy that makes you cry. I've got some dope for you. The *Valkyrie!* Is that the hooker? A bum little tramp with red sides and a rusty funnel, that somebody resurrected from the bone yard? Moseyin' along in ballast, is she? My destroyer was coming south a few days ago, see, and we fetched a course away from the coast of Costa Rica to search for a seaplane that had engine trouble and was reported as blown offshore. We sighted a steamer steering almost due west. Our skipper thought perhaps she might have sighted the seaplane so we tried her with radio and got no answer. We ran down to speak her. It was unusual to see a vessel as small as this tramp heading so far to the west'ard instead of following the coast. The Pacific Ocean looked awful large and wet for her to cross.

"The signal quartermaster tried her with a flag hoist in the international code. All he got back was a string of ragged bunting that looked as if the rats had chewed it. You couldn't make out the code letters to save your soul. So we kept on to run close and hail her with a megaphone. Say, kid, the skipper of this *Valkyrie was* a whale of a big guy. He waved his straw hat and he sure was a natural blond. Lazy and good-natured, too, like he was enjoying a life on the ocean wave. That's how he looked when he grinned at us.

"He hollered over that he hadn't seen any stray seaplanes and would we please give him the correct Greenwich time because his owner had bought the chronometer in a junk shop to save a dollar. We asked him where he thought he was going but he laughed and said he was going to Davy Jones' locker if the weather went back on him. It was nothing in our young lives so we hauled on our course and wished him luck. Now, kid, I've found the big guy for you, but where he expects to head in is too much for me. What's your guess?"

The kid from Cartagena was guilty of the most unmanly behavior. He was biting his lip and dabbling his eyes with a handkerchief. He could not speak. Steve Brackett, the gunner's mate with the heart of a gentleman and the manners of a prince, looked inquiringly at Mike but said not another word. The bartender nodded in the direction of the door. Steve took the hint. A hand on Rubio's soft shoulder, he said:

"So long, kid. I've got to shove off. Glad I could do you a good turn. Look me up if you get a chance or drop a line care U. S. S. *Patterson.* Tell Mike your troubles and don't hold out on him. That goes double for the boss of this dump. If the kid needs more than you can do for him, Mike, be sure to steer him against the boss, won't you."

"Sure, Steve. The kid could ha' done worse than camp in the barroom of the Broadway Front."

The gunner's mate hung his round white hat on three hairs and delayed to roll a cigarette. Meditatively he scratched a match. Rubio's hand stole into his in a clasp strong and grateful. Steve blushed a fiery red and jerked his hand away. Then he moved briskly to the door without glancing behind him.

Mike sat with his elbows on the table and regarded young Rubio Fernandez, not with the eye of a hawk but with a scrutiny both pitiful and protective. The lad might have got away with it, he said to himself, if it hadn't been for the big guy with the yellow hair. Even now there was more suspicion than proof. Taking Rubio by the arm, he spoke in confidential tones.

"Where are you staying at, son? The Tivoli? No? Right here? Don't try to talk. Until you dry your eyes you won't be wanting to go through the hall to get upstairs. I'll have to be tending bar again. Here's what you do. Go into the boss' office an' wait for him. The door in the corner yonder. No one'll bother you. He phoned from his house that wife had a headache an' he would set with her an hour or so. This place may seem rough to you but betwixt Mike an' the boss you're a-going to be looked after right."

Alone in the private office Teresa Fernandez heard Mike turn the key in the door. She was not so much frightened as chagrined that she had miserably failed to play the rôle. But how could she help break-

ing down for joy and thanksgiving that she had been granted a blessed vision of Ricardo, alive, untouched by fate, towering on the bridge of a ship? God had guarded him. She also would be guarded. Her faith glowed like an illumined altar and she felt safe even in a situation like this.

For a few minutes she stood looking out of an open window into a dark rear yard inclosed by a high wall. The room was small and plainly furnished, a roll-top desk, two chairs and a massive steel safe. One of the chairs was against the wall, at one side of the open window. She sank into it and was soothed by the hum of the electric fan. She wondered what the boss could be like and why he commanded the implicit respect of Mike and the fine young gunner's mate. How could he help her find a vanished ship? This was all that mattered.

The doorknob turned. She jumped to her feet, again the young man Rubio Sanchez, alert and on the defensive. A burly man of middle age entered the office. First impressions were alarming. He looked brutal and overbearing, a man fitted to dominate this Broadway Front. He had a jaw like a rock and the neck of a bull. The deep-set eyes were as hard as agates. Teresa watched his mouth. It was human, with a whimsical twist as he spoke from a corner of it.

"Sit down, Señor Sanchez, and make yourself at home. Have a cigar? No? I am Jerry Tobin and I won't bite you. So let's be sociable. Mike told me what he could about your hunt for the *Valkyrie* and so on. You banked on picking up some news in Panama, didn't you? And that goose is cooked?"

"I did find some wonderful news, but it wasn't enough, Mr. Tobin," replied Rubio, his voice steadied, his demeanor composed.

"I'm here to do what I can for you," was the gruff response, "but I don't recommend your living in the Broadway Front. That's too much responsibility to have on my mind."

"I was in a hotel before the goose was cooked. I—er—I don't want to go back there but I can go somewhere else."

"We can fix that up later," said Jerry Tobin, peeling off his coat and shoving back the top of the desk. "I can think better with a pencil and paper. This destroyer kid met your ship off the coast of Costa Rica, Mike tells me. And the voyage was a secret? Going to Buenaventura was all a bluff?"

"My old uncle bluffs in his sleep," laughed Rubio. "He whispers to himself through a keyhole. But he was never so head over heels in a secret as this time."

"It makes 'em act that way," barked Jerry Tobin, making marks with the pencil. "If you hadn't sort of knocked Mike off his pins by blubbering in the barroom, perhaps he could have put you wise. Wait a minute and I'll draw you a rough map. Panama Bay to the coast of Costa Rica and then due west. I'll put down a dot for an island that has made all kinds of people as nutty as your uncle. An old pirate's chart and some shovels and dynamite——"

Jerry Tobin broke off abruptly. A turbulent life he must have led but now he was staring at the open window like a man whose wits were frozen. His seamed, forbidding visage reflected terror, hatred, helplessness. The hard eyes were unwinking.

Teresa Fernandez gazed at him in fixed fascination. She moved not so much as a finger. She heard a voice at the window, a wicked voice that cut the stillness like a knife.

"Hands up, Jerry! I've got you cold. Now back yourself over to the safe. Turn around and open her up. Come clean or I'll plug you in the back. The whole bank roll! Make it snappy."

Burly John Tobin may have had some reason to recall that sinister voice. Very cautiously he backed away from the desk with hands rigidly upraised until his heel struck the safe. Then he knelt to fumble with the combination knob. He was working as fast as he could. His face was gray. Sweat bedewed it.

Almost without breathing Teresa Fernandez watched him. She dared not turn her head toward the window. She was unseen by the man outside. He had spied only Jerry Tobin in the room. From where he stood in the yard the girl in the chair against the wall was invisible. It was a blunder.

From a corner of her eye Teresa could perceive the window ledge. The criminal was careful to stand a little way back from it where he could dodge for cover if the door should suddenly open. To steady himself he rested a hand upon the window ledge. Teresa could see this hand from where she sat. She could have reached out and

touched it. It was a hairy hand with thick fingers and broken nails, a detestable hand. Teresa looked at it, flattening herself in the chair. Then she looked at the kneeling figure of Jerry Tobin who was removing a small drawer from the open safe.

This man who had befriended her was unable to defend himself. There had been a worse menace than robbery in that sinister voice from outside the window. It signified some old score to settle, a vengeance to be slaked. It was as wicked as a snake.

Jerry Tobin straightened himself and stood with the drawer in his hand. His movements were as stiff and careful as those of a man with lumbago. The drawer was filled with packages of bank notes. His eyes roved to the roll-top desk but he could not reach the pistol in it. The voice outside the window spoke again.

"Come through, Jerry, you dirty dog. No funny business. You ain't got coin enough to square it this side of hell. I'm liable to blow your head off yet."

It was the voice of a man lustful to kill but not quite ready to risk the consequences. Jerry Tobin's life hung in the balance. The weight of a feather might swing it either way. Teresa Fernandez could read in his drawn, ashen face that he expected no mercy. It was the climax of a mortal feud.

Teresa put her hand to her breast. Her fingers felt the handle of the antique dagger under the soft shirt, the two-edged weapon in the leather sheath hung by a ribbon around her neck. No matter what Jerry Tobin might have done to deserve a bullet he was a friend and she was loyal. She stole a glance at the hairy hand upon the window ledge.

Her own hand flew inside her shirt and whipped out the dagger. A jaguar could have struck with no more speed and fury. The blade drove down through the detestable hand upon the window ledge and quivered in the soft wood. It was driven by a supple wrist and an explosion of energy. It transfixed the evil hand and spiked it there.

Jerry Tobin leaped for the desk and snatched a pistol from a pigeonhole. From a corner of his mouth he growled like a mastiff:

"Guess again, you dumb-bell. Drop that gun."

The dumb-bell had forgotten that he possessed a gun. He was writhing and cursing, his one idea being to pull that dagger out of the window ledge. Jerry Tobin preferred to let it stay there for the moment. Mildly he said to the girl in the chair:

"On your way, señorita. You mustn't get mixed up in this. Go upstairs and wait there for me. Stay in your room. Tell Mike to come here. Excuse me but you'd better pull your shirt together. Rubio Sanchez is a dead card."

Teresa clutched at the bosom of her shirt. A button had been ripped off. It revealed no more than did her evening gown of black lace but it was enough to prove to Jerry Tobin that he had taken on the responsibilities of a chaperon. The color dyed her face from chin to brow as she buttoned the gray coat over the shirt.

Looking neither at the window ledge nor at Jerry Tobin she fled from the office, whispered a hurried word to Mr. Mike as she passed the bar and stole into the hall and up the staircase. The straw hat was pulled low over her eyes. Safely in her room she shot the bolt and fairly toppled over on the bed. To her ears came the thump, thump of the drums, the frenzied wail of the saxophones, loud laughter, snatches of hilarious song.

An hour passed before she was aroused by a knock on the door. It was Jerry Tobin. He entered rather gingerly as if to apologize for an intrusion. As a chaperon he was evidently a novice. His change of manner was amusing. He was like a man afraid. From a pocket he took the antique dagger. Awkwardly he ventured to say:

"Here's something of yours. I didn't want the police to find it. 'Dirty George,' the bird you—ahem—left it with, don't know how it happened."

"What did you say to the police?" fearfully asked Teresa.

"No more than I had to. I made 'em a present of an outlaw with a record as long as your arm and they were tickled to death. He'll get put away for pretty near the rest of his life. So there's that. You don't show in it at all."

"But I don't want the dagger, Mr. Tobin. Throw it away."

"Not if you'll let me keep it as a souvenir. You won't have to pack any more weapons. Understand? So cheer up, young lady. You've got a friend to deal 'em for you. Do you mind telling me what name to call you by?"

"Teresa Fernandez. As a young man I was—I was a failure, Mr. Tobin."

"Oh, not so worse, until you just naturally blew up," was his verdict. "Now, Miss Fernandez, I can't make your head of black hair grow again but they're wearing it short. Against that, you can credit yourself with a large, elegant night's work. You saved my bank roll, twenty thousand dollars. I run a game on the third floor. And you just about saved my wife from being a widow. Dirty George was working up steam to croak me. It was the yellow streak that held him back just long enough for you to get action."

