JUNE, 1907

A GREAT MOTOR-BOAT STORY IN THIS ISSUE

15 CENTS

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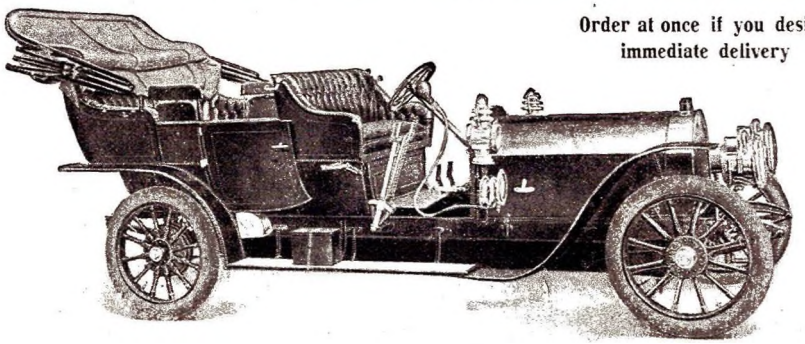
The Popular Magazine

The Victorious

Darracq



Order at once if you desire immediate delivery

50 H. P. 6 CYLINDER DARRACQ TOURING CAR

Every record made by the Darracq has been made in open competition with the world's products and not in contests that might almost be called private. Thousands upon thousands have witnessed the blue ribbon events that the Darracq has won, but what we are most proud of is the satisfaction the Darracq has given purchasers. Every day letters come in from Darracq owners, saying that their cars are not only all they expected, but a great deal more.

Write to New York Office for Booklet explaining the Darracq System and list of events all over the world scoring Darracq victories. Whether you drive a Darracq or not this information will be interesting.

DARRACQ MOTOR CAR COMPANY,

1989 Broadway, New York, between 67th and 68th Streets

Licensed Under Selden Patent

The Increased Advertising Call For Good Writers

There exists to-day in the United States a greater demand than ever before for brainy young men and women who have been trained to draw trade by modern advertising. Salaries $1,200.00 up.

The young man or woman who is ambitious to earn from $1200.00 to $6000.00 and upward, will be interested in a few more *genuine* testimonials which show what a great work the Powell System of Advertising Instruction by Correspondence is doing in doubling and quadrupling salaries and incomes.

CHICAGO, Ill., March 24, '07.

MY DEAR MR. POWELL—

I have been appointed Gen. Agent for The Pequot Mills Co.

I suppose you have noticed that I am a little behind with my work, but I will catch up just as fast as I possibly can, and I hope that you will stay right with me.

I feel rather elated over getting this appointment, and I must confess that I never should have felt myself competent to fill this place unless I had had your instructions.

Your system not only teaches advertising but gives a keener insight into salesmanship through correspondence.

Hoping you will pardon my delay in my work, I am,

Gratefully yours,
H. R. McWHISTON,
1742 Pemberton Ave.

KNOXVILLE, Tenn., April 1st, '07.

MY DEAR MR. POWELL—

In the selection of a school, there are three things to keep in mind.

1—Does the instructor know his business and is he a practical advertising man?

I have known your work for over fifteen years, back to the time when you were advertising manager for the largest bicycle manufacturers in the world. The boldness and originality of your methods at that time revolutionized advertising, and I believe modern advertising was greatly influenced by the copy, type, borders and layouts you brought into use, many of which, or with slight modifications are still employed.

2—Is the instruction along practical, useful lines, and does the pupil receive personal, explicit instructions and criticisms?

The lesson sheets used by you are thoroughly practical and calculated to bring forth the points that the student will have to face later when doing work for someone who is paying the bills. The criticisms are made by you in person and are helpful and practical to the earnest student. The criticisms sent is not a stock letter made to fit all possible contingencies, but one applying to a particular lesson by a particular student.

3—Does the school attempt to secure positions for students?

I know personally that you do, and that you succeed, and that you have more good positions to fill than you have good students to fill them.

Whatever success I have made in the advertising field I feel is due to you and your methods, and I shall ever be glad at all times to reply to anyone you wish to refer to me.

Very truly yours,
E. H. LONGEWAY,
Adv. Mangr. Knoxville Banking

MIDDLETOWN, Conn., April 6th, 1907.

Dear Sir—You and your system have been more benefit to me than anything else I have ever run across, for you have not only made me an advertising writer, but have instilled in me a love for advertising and a great desire to push ahead in it.