"His voice told me so," shakily replied Teresa. "Oh, Mr. Jerry Tobin, I am going all to pieces. What can I do? You don't know—you don't know—I did it to help you—I was so angry—but I never, never want to see a pistol or a knife again, not in all my life. I used to be a happy girl and I never harmed anybody—and I never dreamed of things like this."

This was too much for battling Jerry Tobin to handle. As he said to himself, it was time to pass the buck. Fingering that iron jaw of his, he issued his instructions.

"Please scramble your stuff into that suit case, Miss Fernandez, or let me do it for you, seeing as it's the duds of the late Rubio Sanchez. You are going home with me. This is a job for Mrs. Jerry Tobin, a woman that's too good for this world. The best bet for you is a mother. Get that? Have you got any other clothes?"

"A trunk at the Hotel Las Palmas," meekly answered Teresa. "What will Mrs. Tobin say? My goodness, I am scared again."

"You scare easy, don't you?" he grunted. "I know different. I phoned the missus but I didn't tell her too much. I never do. You and she will cuddle up like two kittens in a basket. My car is outside. Now let's make it pronto."

Teresa obeyed. Discussion seemed absurd. She had one question to ask.

"That island, Mr. Tobin, where you said my uncle's ship had gone? You were going to show me with a pencil."

"Cocos Island. What's the hurry? I'll get you there. If I know anything about these treasure-hunting delusions, this locoed uncle of yours will be blasting rock and making the gravel fly from now till the Fourth of July."

"Cocos Island?" murmured Teresa. "I never heard of any treasure on Cocos Island. It was just my bad luck, Mr. Tobin, or maybe I am stupid."

"Not stupid, Miss Fernandez. For fast work you have me stopped. You wouldn't be so apt to hear this treasure dope over on the Atlantic side. Leave the proposition to me. As a fixer I'm good."

Jerry Tobin carried the shiny suit case into the lower hall. Teresa had a farewell glimpse of the devoted Mr. Mike. He was manipulating a cocktail shaker and patiently listening to the sorrows of a stranger who clung to the bar like a limpet to a reef.

While they drove through the city and into a suburb of trim lawns and bungalows Jerry Tobin was taciturn. Teresa felt grateful for it. For the time she had ceased to fret and suffer. Quietude infolded her. Through troubled waters and muddy, her pilgrimage had led her to a haven. She was tolerant of the faults and follies of mankind as she had known them on land and sea. God's grace might visit the heart of a Mr. Mike or a Jerry Tobin as well as the heart of a priest. Saints or sinners, who was she to condemn?

Jerry Tobin marched her into a wide-roofed bungalow on the side of a green hill. A woman came forward to meet them. She was slight and plain-featured, insignificant to the eye. To Jerry Tobin she was the Colleen Bawn. He kissed her like a knight paying homage to a lady love. The Jerry Tobin, boss of the Broadway Front, was unknown inside this threshold.

His wife saw the slender girl who waited hesitant, uncertain of her welcome. Mary Tobin took her hands as she said:

"Jerry phoned me you were a lady and a darling, Miss Fernandez, and I would love to have you in the house. Once in a while the lump of a man says something real sensible. Now run away, Jerry, and leave us two women alone. You have done your bit for to-night."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INTRUDER FROM ECUADOR.

The voice of Señor Ramon Bazán cracked with excitement as he cried out from the bridge of the *Valkyrie:*

"Behold our Cocos Island, my Ricardo! You have steered the ship as straight as an arrow."

They were gazing at a lofty rounded hill

that lifted from the sea like the cone of a dead volcano. For the most part its slope was green, with bare cliffs here and there or yellow gullies washed by the rains. In the top of this hill was a bowl or crater which seemed to brim over with water like a tiny lake, spilling many streams that leaped and flowed to the strip of level land, close to the sea, which was luxuriant with coconut palms. A pleasant island to visit, as the buccaneers had found it when first their topsails had gleamed in the South Sea.

It was no longer a secret to the *Valkyrie's* crew that they were bound in search of pirates' treasure. Captain Richard Cary had told them so soon after the departure from Balboa. He had pledged them his word that if they played fair with him they should receive a share of the booty. They believed him. The Colombian sailors and firemen yelled with enthusiasm. They had completely forgotten the conspiracy to take the ship back to Cartagena and claim the reward offered for *El Tigre Amarillo Grande* dead or alive. It had been a foolish dream of very ignorant men, they admitted among themselves. Their huge captain had saved the wretched steamer from perishing in the storm on the Caribbean coast. After that he had enforced such a discipline and mastery as they had never known in their lives, the rule of a sea lord who was both stern and kind. He held them under his thumb. It was even a pleasure to obey him for the sake of the smile and the word of praise that followed duty well done.

With chart and sounding lead the *Valkyrie* slowly approached Cocos Island to find the small bay which was indicated as an anchorage. As the bay opened to view between its rock-bound headlands, the masts of a schooner became visible. Señor Ramon Bazán was greatly disturbed. He snatched up the binoculars and squinted until the hull of the schooner was disclosed.

"By my soul, it is another treasure party," he wildly shouted. "They will find out my secret of the place where it is hidden."

"We can't very well stick up no-trespass signs on Cocos Island," said Cary, in his easy fashion. "It doesn't belong to us."

Chief Officer Bradley Duff broke in to say: "No sense in borrowing trouble, Señor Bazán. Of course you were all wrapped up in your own pet scheme but it's no great surprise to me to find another party here. They have been at it on and off, all kinds of expeditions, as long as I've known this coast. If you have the real information, then the rest of 'em are out of luck. We won't let this other outfit crowd us."

"We will make them mind their own business," grumbled Señor Bazán, in a very fretful humor. "I bought those expensive rifles in Panama, Ricardo, to guard the treasure after we find it, but nobody must interfere with us at all. Do you understand that?"

"Wait and look it over," placidly advised Ricardo. "There seems to be plenty of elbow room on the island. The schooner may have touched here out of curiosity."

The *Valkyrie* nosed her way inside the bay and let an anchor splash a few hundred feet from the three-masted schooner which flew no colors. Several South Americans lounged beneath an awning. They looked like seamen left in charge while the rest of the company went ashore. One of them flourished his big straw hat in a friendly gesture.

"Better send the second mate over with a couple of men, Mr. Duff," suggested Captain Cary. "Mr. Panchito is a sociable cuss and perhaps he can find out something."

The rotund, vivacious Mr. Panchito was delighted to oblige. As a former officer of the Colombian navy he flattered himself that he possessed the aplomb, the diplomatic approach. He assured Mr. Duff that he would turn those strangers inside out. They could conceal nothing from him. Into a skiff he bounded and was rowed over to the schooner which displayed no symptoms of excitement.

Señor Ramon Bazán, on the contrary, was in a stew of impatience to be set ashore. It was the noon hour and the sun was insufferably hot for a rickety old gentleman to explore the jungle and the rocky ravines. Richard Cary advised waiting but was met with sputtering obstinacy. They were to take the precious chart drawn by the own hand of the infamous Captain Thompson of the brig *Mary Dear,* also a compass and a surveyor's chain to measure the distances in rods and feet. After finding the lay of the land they could rest much easier. At their convenience they could unload the equipment and make a camp.

Richard Cary kept his own misgivings to

himself. It had strained his credulity to accept the secret chart as authentic. Granted this, however, the face of the island must have been considerably changed in a hundred years. Naked scars showed where the rock and gravel had slid from the steep hillsides. The water overflowing the craterlike bowl fed by living springs had been eating the soil away and depositing it elsewhere. The cliffs, however, might have resisted this erosion. If there were natural caves in them and these had not been buried too deep in débris possibly the treasure chart of Señor Bazán could be used as a guide.

The blurred notations and rude symbols had been inscribed on the chart by the hand of a man familiar with Cocos Island. The safe channel for a vessel entering the bay was correctly indicated. And in these first glimpses of the rugged landscape, it was mightily persuasive to study such detailed directions as *N. N. E. 5 rds. to watercourse—thence 9 rds. 7 ft. E. by W. ½ W. to face of cliff—thence follow ravine to big Boulder bearing S. S. W. from hump of Hill & due South from Stone on Beach which Stone is carved with letters H. M. S. Jason 1789.*

There was some delay in getting the exploring party ashore. Señor Bazán had to be humored. A pitiable agitation muddled his wits. He had to pore over the chart again. Compass and surveyor's chain were not enough, he suddenly decided. They ought to carry axes, picks and shovels, on the chance of stumbling across the place where the treasure was unmistakably concealed. Some of the crew ought to go with them and carry rifles. There were strangers on the island. They might be lawless men. It was for Ricardo to be prepared to drive them away if they came near enough even to spy on the party from the *Valkyrie*.

By this time Mr. Panchito was returning from his diplomatic mission to the schooner. He was all animation and importance. Yes, he had found out everything. It was a treasure expedition, from Guayaquil. They had been three months on the island and the sailors were very tired of it. Now they felt in better spirits because their leader had been overheard to say that he had given up hopes of finding any gold and silver. He would soon be sailing back to Guayaquil. He was a most extraordinary man, this leader. He had attacked Cocos Island as if he intended to tear it to pieces, with powerful machinery which tossed the great rocks about like pebbles and moved thoustands of tons of gravel. He was a mining engineer well known in Ecuador.

"Did they tell you his name?" interrupted Chief Officer Bradley Duff.

"Don Miguel O'Donnell, but he is not Irish," replied Mr. Panchito.

"Huh, I know that," grunted Mr. Duff. "It's like the O'Reilleys in Cuba and the O'Higgins in Chile. They were Irish some ways back. And it still crops out in their blood. And so we have run afoul of this O'Donnell highbinder from Ecuador! Now what do you think of that! He calls himself a mining engineer, does he? Maybe he is. All I know is that he has been mixed up in trouble enough to please any Mike O'Donnell. Concessions and politics and high-class devilment in Ecuador for years and years. I was captain of a dredge in Guayaquil harbor one time. From the stories I heard, it was Don Miguel O'Donnell that really backed General Eloy Alfara in the revolution of 1905 that bumped President Cordero off his perch. How about it, Señor Bazán? You may have the straight dope."

Ramon Bazán was more troubled than ever. He took hold of the ship's rail for support. Wearing a great cork helmet and leather gaiters, a canteen slung over his shoulder, he looked like a queer little carricature of a tropical adventurer.

"Don Miguel O'Donnell on Cocos Island?" he wheezed, in a gusty flare of passion. "I wish he was roasting in the flames of hell. Colombia knows him as well as Ecuador, Mr. Duff. He is very wise and very bold, a man of brains. I tell you, we must sleep with both eyes open. Bad luck has come to us. If Don Miguel O'Donnell suspects us of knowing where the treasure is he will stop at nothing at all. A soldier of fortune, Ricardo? This one is a *piratico* of the most up-to-date pattern."

"He sounds entertaining," hopefully suggested Ricardo. "He does things in the grand manner. Just now he is tearing Cocos Island to pieces or pulling it up by the roots, according to Mr. Panchito. I like his style. My friend, the vanished Colonel Fajardo, was not in his class."

"The grand manner is right," grumbled Bradley Duff. "Somebody staked him on this proposition. A syndicate, perhaps. He talks in millions and gets away with it."

It was apparent to Richard Cary that old Ramon Bazán had been shaken by enough excitement for one day. Don Miguel O'Donnell was the last straw. It was therefore sensible to suggest:

"Why not sit tight aboard ship for a day or two and see if this other outfit really intends to weigh anchor? Mr. Panchito has a notion that they are about through. Unless we show our hand this enterprising gentleman from Ecuador won't think of interfering with us."

"Right you are, Captain Cary," agreed Bradley Duff. "Let's wait him out. It may avoid getting in a snarl. Why not keep our business to ourselves?"

This rational advice infuriated Señor Bazán. Wait in idleness on the deck of a ship and look at the cliffs of Cocos Island with its fabulous riches almost within his grasp? Why had he placed this giant of a Captain Ricardo in command of the expedition? To smash through all obstacles, to use his wonderful strength and courage. Was the Yellow Tiger of Cartagena afraid of matching himself against this crafty Don Miguel O'Donnell? He, Ramon Bazán, was an aged man with one foot in the grave but he was eager to go ashore and begin operations. There were men and rifles enough to tackle——

The tirade was quelled by Ricardo who thrust his employer into a deck chair, fanned him with the cork helmet, and announced:

"If you rave any more, Papa Bazán, your heart will go funny and then where are you? Unless you take care of yourself I can't let you go ashore at all. You are not fit to leave the ship to-day. I am going to do some preliminary scouting this afternoon. Now please stay in the shade and keep cool and collected. What's the hurry?"

This high-handed behavior dumfounded poor Papa Bazán. He dashed the cork helmet to the deck and kicked it like a football. Ricardo pleasantly suggested tucking him in and locking the door. This ended the tantrum. The owner of the *Valkyrie* curled up in the chair and disconsolately talked to himself.

The boyish chief engineer, Charlie Burnham, came strolling along, bright-eyed and eager to insert himself into whatever ructions might show above the horizon.

"Come along with me, Charlie," said Captain Cary. "Let's take a look at this Cocos Island. I may pay Don Miguel O'Donnell a social call. Keep a sharp watch, Mr. Duff, and let nobody aboard from the schooner."

"Atta boy!" blithely exclaimed Charlie Burnham. "Why not take the whole crew and run these Ecuador outlaws plumb off the island? They have had a fair crack at it, haven't they? Three months is enough. Time's up."

Woefully forlorn, Señor Bazán watched them set out for the beach in the skiff. Before striking inland they paused to examine the boulders strewn above high-water mark. On this one and that were roughly chiseled the names of ships which had visited Cocos Island at various times. It had become a custom singularly interesting. Richard Cary felt a thrill when he discovered a massive stone on which the weather had almost obliterated the lettering, but it was possible to decipher this much:

H—S—J—O—7—9.

"Here we are, Charlie," cried Richard Cary. "We couldn't ask anything better than this. This must be *'H. M. S. Jason 1789.'* Now we head due north to what the chart calls the hump of the hill. We are going at the thing backward but this is good enough for to-day. I want to work out a rough position and select a place for a camp. We may have to cut a trail and so on."

To their surprise and uneasiness a trail already led due north from the stone on the beach. The trees and undergrowth had been chopped out, holes filled with broken stone, two or three small watercourses bridged with logs and plank. Wheeled vehicles had worn deep ruts in the soil. The crew of the schooner must have dragged heavy burdens over this pathway through the coconut groves and jungle. Observant Charlie Burnham picked up an iron bolt and a pipe coupling of large dimensions. He remarked that it knocked the romance out of treasure hunting when you made an engineering job of it.

Curiosity urged them along at a breathless gait. They emerged into the wide bed of a dry ravine and followed the path until it climbed to a small plateau or level area barricaded on one side by crumbling cliffs. They could hear the noise of rushing water. It was as loud as a cataract. They halted to reconnoiter. Charlie Burnham craned

his neck to stare up at the broken slope of the great hill that towered far above the cliffs, the hill that loomed so conspicuously from seaward like a dead crater.

"Do you see that rusty streak that runs down the hill, Captain Cary? I've guessed it. This Don Miguel O'Donnell has tapped the little lake way up yonder. That streak is a line of pipe. He has a dandy head of pressure for hydraulic mining. Tearing the island to pieces? I'll say he is. He is trying to wash the treasure out. Some stunt."

They followed the noise of rushing water and came to chaotic banks of gravel and a wooden sluice box that poured its torrent into a brook. A little way beyond was a tent and two huts of boards. What fascinated them was a heavy steel nozzle at the end of the iron pipe leading down the hillside. A solid stream of water leaped from the nozzle. One man easily guided and turned it as a gunner lays his piece on the target.

The water was like a projectile. It bored into the looser soil of the hill where it had slid down to pile up at the base of the cliff. Gravel and broken rock were swept down to the sluice or flung aside.

"And to think we have got to break our backs with the old pick and shovel, or drilling holes for blasting charges," lamented Charlie Burnham.

"But this clever hydraulic scheme hasn't found the treasure for him, remember," replied Cary.

They advanced toward the tent. A hammock was swung near it. In it reclined a man who smoked a cigar and read a book. He glanced up, was quickly on his feet, and walked to meet the visitors. Don Miguel O'Donnell was nearer sixty than fifty years old but physically he appeared to be in his prime. He was well knit, vigorous, and taller than the average. His cheek was ruddy and unwrinkled but around the eyes was a network of fine lines. He looked more like an O'Donnell than a native of Ecuador. It seemed odd to hear his courteous greeting in Spanish. Richard Cary fumbled a few phrases in response. Don Miguel apologized and his smile was engaging as he said in English:

"I saw the Colombian flag on your steamer, my dear sir. But there is not a man like you in all Colombia. You are perhaps——"

"I am Captain Cary of the *Valkyrie* and this is the chief engineer, Mr. Burnham."

"An excursion for pleasure to Cocos Island?" said Don Miguel, watching them closely. "You are interested in my mining operations? There is nothing to hide. I have been disappointed."

"And you are going home soon, sir?"

"Perhaps. It may amuse me to stay and observe you. One of my men reports that you sent an officer to the schooner. The second mate? A fat young man with curly hair who chatters like a parrot."

"Quite correct. That was Mr. Panchito," replied Cary. "I wanted to find out."

"And you found out? My men asked some questions of Mr. Panchito. He was delighted to tell them. Señor Ramon Bazán of Cartagena has come to camp on Cocos Island for his health?"

Young Charlie Burnham was nothing if not direct. He broke in to say: "Quit your kidding. You know exactly what we came for and that we expect to get it. Mr. Panchito is as leaky as a basket. I'll bet he told your men all he knew and then some. But there is no harm done."

"I will be frank with you, gentlemen," exclaimed Don Miguel O'Donnell, who showed no resentment. "My own chart of this pirates' treasure was made by the boatswain of Benito Bonito's ship. The rascal died in prison in Guayaquil. The chart was found by accident, a few years ago, in a pile of old prison records and papers. As you say, Señor Burnham, I knew exactly what I came for and I expected to get it. May you have more success. My Cocos Island Exploration Company has wasted its money."

The visitors from the *Valkyrie* eyed each other dubiously. If the chart of Benito Bonito's boatswain had failed to locate the treasure, what about the chart of Captain Thompson of the brig *Mary Dear?* This was poor news for Señor Ramon Bazán. They would say nothing about it.

"If you decide to stay longer, Don Miguel," said Cary, "I see no reason why we should get in each other's way. We shall be digging a good many rods from here."

The adventurer from Ecuador had been shrewdly appraising the massive simplicity of the Yankee shipmaster. Plausibly he suggested:

"Why not a partnership, Captain Cary? You have your own secret information. I

have the machinery, and we can send a vessel for more iron pipe if we need a longer line."

"Señor Bazán will not agree to that," said Cary, rather curtly. "He prefers to go it alone."

"Ah, old Ramon has a long memory and a short temper," chuckled Don Miguel O'Donnell. "I was a young man then, when he had an ambition to be the president of Colombia. To some extent I helped his enemies. It hurt him to spend money. He might have had my support, but no matter—I know your Ramon Bazán, as it happens. If he comes to Cocos Island he bets on a sure thing. But you will find it enormous labor, so much rock and gravel have tumbled from the hill since the pirates buried the treasure of Lima. My bargain is a good one, Captain Cary. I beg you to consider it."

"Señor Bazán wouldn't trust you, sir," bluntly declared Cary. "His dislikes are very violent."

"Is it necessary to obey his orders?" suavely returned Don Miguel O'Donnell. "Why not arrange this business without him? I include your chief engineer, Mr. Burnham. He will be most useful. To let a greedy old man expect most of this treasure for himself, to let him stand in the way of a partnership with me, is absurd, Captain Cary. Your Colombian sailors will soon be tired of digging in this gravel. Even a man like you will fail unless you let me help you. You see my equipment. Think of the money it has cost me."

"Do you intend to take it with you?" asked Charlie Burnham.

"A bright young man," smiled Don Miguel. "You can use it for yourself? Wait a minute. What do you say, Captain Cary?"

"My owner will have no dealings with you, and that goes for his officers," was the brusque response. "I should say that he has you sized up just about right. You ask me to be disloyal to him, do you, to make a private dicker and throw him over? Then how do I know you would be on the level with me? Nothing doing. We play our own game and I warn you to keep clear of it."

"Most big, strong men are stupid," amiably observed Don Miguel. "You have no objections if I stay and guard my property?"

"Not as long as you leave ours alone," declared Cary. His voice had a deeper note. The blue eye had a frosty glint. Charlie Burnham nudged him. It was time for them to put their heads together. They bade Don Miguel O'Donnell a curt good day. He was affable, polite, and apparently amused by the crassness of youth. Until the arrival of these simple-minded Americans one could see that he had been bored to extinction.

As they scrambled down to the dry ravine Charlie Burnham remarked with some heat:

"One smooth guy, Captain Cary. He would double cross his own grandmother. What's the answer? It don't look much like waiting him out. Shall we go ahead and be damned to him?"

"It looks that way, Charlie. I don't know how many men he has. After we begin work, is he liable to jump us? I can't put our whole crew in camp. It would be foolish to leave the steamer without protection."

"Sure it would. And I mustn't let the fires go dead. If it came on to blow hard we might have to steam out of the bay. And you'll need a deck watch, of course."

"Well, we can get organized by to-morrow. Now let's see what we can do with this next bearing, from the hump of the hill and along the ravine."

They floundered through dense growth and over gullied ground until they had traversed the estimated distance in rods. No attempt was made to measure it accurately. This brought them to a lower rampart of cliff, crumbled and rotten, in which bushes and creepers had found root. There were wide fissures as though an earthquake had shaken the limestone formation. Richard Cary made a hasty calculation. There was no other "face of cliff" near by. They could not be very many rods from the spot. Here was an agreeable camp site in a grove of coconut palms with a spring of clear water just beyond it.

"We shall have to make our own trail to the bay," said Cary, "but it's not as rough as I expected. We don't want to pack our stuff in over Don Miguel's road."

"Leave him alone," agreed Charlie Burnham. "I don't feel neighborly. He'll have me sitting up nights."

"Why, there would be no fun in it without him," cheerfully protested Richard Cary. "It would be a chore, like digging post holes back on those New Hampshire

farms of ours. I didn't dare expect anything as good as this Don Miguel O'Donnell. This may turn out to be livelier than Cartagena."