You will come nearer appreciating how I feel when you know that for sixteen years I have wandered about like a lost kitten, trying many different kinds of businesses, making good at them all, but really liking none. I like this work, and I'd do it if I could if there wasn't a cent in it.

I am going to keep along with this local work and study hard for the next few months, and then I will be ready for something bigger. I haven't given myself a fair show yet, for all the work and study I have done have been after ten hours' labor every day in another line.

All that I can say is, Mr. Powell, I thank you.

C. S. HASTINGS,
158 Grand St.

OGONTZ, O., March 8th, '07.

GEO. H. POWELL, New York.

My Dear Sir—Yesterday I signed a contract with the Union Department Stores Co. of Cleveland as Advertising Manager.

When I have fully earned a place in the Advertising World, I will not hesitate to further acknowledge the great benefits I have received from your lessons.

Very truly,
NORTON SMITH.

SO. ROYALTON, Vt., March 26th, '07.

MR. GEO. H. POWELL,

Dear Sir—You may be interested to know that since beginning your course and putting the knowledge gained into our weekly ads, our grocery business has GAINED OVER $3,500 IN LESS THAN THREE MONTHS, compared with the same three full months a year ago. I don't pay all the blame on the ads, but I know that what I have already learned from your course is helping me to improve the quality of my work. Too much business has put me behind in my lessons. Shall hope to catch up some day though.

Yours sincerely,
ERNEST J. HEWITT.

Note the late dates of these letters, and I want to say to every one who is searching for facts regarding correspondence instruction, that testimonials should always be investigated. Weak imitators of my methods generally rely on names of alleged successful students which defy investigation. It is a well known fact in advertising circulars from coast to coast that the Powell System is the only one worthy of endorsement.

If interested in the situation, let me mail my two free books—Beautiful Prospectus and "Net Results."

George " Metropolitan Annex, New York

Tell the substitutor: "No,

Tell [illegible]

asked for. Good-bye."

WINNER OF AINSLEE'S MOTTO CONTEST

Last October we announced that we would offer a prize of $50.00 for the best motto to combat the substitution evil, submitted to us on or before February 15th, 1907. We take pleasure in announcing that Mr. J. M. Campbell, 3022 Fairfield Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio, has won the prize. His motto is,

"No, thank you, I want what I asked for. Good-bye."

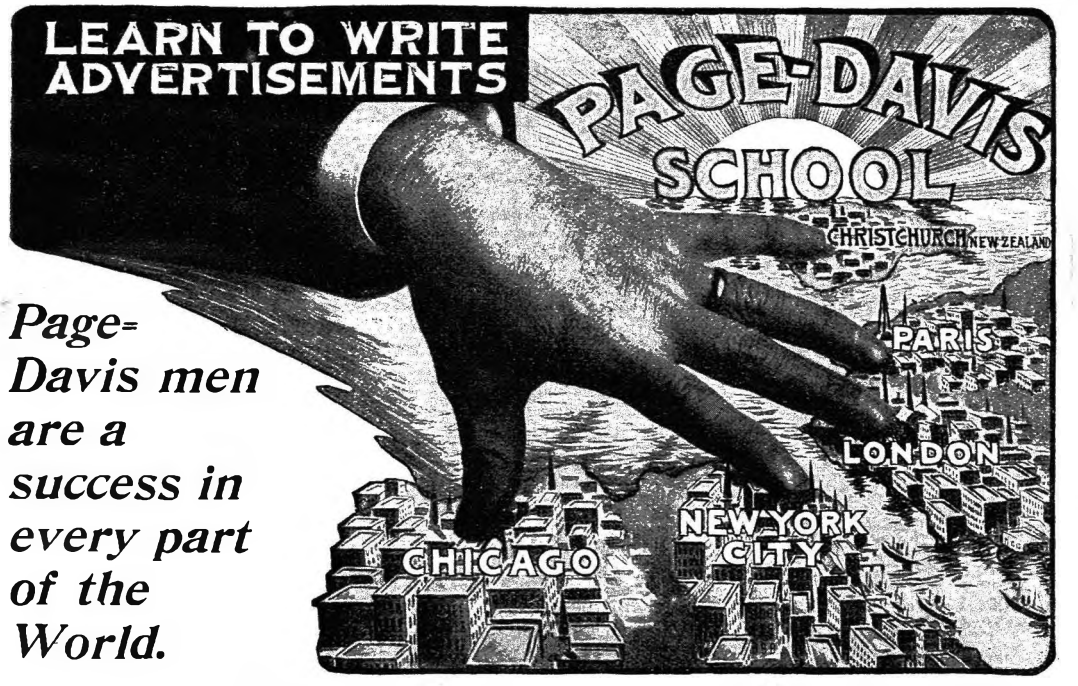
A great many mottoes were submitted. It was a difficult task to make a selection. Mr. Campbell's motto was unanimously selected by the committee. One of the conditions of the contest was that the motto be such as not to offend, and we are sure that the motto "No, thank you, I want what I asked for. Good-bye," will not offend even a dealer of long standing who attempts to palm off a substitute. After some dozens of people say "Good-bye" and make no argument, there will be no question in the substituting dealer's mind that people have awakened to this dangerous practice in our commercial life.