CHAPTER XX.

RICARDO PLAYS IT ALONE.

Twenty-four hours sufficed to cut a trail with machetes and pitch the tents in the coconut grove under the cliff. One of them was promptly occupied by Señor Bazán, who was elated at seeing things move in such a brisk and orderly fashion. His faith in his yellow-haired captain was restored. There had been no waiting upon the movements of the interlopers from Ecuador. If Don Miguel O'Donnell should presume to interfere, so much the worse for him. Ricardo was the man to conquer him.

Privately Ricardo was not so certain of this. He had his moments of serious apprehension. He could not quite imagine the resourceful Don Miguel as sailing away empty-handed if there was the smallest chance of finding a hint or a clew more promising than his own. Might was right on Cocos Island. And the bold O'Donnell had never been hampered by scruples or lack of wit.

It was difficult to ascertain how many men were in his party. They were scattered, a few on the schooner, others carrying supplies, the rest in camp or working on the hydraulic pipe line along the hillside. They kept away from the *Valkyrie's* company nor did Don Miguel himself display a sociable spirit. The inference was that he considered himself too much the gentleman to intrude. It had been conveyed to him that he was unpopular with Señor Bazán.

After painstaking measurements Captain Cary felt satisfied that he had chosen the likeliest spot to begin digging. To a certain extent it was guesswork. The "great tree" noted on the chart had disappeared. There was more than one "big boulder" in the ravine. Three of the bearings, however, were accurately established, the H. M. S. *Jason* stone on the beach, the "hump of the hill," and the face of the cliff. The compass and chain helped to fill the gaps. Stakes were driven. Señor Bazán turned the first shovelful of gravel. Not content with this, he furiously plied the shovel until he wilted with a touch of fever.

Captain Cary took command of this party, leaving Mr. Duff in charge of the ship. A dozen men were picked for the hard labor at the camp. No more could be spared at one time. They were willing and industrious. Why not? It meant filling their pockets with pirates' gold. The treasure would soon be uncovered. El Capitan Ricardo had shown them where to dig. He knew all things.

With the prevailing breeze the camp was in the sultry lee of the cliff. This made the days intensely hot and the nights breathless. Señor Bazán complained of his asthma. Mosquitoes tormented him when he moved out of his tent. Ricardo urged him to spend a night or two on the ship where the air had some life in it. He consented without much argument. A hammock was slung from a pole and two stout Colombian sailors bore the old gentleman over the trail to the beach.

Captain Cary went with him, planning to return in an hour or two. He wished to find out from Mr. Duff how things were going on board the ship. Charlie Burnham was left in camp with orders to post a couple of sentries now that dusk was coming on. Mr. Panchito had appeared for supper and was delighting the weary sailors with songs and stories. He was excellent for their morale. He made them forget aching backs and blistered palms.

There was nothing to cause anxiety. Don Miguel O'Donnell had committed himself to a policy of watchful waiting. For the present no trouble was anticipated. The discovery of the treasure might provoke a crisis. Meanwhile it was prudent to be vigilant.

Mr. Duff was eager for gossip, having been low in his mind for lack of company. Cary found it refreshing to sit down for a chat with him on the breezy deck of the *Valkyrie*. There had been no stir on the schooner, he reported, a few men coming and going, but nothing to indicate an early departure. A gray-haired, soldierly man had come off in the afternoon for a brief visit, presumably none other than Don Miguel himself.

Richard Cary was relating the news of the camp when the sound of a rifle shot made him jump to his feet. It came from the interior of the island. Another shot, then the sharp reports of a magazine emptied as fast as a man could pull trigger. They reechoed from the cliffs like a fusillade. A

rocket soared from the jungle and traced a scarlet line against the evening sky.

Captain Cary roared a command and two men popped into the boat at the gangway. He delayed to say to the chief officer:

"Stand by, Mr. Duff. If you need me blow the whistle. We don't know now what devilment the schooner may be hatching. We have to divide our forces. Charlie Burnham is in a mess. Watch out for my signal from the beach. We may want to shove off in a hurry."

"You will find the old hooker right here, sir," hoarsely rumbled Mr. Duff. "I wish I could go with you."

The two seamen tugged madly at the oars, while Richard Cary standing in the stern listened to the renewed *rat-tat-tat* of rifle fire. It subsided before he leaped to the beach and dashed into the narrow trail. Soon he heard a man cry out with pain and the ferocious clamor of others fighting at close quarters. He upbraided himself for his folly in leaving his men. He had been caught napping and tricked into a false sense of security.

Stumbling over roots and stones he ran with the thin beam of his little flash light to reveal the path cut through the undergrowth. He shouted mightily as he ran. He thought he heard answering voices. There was no more rifle fire. He was some distance from the camp when he saw a figure coming toward him. It swayed like a drunken man and fell to the ground. He ran harder than ever. The fugitive was found to be a Colombian sailor whose sweat-soaked shirt bore darker stains of blood. Two others came staggering along the trail. Between them they carried a comrade whose head wagged grotesquely. Cary flashed his light on the round, pallid features of Mr. Panchito who dangled a useless arm and was gashed in the thigh. His gayety was eclipsed.

Behind them was the rest of the *Valkyrie* party, in tragic disorder. Charlie Burnham was limping with the rear guard, using his rifle as a crutch. He blubbered at sight of Captain Cary and was ashamed to meet him.

"They jumped us, and it's all my fault," he sobbed. "They crept up on us just after dark. One sentry got his, with a machete, before he could squeak. We put up the best scrap we could, sir, but we had to beat it. For God's sake, Captain Cary, get the men from the ship and we'll go back and clean them up."

"Steady, Charlie. You couldn't help it," said Cary, putting an arm around him. "Did you leave any behind?"

"No, sir. We started to lug the sentry but he died a little ways back yonder and we hid him in the bushes. I don't know how many are hit. They caught us from three sides and rushed us. We couldn't hold the camp. These Colombian ginks of ours fought like devils. You can't tell me a South American revolution is vaudeville stuff. I know better."

Cary had stripped off his shirt and was tearing it into strips. The able-bodied men were quick to imitate him. As best they could they bandaged the wounded who laughed and swore and begged cigarettes. For those unable to walk, or faint from loss of blood, litters were contrived from boughs and saplings, the sailors using their leather belts for lashings. Cary slung Charlie Burnham over his shoulder and strode ahead of the others. He was sad and silent. It was for him to square the account with Don Miguel O'Donnell. Now that the thing had happened he comprehended the motive. As soon as the *Valkyrie* party had begun digging the place where they expected to find the treasure was clearly indicated. It told the secret of their own pirate's chart. Don Miguel had concluded not to wait, perhaps for weeks and weeks. He preferred to do his own excavating and make speedy work of it. There was no law on Cocos Island. A little bloodshed? It was of no great consequence. And old Ramon Bazán was distinctly irritating.

Richard Cary spoke his thoughts aloud to the hapless chief engineer who could not help groaning now and then.

"He outguessed me, Charlie. He was marking time until we showed him where to set up that hydraulic squirt gun of his and get busy again. He thinks Señor Bazán has a sure thing. He told us so."

"That's my notion, Captain Cary. Ouch, I got a hole drilled clean through my leg. Chasing us into the bushes didn't bother that sudden hombre one little bit. He bats 'em high, wide, and lively."

"I wish I had stopped those bullets myself," sighed the master of the *Valkyrie*.

He came out on the open beach well ahead of his forlorn company. Carefully he laid Charlie Burnham on the sand and

flashed his signal to the steamer. Chief Officer Duff answered with a blast of the whistle. He must have had the yawl manned and ready. The refugees heard the rattle of oars. Presently the wounded were lifted in over the bow and stowed against the thwarts. Mr. Duff handled the boat himself. Efficiently he transferred this sorry freightage to the deck of the *Valkyrie*. Richard Cary fairly rocked with exhaustion, a man sick in mind and body. Doggedly he pulled himself together to act the amateur surgeon. The colored steward displayed a competency unexpected. Between them they set about sterilizing and dressing the bullet wounds and machete cuts. One sailor's chest had been ripped by a blade and required a dozen stitches. Poor Mr. Panchito had an ugly fracture to set. A coal-black fireman was moaning with the torture of a bullet embedded in his back. Captain Cary had to probe and extract it. He did these things as well as he could, slowly, carefully. He had seen them done by other shipmasters with no surgeon on board. Including those less seriously hurt, six men bore testimony that it had been a furious affray in camp.

Richard Cary dreaded an interview with Ramon Bazán who was a trifle flighty with fever. He had erupted from his room and was flitting about in pajamas, very much in the way and sputtering questions to which no one paid the slightest attention. At length, Cary found time to say, rather roughly:

"Why not thrash this out to-morrow? No use crying over spilt milk. You ought to be in bed."

"But I am not blaming you for anything, my son," was the surprising answer. It was a chastened, frightened Papa Bazán who, for once, had forgotten his greed of phantom gold. "It may be true, Ricardo, that the pirates put a curse on their treasure. It poisons men and makes them kill each other. You would have been killed in the camp to-night. You are too big for bullets to miss. And these wounded men—they suffer and are so brave—and I am the one that brought them to this wicked Cocos Island."

The accents were mournful. Señor Bazán was lamenting for his children of the sea. He was the sinner that repenteth at the eleventh hour. His feelings were shaken to the depths.

"You certainly do not seem like yourself, Papa Bazán," gravely returned Ricardo. The symptoms were as alarming as one of those sudden heart seizures. "I'm glad you appreciate the loyalty of your ship's company. And it is very decent of you to make it easy for me. What it amounts to, though, is that Don Miguel O'Donnell was too wise and bold for me. You were afraid of it, remember?"

"You will try to make him pay for it, Ricardo. I see it in your eye. More men will be bleeding with bullets. You yourself may be dead. I made you come on this voyage when you wished to get out of Cartagena and find your sweetheart, that girl of mine, Teresa Fernandez."

"I shall find my girl. The world isn't big enough to keep us apart," said Ricardo, his scowl fading. "But I am not ready to quit Cocos Island. The only curse on the treasure is Don Miguel O'Donnell. You must let me work it out, sir. You don't have to strike your colors yet."

"Promise me you will not get yourself killed, Ricardo," implored the affectionate Papa Bazán. "I would not leave you buried on Cocos Island, not for the riches of Captain Thompson and Benito Bonito."

"My own funeral is not on the program," replied Ricardo. "Please don't interfere with my orders. I shall have a good deal on my hands. Don Miguel rubbed me the wrong way. I don't like the way he did it."

The old gentleman consented to go to bed. Captain Cary made a tour of his patients. With luck he expected to pull them all through. He found the steward faithfully on duty as nurse. Climbing to the bridge he stood gazing at the shadowy outline of the hostile schooner, only a few hundred feet away. His solid composure of mind had returned. He was putting his shattered self-confidence together again. It made him wince to know that Don Miguel was laughing at him. It was his first humiliating defeat. His men deserved better of him than this.

While he stood musing in the starlit night there stole over him the inexplicable sensation of having been in some situation resembling this, a Spanish vessel riding at anchor in a tropical harbor and the odds against him. Was it a spectral memory of Cartagena or Nombre de Dios? He could hear the voice of Teresa Fernandez as she told him the tale of the great galleon

Neustra Señora del Rosario and her ancestor Don Diego Fernandez—the tale of the two little English ships that had throttled the galleon like bulldogs. He had interrupted the glowing Teresa to exclaim, like a man talking in his sleep:

"Yes, those would be the two ships, the *Bonaventure* and the *Rose of Plymouth.* Eighty men in one and sixty-five in the other, and thirty-odd of 'em laid by the heels with the cursed Chagres fever. Some of 'em tottered on deck like ghosts and plied cutlass and pistol till they dropped in their tracks. True-born Englishmen! A great day, that!"

The little ships of Devon, lubberly, as round as an apple, gaudy pennants floating from their stumpy masts, wallowing off to leeward, daring the devil and the deep sea! The blood coursed through Richard Cary's veins. He paced to and fro, head erect, heart beating high. Was he to be balked of Spanish treasure? He was a Cary of Devon. This Don Miguel O'Donnell was a worthy foeman. How many of his men were aboard the schooner? To-night was the time to carry her by boarding, before Don Miguel could intrench the camp and send more men to his vessel to hold her against surprise.

The *Valkyrie* had no Devon lads with hearts of oak, experienced at this game of swarming over a ship's side and clearing her decks. The Colombians had been demoralized by wounds and disaster. A respite was necessary to inspire the able-bodied, to drill them, to show what was expected of them. They were bewildered, fatigued, and ignorant of the tactics of such an adventure as this. Another day and they could be led against the schooner. Reluctantly the attack was postponed.

Mr. Duff tramped to the bridge and urged his skipper to turn in until daylight. The ship didn't need him. The wounded men were quiet.

"All right, Mr. Duff. I'll go below soon. The steward will stand watch and watch with me. I am not worried about the ship. You will look after her, but I feel like a father to those poor devils that got hurt. It sort of cheers them up if they happen to be awake when I go the rounds."

"You take it too hard, Captain Cary," bluffly replied the veteran chief officer. "The men might have been stove up as bad as this in a shindy ashore in some port. I had a ship in Valparaiso one time—Lord love you, the police and the sailors fought it to a fare-ye-well."

"That wasn't Cocos Island, Mr. Duff. Now keep this to yourself. If things break wrong for me, you understand, you are to take this steamer back to Cartagena, subject to the owner's orders. And you can keep the command of her, I have no doubt, if she can be made to earn her way in coastwise trade. You have made good with me and with Señor Bazán."

"Thank you, sir. Going to run some fool risk, are you? It isn't worth it, let me tell you. You are young and husky and there's a fine life and a long life ahead of you. Why get popped off in a tuppenny rumpus like this? Hell's bells, why don't you let me do the dirty work? Give me a chance to pay you back, Captain Cary. You fished me out of the garbage can and put me on my feet. I'll go up against this desperate Don Miguel O'Donnell the minute you say the word."

Richard Cary shook his head. He had said all he had to say. Daylight found him again on the bridge, intently studying the schooner. He was astonished and chagrined. Outwitted for the second time! Forestalled and beaten! During the night two machine guns had been mounted on the schooner's deck, one well forward, the other near the after cabin. No boats could hope to approach the vessel and throw men on board. To attempt it even by night would be bloody suicide. Richard Cary's intentions were snuffed out. The stout lads of Devon never had to reckon with streams of bullets sprayed from machine guns.

The day passed uneventfully. Men were always loafing near the schooner's machine guns. Another midnight hour came. The tide was flooding into the bay. The sky was slightly overcast. The stars were mistily veiled. The bay slept in a soft obscurity. Captain Cary called Mr. Duff aside to confide:

"This seems to be up to me. Please keep the ship quiet. Look and listen. If you hear me yell for you bring your men over in the yawl."

"Good God, sir, what do you mean? Are you going to tackle that armed vessel alone?"

"You do as I say. Watch me swim for it."

"The sharks'll get you. This may be

mutiny but I wish I was big enough to put you in irons."

"Come along aft and see me off, Mr. Duff."

They halted at the taffrail. Cary took off his canvas shoes and stripped himself to the waist. All he had on was a pair of thin khaki trousers. At his belt was a holster. The flap covered a Colt's revolver of the old navy pattern. It was long-barreled with a heavy butt. The two men shook hands. Mr. Duff whispered a blessing almost tearful. Cary footed it down a rope ladder. Mr. Duff peered over and heard a small splash. For the first time in many years he piously, genuinely invoked his Maker. He saw Cary come to the surface and swim steadily to make a wide detour and approach the schooner bows on. Very soon the swimmer vanished from view. Mr. Duff hurried forward and awoke his men with orders to be alert and to jump for the yawl when he said so.

Richard Cary was swimming at a leisurely pace, saving his strength, taking advantage of the favorable drift of the tide. He held the same course until he was well inshore and the schooner's masts were in line. Then he moved directly toward her, paddling gently and almost submerged, as silent as a bit of flotsam. Thus he floated until high above him loomed the bowsprit. He was screened from discovery. Catching hold of the anchor chain he steadied himself and rested for several minutes. He could hear two men talking somewhere forward.

Hand over hand he hauled himself up the cable until he could grasp a bowsprit stay. Another effort and he found a foothold, crouching between the stays directly beneath the heavy timber upon which the folds of the head sail had been loosely secured. There were at least two men to deal with up here near the forecastle. Their conversation still flowed in drowsy murmurings. They were not far from the forward machine gun, he surmised. He knew how to operate machine guns. During the war he had been in the American navy.

He took it for granted that the two machine guns were loaded and ready for instant action. Don Miguel O'Donnell was not a man to be careless in matters of this sort. To get his hands on one of them, long enough to sweep the schooner's deck with it, this was the hazard upon which Richard Cary was gambling his life.

Clambering over the bowsprit, he crept as far as the anchor winch. Between him and the two men on watch near the forward machine gun was the deck house in which the sailors were quartered. It was his assumption that most of them were ashore in the camp to hold it against a possible sortie from the *Valkyrie*. He had first to deal with the two men just beyond the deck house. They were standing close to the starboard bulwark. From where they were the deck ran flush to the after cabin and the raised quarter-deck upon which the other machine gun was mounted.

The intruder was silent and invisible. He took the heavy revolver by the barrel but, on second thought, shoved it back into the holster. It might be better to have both hands free.

Like a yellow tiger he leaped from his ambush behind a corner of the deck house. His bare feet slapped the deck in three great strides. The two sailors of Eucador had no more than time to whirl and face him. He stooped as he ran and grasped one of them around the legs. The fellow seemed to rise in the air as though he had wings. He soared over the bulwark in a graceful parabola. Into the placid waters of the bay he shot as prettily as a man diving. He was yelling when he went under and he yelled when he came to the surface. He made as much noise as a riot.

Meanwhile the active Ricardo had lunged to get a grip on the other seaman and toss him overboard in the same fashion. This one had a moment's warning, however, and he was wonderfully nimble. He dodged like a rabbit and fled around the machine gun. At this game of tag there was no catching him. He scudded under Ricardo's outstretched arm and flew like mad to seek refuge with his friends in the after part of the vessel. A bullet might have stopped him but the yellow tiger had business more urgent. Every second of time was precious.

He dropped to his knees behind the machine gun. His questing fingers told him that the belt was filled with cartridges. He swung the weapon to rake the quarter-deck and drive the enemy from that other machine gun before they could open fire on him.

He pressed the trigger. *Brrrr-r-r-prut-prut-prut-prut*—the mechanism responded in a ferocious tattoo amazingly sharp and loud as the headlands of the bay flung the

reports to and fro. Checking the fusillade, he looked and listened. He heard shrill shouts, the scamper of feet, a man wailing that he was killed. The other machine gun was dumb. In this brief burst of fire he had driven Don Miguel's men to cover but he could not hope to hold them there long. They could snipe at him with pistols and rifles from the cabin windows, from behind the mizzen mast, from the rigging.

He was in the open, kneeling at his machine gun, his body naked to the waist as a target discernible in the darkness. There was this to be said for him, that the schooner was his from the bow all the way aft to the quarter-deck. He glanced behind him at the open doors of the forecastle. If any seamen were in there they had too much respect for a machine gun to poke their heads out.

The voice of Richard Cary rolled out in a tremendous shout of: "Ahoy the *Valkyrie!* Boarders away! Lively, lads. Shake a leg. I can't hold 'em long. Come over the bowsprit. Do you understand?"

The jubilant bellow of Chief Officer Duff announced that he understood. His men were in leash, awaiting the summons to cast off. They had an account of their own to square. Richard Cary heard their oars bang against the pins as they shoved clear and put their backs into it while Mr. Duff hurled profane exhortations at their devoted heads. Captain Cary saw the shadow of the boat as it surged toward the schooner. It was for him to maintain the mastery a few minutes longer. What he dreaded and expected was a swift rally to snatch the after machine gun, find shelter for it, and sweep the *Valkyrie's* boat. The possibility of such a disaster made him desperate. His hands would be stained with the blood of his own comrades if he should lead them into such a wicked trap as this.

Now he recognized the voice of Don Miguel O'Donnell who was driving his men up from the cabin into which they must have piled helter-skelter. This made the situation more critical than ever. The reckless soldier of fortune from Ecuador would not hesitate to pistol his own ship's officers or men if they refused to do his bidding. They would try to make quick work of it, reflected Cary.

A rifle flashed and then another. He threw himself flat. A bullet kicked a splinter from a plank beside his head. Several whined over him. He watched the flashes. Don Miguel had shrewdly scattered his men in various hiding places. Without fatally exposing himself Ricardo was unable to look over the bulwark and gauge the progress of the *Valkyrie's* boat. He dared withhold his machine-gun fire not another minute. It was the card he held in reserve but if a rifle bullet should kill or cripple him Mr. Duff and his shipmates would be exposed to slaughter.

He knelt behind the gun and carefully marked the flashes of the rifles. A bullet grazed his left arm. Another chipped an ear. Then he let drive with all the cartridges remaining in the belt. It was a sustained, furious chatter of explosions. He sprayed the quarter-deck from starboard to port and back again. It silenced the enemy's fire and granted him the desired opportunity.

Jumping to his feet he lifted the machine gun in his arms and tossed it overboard. This one, at least, could not be reloaded and turned against his own crew. Then he ran aft, jerking out the heavy revolver.

For an instant he halted behind the mainmast, in the middle of the ship, to reconnoiter. It was as he expected. Don Miguel's men knew he had blown away all his ammunition. They were coming out from cover but not eagerly. Don Miguel was roaring at them from the cabin roof where he had been trying to pot Cary with a rifle. It was he himself who leaped down to aim the after machine gun. He was guilty of a blunder. His intention was to rake the *Valkyrie's* boat before it passed from sight under the schooner's bows, leaving his men to dispose of Richard Cary.

Instead of this he saw a tall, glimmering figure dart from behind the mainmast and come charging aft. His attention was diverted. He hesitated. Then he opened fire at the swiftly moving wraith of a man, expecting to crumple him in his tracks. Ricardo was too canny to make himself an easy target. He ran a zigzag course, on a headlong slant toward one side of the deck and veering toward the other side. It was a disconcerting, bewildering onset even to an experienced campaigner like Don Miguel O'Donnell.