We thank our readers for the hearty support they have given this contest.

AINSLEE MAGAZINE COMPANY
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

Tell the substitu ' I asked for. Good-bye."

4



Page-Davis men are a success in every part of the World.

The Page-Davis School is the Original and Genuine Advertising School of the World

Earn $25.00 to $100.00 a Week

Are You in a Rut? Learn by correspondence to write advertisements with the Page-Davis School and get out of the rut.

Why is this certain? Because advertising is the important factor that makes every business a greater success and a man who is capable of increasing business is the most valuable man to that business whether he is the proprietor or an employe.

The salesman on the road is a better salesman when he learns advertising.

The bookkeeper is a far better bookkeeper.

The clerk becomes a better clerk when he learns advertising. Ask any man who knows about the Page-Davis course.

I AM A PAGE DAVIS MAN

The man who says today that he doesn't intend to remain in his present position and is taking no steps to better his condition will be found in the same rut next year just as hopeless as ever, but still doing nothing to better his condition. He sees friends and acquaintances rise to places of from $25.00 to $100.00 a week. He doesn't know about an advertising course that they are studying with the Page-Davis School.

PAGE-DAVIS COMPANY,
Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:—I am now in the $35.00 per week class and have been in the advertising field only a year and a half and am going to reach the $50.00 class before this year is past.

It was your thorough training that enabled me to get away from the life of an express messenger with its long hours and poor pay to join the ranks of successful advertisement writers.

Yours very truly,
GEORGE LEMONS.

One student who enrolled said:

"I never thought but what I would always be connected with the B. F. Company, and if I hadn't been prepared in your advertising course, I would have been looking for work, when the change came in our concern."

One of the largest concerns in the world has a method of picking good men by making small cash gifts to employees who bring an idea to the office, or who will point out weak places in their advertisements. Who are the men that get these cash gifts? Those studying the Page-Davis Advertising course, because they have been taught what constitutes good advertising. Who are the men that are thought of when promotions are made? Those who are preparing for the promotions, of course, through the Page-Davis School.

To what class do you belong? If you want to do something definite toward advancement and become able to earn from $25.00 to $100.00 a week, just send for our beautiful illustrated prospectus, which tells about the most profitable modern profession. Only a common school education is needed—no genius of any kind—and we guarantee to teach you the business. The field is large and the demand for advertising men is greater this year than ever before. Use the coupon if convenient, but a postal card will do.

FILL IN NAME AND ADDRESS AND SEND THIS COUPON

Page-Davis School—Send me, without cost, your beautiful prospectus and all other information.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

State.....

6171

Page-Davis School,

Address Either office: 90 Wabash Ave., Chicago / 150 Nassau St., New York

Tell the substitutor: "No, thank you, I want what I asked for. Good-bye."

Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen

The pen with the Clip - Cap

IN PROCESS OF MANUFACTURE AT THE JAMESTOWN EXPOSITION

CHANGES of TIME and GENIUS

You will find entertainment and instruction by visiting our booth at the Jamestown Exposition, and seeing us manufacture the best fountain pen in the world. Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen will hold a new interest for you when you understand how the vulcanized rubber and solid gold from which it is made are moulded and shaped to make your writing easy. Look for us at

Booth No. 1, Interior Court,
Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building.

When you pay us a visit we will present you with a very dainty and useful celluloid bookmark souvenir, one which will not only keep your place when reading, but which will also remind you to keep in a convenient place the world's best fountain pen. This souvenir will also be mailed free on request.

L. E. WATERMAN CO., 173 Broadway, NEW YORK.
8 School Street, BOSTON. 742 [illegible]ket Street, SAN FRANCISCO.
209 State Street, CHICAGO. 1[illegible]s Street, MONTREAL.

Tell the substitutor: "N[illegible] Good-bye."

Tell the substi[tute] [as]ked for. Good-bye."

SPECIAL NOTICE. H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON'S NEW SERIAL, "DEVIL'S PULPIT," BEGINS IN JULY.