Cary was running like the wind and as he ran he blazed away with the revolver which barked like a small cannon. A machine gun on a deck deeply shadowed was a clumsy

weapon with which to stop a man determined to capture a ship single-handed or perish in the attempt. Don Miguel stood stoutly at his post, vociferously damning the gun and the men who were ducking the bullets from that infernal revolver. The yellow tiger swerved again and gained the quarter-deck. He hurled the empty revolver at the man behind the machine gun. It was a missile propelled by an uncommonly powerful arm.

Unseen by Don Miguel, it struck him in the face. He staggered and fell. One of his men stumbled over him. Another lurched into them. In this moment of confusion Richard Cary laid hands on the machine gun and wrenched it around to command the quarter-deck. A touch of the finger and he could have riddled the nearest group of three, huddled as they were, but the deed was abhorrent. Don Miguel had shown no mercy for the luckless *Valkyrie* party at the treasure camp but this modern Richard Cary, a sea dog of Devon in spirit, felt inclined to offer quarter. A machine gun was a detestable weapon for men who loved good fighting.

"Get below, you swine," he shouted, "before I turn loose on you. Pronto, now, and drop your rifles."

The two with Don Miguel dragged him to the companionway and he went bumping down into the cabin. Others were still sulking in the dark. Two or three came forward with hands upraised. They were glad to surrender. Cary called out a final summons. From the other side of the deck a die-hard took a futile snapshot at him with a pistol. Picking up the machine gun Cary climbed to the cabin roof and deliberately swept the quarter-deck with a hurricane of fire. It smashed through woodwork and searched out the dark corners. It was the blast of death.

A wounded man came whimpering from his hiding place. Another sprang up with a scream and hung limp over the rail. It was enough. Richard Cary shouldered the machine gun and ran forward with it. He had achieved the vital purpose. His comrades had been saved from destruction. With a thankful heart he waved and shouted to them:

"All clear. Come along and take the schooner."

The first man from the yawl was just coming over the bow. Wound about his waist was a rope ladder which he made fast and dropped. Up they swarmed, so fast that they were treading on one another's shoulders.

Rifles slung on their backs, pistols in their fists, they crowded around their captain and clamored to be led against the thieves and assassins from Ecuador. Mr. Duff crawled over the bowsprit, the last man aboard. His years and his girth had hampered him. The others had rudely shoved him aside. He was puffing and blowing and his temper was ruined.

"The scoundrels, they pranced all over me, Captain Cary. Where's this bloody ruction of yours? Here we stand like a bunch of idiots at a tea party. What's that you're lugging on your shoulder? A machine gun?"

"One of them," laughed Richard Cary, affectionately thumping his chief officer. "I had to chuck the other one over the side. You might have got hurt. Hop along aft and finish it up. If you find any loose hombres throw them into a hatch."

"Then you didn't scupper the lot?" eagerly exclaimed Mr. Duff.

"I had no chance to count noses," answered Captain Cary. "Take a look in the fo'castle first."

"Let's go, boys," thundered Mr. Duff.

To be concluded in the next issue, November 20th.

AN IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE

YOUNG Mr. Lynn Pritchard, six-year-old son of McKinley Pritchard, leader of North Carolina Republicanism, is a two-fisted, upstanding, hard-hitting, real boy. One day recently when he came into the house with his clothes dusty and torn his mother rebuked him with the inquiry, "Why don't you keep yourself nice and clean like those boys you met yesterday?"

"Pshaw, mother!" replied Lynn. "They're not *boys;* they're pets!"

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a profitable investment for the stockholders a plot that Boole had formed to do them out of legitimate winnings.

"It's pretty tough, all right," Gordan Nash admitted. "Eddie and I aren't having it any too sweet. Eddie's mother got after him a while back to build a new church for her gang and Eddie agreed to that all right, and now they've elected him a trustee and his mother makes him go to church every Sunday. But now about this Windy Boole running for sheriff——"

"Listen," Wilder broke in. "You remember, Eddie, that time we were way over by 'Indian' Henry's and got caught in a cloudburst? Just couldn't travel at all and we finally made our way to a nester's and pounded around and couldn't wake anybody, and finally a red-headed kid came to the window with a lamp and we asked him could we stay all night——"

"I remember, and the kid said, 'You kin for all of me!' and slammed down the window."

Travenna laughed and Wilder laughed, and Gordan Nash, who had heard the story many times, smiled feebly.

"But what's all that got to do with Windy Boole running for sheriff?" he demanded.

Perry Wilder dropped his feet from the mahogany desk to the Oriental rug, got out of his creaky armchair and reached for his hat.

"Simply that he kin for all of me. Politics don't interest me none whatsoever."

Travenna and Nash immediately got into action, Travenna lifting Wilder's hat from his head, and Nash pushing him back into the chair.

"In about five minutes we'll get plumb mad at you," said Nash. "Here we come to talk to you about a matter of importance and you won't listen and have the gall to start out on us. Why, dad-gast you, Perry, we knew you when you didn't have so much as a Ford to your name and we expect to know you when you're in the same state again. Now, you listen while Eddie tells you about it, and then, if you don't want it, we can't help it, but anyway you'll listen."

"All right, shoot."

Eddie Travenna shot.

"The idea is this, Perry. Boole filed this morning for the primaries. There's about six others, including Lem Potter, who's running for reëlection and deserves it. Now, Boole figures that if he wins the primaries he's sure of the election, and he's right in that, because of course nobody but a Democrat has any chance in this county, and I'm telling you that he's got a good chance to win the primaries."

"Oh, shucks! Everybody knows Lem Potter. He's a gun fighter, Lem is, and that's what you want for sheriff—why, Lem's rounded up more outlaws than Windy Boole ever heard the names of. He'll win in a walk."

Nash shook his head, and Travenna went on:

"He'd win in a walk if all the voters were old-timers like you and me, but these new folks don't know anything about bandits—why, it's been ten years since Lem shot that nephew of 'Cherokee' Bill's that was ramping around here. All these newcomers will be voting for their friends—some for one and some for another, and with all us old-timers just sitting back you'll see Windy Boole get a few more votes than anybody else and win the primary."

"From where?" queried Wilder. "From where does Windy Boole get any votes whatsoever?"

"I'll tell you from where, and it'll surprise you," Nash said then. "Windy, he plays both ends against the middle. He's got Bandy' Martin circulating around the lower end of town, telling these bootleggers that there won't be any interference if he gets in, and spreading the word to the negroes that make Choctaw beer that business will be good if——"

"Shucks! The negroes can't vote."

"Not many of them, but they can tell their white customers that there will be no more ten-per-cent beer unless Windy Boole gets in. That's one end of it, and the other is the women. You remember when you worked that razz and took that big well away from him over toward the Harder Field? Well, maybe you thought you were going to cure a lot of sucker investors, but not whatever. All the folks that stood to lose, except for you, won out and made big money, but Boole has given them to understand that he intended all the time to see that they made a pile on that well and they're all for him strong, for sheriff or anything else."

"What!"

"It's the truth. Anybody'll tell you. But here's the worst of it, and why we're coming to you: Windy Boole don't want that job

for the three thousand a year that it pays, nor even for the graft money he might get out of bootleggers and chalk brewers. What he wants that job for is to give him standing with people that he's trying to sell stock to. Think a minute and you'll see how reasonable it is: when you think of a sheriff you think of an honest man, don't you? Take them by and large, I imagine that there is no more honest and dependable lot of men in the country than sheriffs. Suppose Windy Boole writes one of his lovely hot-air letters on the stationery of Petroleum County, with his name at the head of it as sheriff. He probably will make the county pay for the stationery, but suppose he's wise and pays for it himself, but uses it to sell oil stock, or units, or whatever he happens to be calling the stuff at the moment—who's to stop him? Think it over; I tell you this thing is serious."

Perry Wilder thought it over and finally nodded in agreement.

"What's your plan?"

"Why, we thought we had better organize a Lem Potter Club, or form a committee or something."

Nash was rather vague about it, and intentionally. He knew Perry Wilder.

"Shucks! We got to do something impressive and then maybe something a little spectacular. Now, for the impressive part, let's have a committee of one hundred, starting off with a few bankers and lawyers and merchants and maybe a preacher or two—Eddie ought to be able to get that preacher he built a church for to sign, for one—and we'll get out a letter in which these hundred men and women—— We'll get the club women in on this and a ladies' aid president or two——"

His voice trailed off. He was thinking. Nash and Travenna sneaked out and went down to the In and Out Club and played three or four games of odd-ball pool at five cents an odd ball, and then reported back for the blistering that Wilder would give them. They found him with his coat off, sleeves rolled up, cigarette butts everywhere, and on the wide expanse of mahogany desk many sheets of paper with a word or two on each.

"About time," Wilder told them. "Just like you birds to start something and then leave it to me to carry out. Now if I'm going to be chairman of this committee of one hundred——"

"Hear, hear! I say, old chap, that will be ripping. Only fancy now."

Wilder glared at him and Travenna subsided.

"We want to do anything we can to help," said Nash, soberly. "Don't mind Eddie; he had a sarsaparilla pop. How does your letter go so far?"

Wilder cleared his throat and read it. It recited the good qualities of fighting Lem Potter, present sheriff and candidate for reelection, called upon all honest citizens to rally to his support and promised the unqualified indorsement and support of those whose names were signed thereto.

It appeared not to sound very good to the author, who grabbed a new piece of paper and took a fresh start, Nash and Travenna meanwhile sitting on the edges of their chairs, hats in hand. Suddenly he swung on Nash:

"Where's Bandy Martin?"

"How should I know? Shooting craps somewhere, I reckon."

"How should you know? Why shouldn't you know? We've got to have him, haven't we? Well, then, go get him. And Eddie, you find Lem Potter and tell him he's wanted at once at campaign headquarters."

They scurried out, leaving him still engrossed in composition. Half an hour later Gordan Nash returned with Bandy Martin in tow.

Bandy was looking decidedly down in the heel. His once splendid suit of light-gray tweed was as devoid of press and shape as a tweed can be, smeared with grease, minus two buttons and burned in several places with cigarette scars. He was a capable man and resourceful but anybody could beat him at craps, and nearly everybody did. As a result he was always broke and for some months he had been driven to such straits that he had accepted employment with Windy Boole as general handy man.

Perry Wilder looked up from his latest composition and frowned. Then he took the telephone from its hook, called a number, and Martin and Nash heard him say:

"That you Joe? Perry Wilder talking. Say, Bandy Martin's going to work for me and I want him dolled up in some new rags. Fix him up all the way and charge the bill to me. He'll be right down."

He favored Martin with a grunt and nodded him to the door and Martin left. He handed a list of names to Nash, for Nash

to call up, sounding the call to a conference. In a few minutes they began to straggle in—Huggins, the lawyer; Overholt, of the First National Bank; Scriber of the *Oil Herald;* Joe Adholtz, the clothier, and half a dozen others, including Johnny Watterson and other veteran oil men.

With the last of them came Eddie Travenna, with Sheriff Lem Potter in tow. Potter looked ill at ease—a long man, past fifty, bald, with a face seamed in deep furrows and tanned the color of a used saddle. Wilder passed cigars and they found chairs or perched on the mahogany desk.

"The idea is," said Perry, "that I'm taking it for granted that all of us here are for Lem Potter for sheriff, and for him strong, especially since Windy Boole's filed for the primaries. You folks are part of a committee of one hundred that's going down the line for Lem. How does that strike you, Lem?"

The sheriff edged over to the window, raised it and spat out, contrary to city ordinance.

"Well," he said, "I reckon it's pretty good of you boys but not hardly necessary. I kind of figure the folks want me returned to office."

"Sure," Perry agreed, and then he told Lem Potter and the others just how dangerous was the candidacy of Windy Boole, and finally made them see it. But he had not finished with what he had to do. He let the conversation get general, steered it to the old days of banditry in Oklahoma, brought in such apparently extraneous matters as ponies and saddle blankets, and finally had the satisfaction of hearing Lem Potter start to tell his adventure with Cherokee Bill, most famous of all Oklahoma bandits.

"I was only a kid in them days," said Potter, "and working with a cattle outfit, and these bandits used to come and stay overnight with us. I knew the Dalton boys well—saw them the day before they started for Coffeeville, where they met their Waterloo, you might call it. But Cherokee Bill was the worst of them all. Say, he was plain ruthless. I know for a fact that when he was starting out on a trip to rob a bank or something he'd cut loose and shoot a kid or two just to see if his eye was right that morning.

"Well, we boys didn't have much in them days, but most of us aimed to own a saddle and a good saddle blanket. Maybe you don't understand why a saddle blanket was so important and I'll tell you. You see, a cheap saddle blanket will mat down when it gets wet from the sweat of the horse, but one of these Navajo blankets won't. I'd had several good saddle blankets and had 'em stole on me, and I got a new Navajo that cost fifty dollars and I told the whole outfit that if any man stole that off me I'd get him sure.

"Well, one night four of these rustlers stopped at our camp, leaving bright and early next morning, and when I got up and went to saddle my horse, sure enough that Navajo blanket was gone and a little old measly thing left in place of it. The cook told me these rustlers had gone west and I started right out, and along toward noon I caught up with them and sure enough here was one of them fellers with my saddle blanket under him. They'd stopped to breathe their horses and I rode up to them and poked my gun right in the stomach of this chap that had my saddle blanket and I says, 'Pardner, you and me'll change saddle blankets.'

"Well, he looked at me kind of funny and then he said, 'All right, kid, just as you say,' and he got down and unsaddled and we swapped and I went back to camp. And when I got there I found they were about to send out a searching party for my remains, and when I told 'em I hadn't had any trouble, Jim Masters, the foreman, says to me: 'Lem, you don't know how lucky you were. That was Cherokee Bill, and if he hadn't happened to be in a good humor he'd have grabbed that gun out of your hand before you could pull the trigger and lammed you over the head with it.' "

The sheriff cleared his throat and twiddled his hat.

"I'd kind of like to get away, Perry. The boys think they've got a good still spotted and they'd like to have me go along."

Perry nodded.

"Sure. We'll let you know when we want you."

The sheriff edged out and at the door collided with a transformed Bandy Martin, a glorious Bandy Martin, a Bandy Martin clad not as the lilies of the field but as the Willies of the ball.

He stopped and smirked. He removed an emerald-green cap about twice the size of a waffle and bowed. With a flourish he

drew off yellow chamois gloves and with them flicked a dust particle from butter-yellow brogues. His suit was a horse-blanket plaid, in green and red, his shirt of silk displayed a yellow motif with lavender stripes rampant, and a yellow silk handkerchief edged in lavender poked a noisy corner from a breast pocket.

"Well?" he said, and waited.

"I see you," said Perry. "Get into a dark corner somewhere and sit in on this. Now listen, gang:

"I had Lem Potter tell that story about retrieving his saddle blanket from Cherokee Bill because that's the sort of thing that wins votes for a sheriff. Every time I get a chance I'm going to work that story into the conversation, and each of you fellows must do the same. Bandy, whenever you aren't doing anything else to earn your wages you're going to be circulating with that story. Windy Boole can't match us on anything like that."

The meeting adjourned then, the others agreeing with Perry Wilder that it was a good story, and promising to put it into circulation. Perry finally got his indorsement letter fixed to suit him, and Gordan Nash and Eddie Travenna led it around and secured an even hundred good names. The letter, with signatures, reproduced in facsimile, served as opening gun in the mail campaign. A bevy of gum-chewing high-school girls labored at addressing envelopes in the outer office. The campaign to elect honest Lem Potter to succeed himself as sheriff was on.

Across the street, in the offices of the Greater Amalgamated Development Association—J. Harding Boole, president—a similar state of busy-ness developed. George Washington White, colored, was seen emerging from the elevator entrance nearly every day, carrying washbaskets filled with outgoing mail, part of which had to do with the ordinary stock-selling business of Windy Boole, and more with the ambition of Boole to be sheriff of Petroleum County.

Perry Wilder organized "Potter for Sheriff" clubs in several country districts. Boole's men packed a meeting of the West Side Improvement Association and carried through an indorsement of Boole. The Sons of the Confederacy came out for Potter; the chalk brewers secured indorsement for Boole on the part of a negro burial association.

Bandy Martin, resplendent in his green-and-red horse-blanket plaids, circulated everywhere, handing out Potter cards, tacking up Potter's lean face on telephone poles and other forbidden locations, telling the gamblers and bootleggers that Potter was not such a bad guy after all.

He enlisted in the Potter cause sundry persons of small reputation for good, telling Perry sometimes, and sometimes not. On behalf of Potter he contributed to the relief of distressed widows and orphans, donated prizes for a picnic of the glass blowers, set up drinks in many back rooms.

Wilder, doing a little scouting on his own account, found Bandy one day in the back room of the Golden Eagle soft-drink emporium, shaking dice with a pasty-faced man who matched Bandy in size and build, but who wore in contrast with Bandy's resplendent horse-blanket attire, a suit so ill-fitting that it might have been made in a prison tailor shop. In spite of a stiff elbow the stranger seemed to be able to throw dice well enough to beat Bandy. Perry was angry. The stranger threw seven and scooped in the winnings and Perry dragged Bandy Martin outside and talked to him.

"Look here, Bandy," he said, "this stuff don't go at all, at all. I'm willing to have you plenty generous with my money if it'll do Lem Potter any good, but this crap thing is plain wasteful. Who's your friend, anyway?"

"Goes by the name of Scanlon. I don't know him very well."

"All right, and the less you know him the better it'll suit me. He looks like a little fresh air would do him good. This is a hard fight, Bandy, but we got to draw the line somewhere."

Bandy nodded, as if in agreement, but Perry saw him, during the next week, several times in company with the mysterious Scanlon. Upbraiding did no good. Perry was reluctantly coming to the conclusion that perhaps, after all, Bandy was not only unfortunate as a gambler but lacking in many things required to make a man.

The campaign dragged. The committee of one hundred, having given their indorsement to the candidacy of honest Lem Potter, appeared to think that nothing further was necessary. The attitude of the general public toward all candidacies was, to put it mildly, apathetic. Perry Wilder fumed, stewed, abused such good friends as Gordan Nash and Eddie Travenna and Watterson.

On the day before election, however, something did happen that galvanized into action a good part of the committee of one hundred. The something was an anonymous letter, headed "Do You Want a Horse Thief for Sheriff?"

Half a dozen of the committee of one hundred reported to Perry with copies of this letter. It was a nasty letter, certainly. It charged Lem Potter with being a horse thief in his youth, an associate and confederate of the Dalton boys and a bag egg generally. There was just enough truth in it to make a denial ineffective, but Perry was opposed to denial anyway.

"We've had enough postage stamps and white paper in this campaign," he said. "What we need is action—something definite that will prove to the voters of Petroleum County that Lem Potter is a fearless sheriff and should be returned to office.

"We don't all need to be in on this, and what some of you don't know won't hurt you. We'll handle this with a small committee—say Nash, Travenna, Watterson, Bandy and myself."

To this small committee, then, Perry outlined his plan, which was simply to stage a holdup of the First National Bank, which should be foiled by the daring candidate for sheriff, Lem Potter.

"We'll pull this to-morrow morning, just when the bank opens at ten o'clock. Hardly anybody will have voted by then, so we'll get all the good of it at the polls—it'll offset the effect of this nasty letter and then some. Now, here's how it works:

"Bandy here blows down Main Street in his old seagoing Ford and stops in front of the bank and gets out. He's masked, of course, with a blue handkerchief or something, and he starts up the steps of the bank. Just then Lem Potter sees him from the window of the office here—we'll have Lem planted here and I'll call his attention to what's going on—and Lem tears down the steps, not waiting for the elevator, and grabs Bandy and captures him barehanded. Pretty slick. Of course the story's all over town in no time at all."

The others nodded, but doubtingly. In fact, Bandy Martin protested:

"I don't think much of it. Suppose Lem Potter lets loose with his gun and plugs me, huh? Or suppose that traffic cop on the corner lets loose on me, or suppose somebody in the bank—and, anyway, even if I don't get plugged I sure go to the penitentiary for attempted robbery. How do you get away from that?"

But Perry had thought of all such things.

"In the first place, Lem's gun has been fixed. I'll get him to hang up his coat and vest, and slip the gun out, and put blanks in it in place of regular cartridges. Of course, Lem's got to think it's a regular holdup he's stopping—he wouldn't stand for it otherwise, and, anyway, he's such an honest old coot that he'd be sure to spill the beans. Eddie and Gordan will stage a small collision, halfway down the block, around the corner from the bank, to keep the traffic cop busy, and I'll give Overholt at the bank just enough of a hint so that he won't let his watchman or anybody else bust loose. It'll work like a charm."

The others nodded, now pretty well sold on the idea, all but Bandy Martin, who was to play bandit and who continued to protest.

"But that don't let me out yet. How about me going to the pen for attempted holdup? Answer me that."

Perry rolled himself a cigarette, lighted it with extreme care, drew a satisfying mouthful of smoke.

"That is one of the very simplest things of all. You'll be taken to jail, of course. After the election's over and Lem's elected we'll tell him about it and a few of your friends will rescue you. I don't reckon that there'll be any particular difficulty about that. You'll slip up to Kansas City or some place for a spell. The cops will let on to be hunting you, but we'll have them tipped off that the whole thing was a hoax, and if they get too nosey about it, and want to hang something on you, why Eddie Watterson will tell them that at ten o'clock—the exact time of the holdup—you were in the garage in his back yard, tinkering with one of his cars. How's anybody going to deny it, if Eddie says it's so? As a matter of fact, this thing's going to be the making of you, Bandy. When you get back to town you'll find yourself considerable of a hero. You'll have proved to the folks around here that you have nerve."

"I'll tell the world I will," said Bandy mournfully.

At a quarter to ten on primary-election day Lem Potter and Perry Wilder talked election prospects in Perry's office. At five

minutes to ten, at the suggestion of Perry Wilder, Lem Potter shed his coat and vest and holster. Perry took the gun from the holster and strolled to the window to examine it—a fine old thirty-eight that had seen much service. Watching his chance he slipped in six blanks. He called Lem to the window, handing him the gun.

"That's Bandy Martin's Ford," he said casually. "Henry sure made good ones in 1915, but when we've won this election I reckon I'll have to buy Bandy a new one. He's done fine work for you. Funny he'd have the curtains on in this weather. Wonder what he's going to do at the bank. Getting out now—you don't need to see his face to tell it's Bandy, with that green cap and horse-blanket suit. What the devil!"

Lem Potter saw too, and ran, for the man who got out of the car had a blue handkerchief tied over his face and was hurrying up the steps of the bank, revolver in hand.

Perry watched. Now for the stumble, to give Potter time to catch him, but the man did not stumble. He ran up the steps, waving the gun. Darned fool! Where was Potter. Now his voice rang clear:

"Stand where you are or I'll shoot."

By way of answer the man whirled and shot at Potter, whose gun barked in reply. Then Perry saw Potter race across the street, keeping the Ford between him and the man. He crouched behind the Ford. He drew from his hip pocket a smaller weapon. Then suddenly he stood erect and fired point-blank at the man on the step, whose gun answered in the same split second. Broken windshield glass tinkled to the pavement. The gun of the man on the step clanked to the concrete, while a red gush of blood from the knuckle proved Potter's shot had found it's mark. Potter ran around from behind the Ford, closing in on his now disarmed opponent, keeping him covered.

Perry Wilder was one of the first to get to the scene. Old Lem Potter was puffing a little, but calm.

"You can't fool a horsefly," he said. "I knew that was Cherokee Bill's nephew as soon as I saw him start to get out of the car. I could tell by the way he carried his right arm—I put that on the bum ten years ago when I got him for that trick he finished last month."

He jerked the blue handkerchief from the bandit's face and Perry Wilder recognized the man called Scanlon, whom he had first seen with Bandy Martin in the back room of the Golden Eagle soft-drink establishment.

Election was over. Lem Potter was safely nominated for sheriff—the early returns proved that. Perry Wilder and his friends gathered to talk things over.

"Of course I understand," said Overholt, the banker, "that Lem's spectacular capture of the bandit Scanlon proved him to be a sure-enough gunman, and got him a lot of votes, but even so it seems funny that that anonymous letter didn't do much harm. As a matter of fact I never even heard it mentioned by anybody, except among our own crowd."

Perry Wilder contrived a masterpiece by rolling into a cylinder some flakes from a little bag whose draw string ended in a pasteboard disk.

"Well, that particular thing isn't so surprising," he said. "Maybe you'll remember that this campaign was considerable dead a few days back, and it seemed to me as your chairman that something would have to be done to wake up the committee. I evolved that letter myself and the only persons who got it were the members of the committee of one hundred. What gets me is what became of Bandy Martin."

A post-office special-delivery boy blew in with a letter postmarked Kansas City. Perry Wilder signed for it, tore it open and read:

DEAR FRIEND PERRY: Well, by the time you get this you'll have the election returns and I'm betting Lem got in all right. How are all the boys? Sorry I couldn't act in your little party, but I didn't think much of the alibi you had framed up so I made me a better one. You remember that man Scanlon you saw me with in the Golden Eagle. Well, him and me got to be pretty friendly and I told him about what a bad job you'ld wished off on me and he said he'ld take it on for what there was in it. He figured that with everything framed for a fake hold-up there'ld be a good chance for a real one, so I told him all Okay with me and go to it kid, and I suppose he did. I knew all you wanted was a chance for Lem to show his stuff. BANDY.

P. S. That was a swell outfit you give me, and I sure hated to part with it, but the things just fit Scanlon and he had to have them. Much obliged. I guess I won't be back for a while.

A Chat With You

THE *News*, of New York, sent a reporter out to ask people in the streets what part of the world they would most like to go to.

One young lady answers:

"India, the land of the wonder and romance of the Orient."

A Newark physician picks Egypt.

"The Pyramids," he says, "have always had a great attraction for me. Egypt's history has a great appeal."

A Brooklyn girl, running true to form so far as her sex is concerned, selects Paris, but two other men, one a teacher and one a student, want to see the West and stay outdoors.

* * * *

AS regards India, it is an intolerably hot, dusty plain, overpopulated by a people who, from our standpoint, are short-lived and miserably poor. We fancy that the splendor of the Orient shines much brighter from the pages of a good story than it does when one meets it face to face.

As for Egypt, we have just had a letter from Roy Norton which makes us wonder whether we would like to go there ourself. According to Roy, it would be a paradise for the head of the department of reptiles in the Bronx Zoo. Had the Garden of Eden been situated there Eve would have been tempted by a whole delegation of serpents and eaten a peck or so of apples.

"About six weeks ago," writes Roy, "I killed a cobra on one of the sand greens of the golf course, and day before yesterday had a mighty narrow escape from an asp. Was more than a mile out from the clubhouse and pulled the ball over into some rough sand dunes. Was looking for it when my little bare-legged Arab caddie let out wild shrieks and began to run. Couldn't make out what he said. My partner who is an English officer who speaks the language yelled, 'Look out! There's an asp almost under your foot!' I jumped up to a world's record both for height and distance and sure enough, within six inches of where I had been standing there was one of the biggest and deadliest of the asp tribe. I got the blighter with my niblick but I want to remark that the rough in a desert golf course is no place for a man who has not good eyesight. The asp is exactly the color of the sand save that he has small diamond markings slightly darker. His bite is usually fatal within half an hour. I have to admire him however because he is so game. He puts up a fight to the last and strikes and strikes after his back is broken."

This discourages us a little about Egypt. It is true that if a man is going to be done to death by a venomous serpent, the asp has the most class. It was the one Cleopatra used and so has aristocratic connections.

* * * *

THE novel in the present number has for its setting Egypt and India; it is the work of a man who is an authority on the Orient as well as a gifted writer of delightful stories, and it costs a good deal less than a ticket to Cairo or Bombay.

Speaking of the cost of traveling, a friend of ours was just in after a trip that took him right round the world. He seemed rather depressed and unenthusiastic about it. The transportation alone cost him twenty-five hundred dollars, the grub was indifferent, and in each place he got to in the East he was bitten by some new kind of insect.

PARIS is no doubt an attractive place, especially for ladies and artists, but our impressions of it are so mixed up with the opera "La Bohême" that we conceive it as being populated entirely by starving artists, flighty girls and enthusiastic crowds, who for some unaccountable reason eat their meals out on the sidewalk. Also, the opera gives us the feeling of a shivery sort of place in winter, with insufficient heating accommodations. The French wines would be an attraction for many, but we suspect that no wine that ever came from a vineyard actually tastes quite so good as it seems to in the songs and stories.

* * * *

THE two men who wanted to go West represented an impulse that is more characteristically American. You are going to start for the Northwest in just two weeks from to-day. Edison Marshall, who writes about the outdoors with as deep a knowledge and love of his subject as any one of our generation, will take you there. The story is called "Lord of the Barren Lands." It is one of his best.

* * * *

THE best way to travel is to select the right time for the right place. An English Christmas would be interesting, so would Easter Sunday in Paris. The anniversary of the granting of autonomy to Ireland would be an appropriate day to select for landing in the Emerald Isle, and Derby day should be selected for a visit to Epsom Downs. Arbor Day should be spent in the big timber and to go to sea would be an appropriate thing on Columbus Day. A long subway ride in the rush hours suits a period of national mourning and penance, and almost any time will do for a nice railroad ride for those who like coal dust in their hair and cinders in their eyes.

* * * *

THE one holiday that should certainly be spent in these United States is Thanksgiving. This is not only the land of the free and the home of the brave. It is the land of the turkey and the home of the cranberry and pumpkin pie. Thanksgiving is nearly always a fine day. There is enough frost in the air to give it a tang. One may eat heartily without perspiration.

So let us spend Thanksgiving in America. It is our peculiar national feast. If you get up early there is plenty of time for some outdoor exercise and church as well, which is not a bad idea once in a while. The hours from one to three, or perhaps later, may be well devoted to a study of our natural resources in the way of foodstuffs. Later on, there is time for THE POPULAR.

The Thanksgiving number, out in two weeks, is one of the best and entirely suited to the occasion. The complete novel is by Wilbur Hall, and the short stories are by Ward, Montanye, Dwyer, Norton, Davis, Von Ziekursch, Rohde and others.

RECOMMENDED BY PHYSICIANS

for

Neuralgia
Neuritis
Lumbago
Rheumatism
Sprains
Skin afflictions
Congestions
Sciatica
Muscular
and nervous
disorders

Our informative booklet, Doctor Sun, shows the wide and effective uses for Stein-O-Lite — send for it!

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CONCENTRATE the warm, sunlike rays of Stein-O-Lite on the tender spot . . . how quickly the pain flees!

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Stein-O-Lite rays, on the other hand, have great penetrating power. Mellow and golden as tropical sunlight, they not only heat the surface but penetrate *deeply* beneath it. They act on *the center of pain*. They break up the pain-throbbing congestion and allow the tissues to relax. Thus do they swiftly dispel pain.

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The magic rays of Stein-O-Lite will not burn or irritate the skin (see why in panel text). The sensation is pleasant-like concentrated sunlight. Convenient, too—just screw a plug in a light socket.

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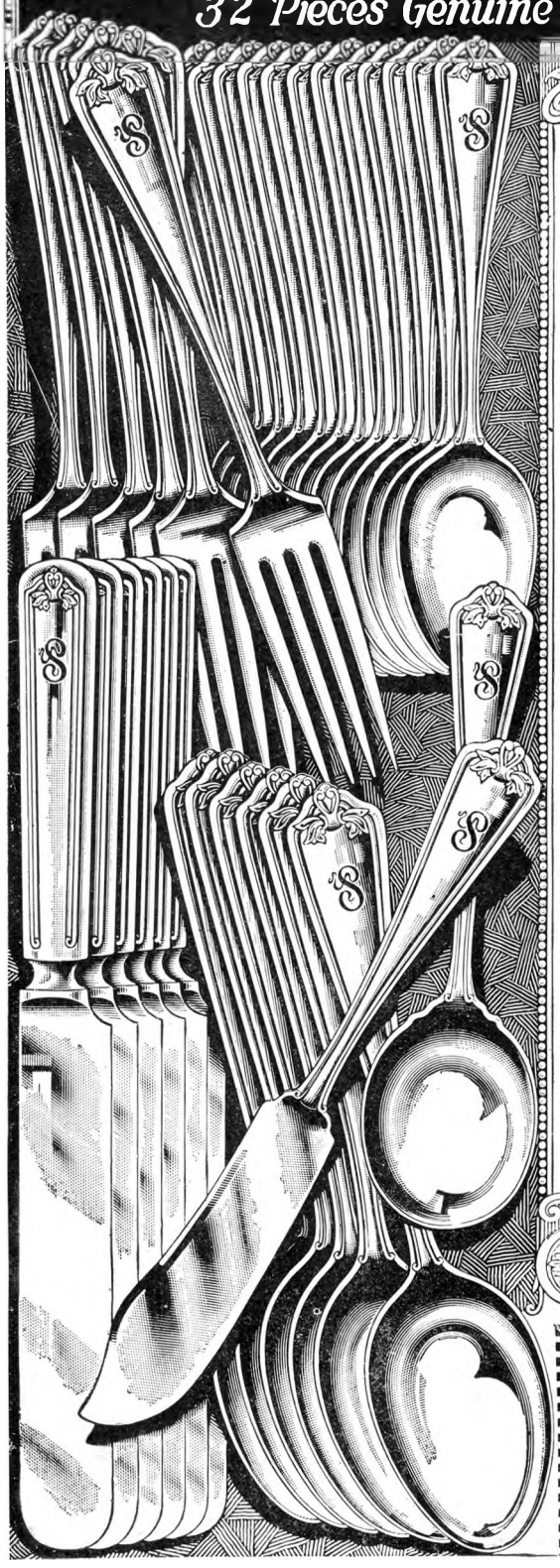

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