VOLUME VIII — NUMBER 4

The Popular Magazine

JUNE 1907

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. VIII. JUNE, 1907. No. 4.

The Difficult Islands

By Bailey Millard

Author of "The Lure o' Gold," "She of the West," Etc.

The Gulf of California has been almost neglected by novelists, and yet there is no place under the stars so full of romance. Mr. Millard knows the Gulf thoroughly and has woven its wonderful spell into this, the strongest novel of the year. Mr. Millard is a Westerner, and was literary editor of the San Francisco *Examiner* for some time. He writes of the "Difficult Islands" in the Gulf with the authority that comes of intimate acquaintance. His "Lure o' Gold" had a phenomenal sale in book form, and we congratulate our readers on being able to read his latest novel in the pages of THE POPULAR.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

BUOYS were bobbing gently in the outrunning tide; the endless straggle of shore-drift was lazing down the creek; round, water-washed coco-husks twinkled and darkled in the stream, like the heads of so many swimmers; here was a sea-worn piece of planking, there a splintered spar, and floating amid it all was my little red skiff, in which I, a lone young fellow, idled at the oars, glancing over the bow now and again to mark what devil of a tug captain might be aiming to run me down. For there were many towing-masters speeding their stout boats about in Oakland Creek and the blue bay beyond, and from the view-point of a boatman in a twelve-foot skiff they were all desperate murderers.

But no screw beat through the peaceful tide near me, and I had that part of the bay-arm all to myself, save for the driftage and the bobbing buoys. It was delicious indolence, this drifting bayward with the tide. The summer sun lay red and low in the fog-murk beyond Yerba Buena Island, but overhead the sky was clear and the air wonderfully soft. On my right brooded the darkly mysterious marsh-lands, with a world of waving tules; forward of my bow swelled the tame and sober billows of the bay; to my left were musty wharves, scraggly lumber-piles, and prosaic coal yards; behind me crooked the turbid creek, yellow with harbor ooze and flecked with the trivial flotsam.

Astern, there in a wider stretch of water rose a bristle of masts by which I had just rowed: half-dismantled clipper-ships of the old Cape Horn Line, stout whalers, with beamy hulls, stubby sticks, and heavily obvious davits—ves-

sels that always made a strong appeal to my imagination—and strangely mixed with these arctic-goers were the schooners *Honolulu, Belle of Tahiti,* and others from far-away southern isles, whose mooring-lines were wound round my heart.

For I was twenty-four, and had at times felt myself born for high adventure in low latitudes. It irked me ill that a hampering set of chances had made of me a shore-going electrician rather than a voyager among coral isles. Still the acquisition of the red skiff, in which I soothed a little of my fierce longing for the sea, bespoke, methought, a place of some sort for me among marine folk, and I was saving up for a centerboard sloop with as neat a leg-of-mutton sail as ever you saw, to be had at a bargain a little later.

I rowed under the bows of a hulking Britisher, whose red water-line showed high above the tide, and heard the clank of hammers upon rivet-heads and plates where she was being repaired amidships. Then I drew ever so gently toward a trim steam-yacht, the lustrous bulk of which shone above the dirty ooze like a clean, white dove in a cow-yard. Truly, the *Thetis* was as neat a thing as I have ever seen upon the water—a handy boat, of about three hundred tons, fit to sail anywhere.

Now, I am free to own that it was not merely for the sake of a peep at this beautiful boat that I was rowing toward her as she lay there in the red eye of the setting sun. In truth, there was that patrician air about her which had irritated me somewhat when I had first clapped eyes upon her while rowing down the creek a week before, and private steam-yachts represented to me all that was plutocratic, privileged, and undesirable from an economic point of view.

As I look back now, I see myself at that period as a young chap just out of college, pluming himself on having mastered the awful "math" that had made him an electrical engineer (though in practical life he had as yet not got far beyond the bell-hanging stage of the craft) and still prouder of his theory of life and anxious to change things to suit it. Let me confess, though, that two minutes after the first time I had rowed over to the *Thetis* I had clean forgotten that I was carrying the world on my shoulders. Indeed, I was at once ready to accept the yacht and all aboard her on their own terms.

For there in a wicker-chair under the after awning sat a dark-eyed, adorable girl, with jetty hair, a sweet face, tanned by the sun of the sea and the salt winds—a girl right out of a high society novel—one of those distinctive, world-knowing creatures that soared miles above all provincial town folk and electricians. Her hand held a book, but her eyes were turned up the creek toward the blue Coast Range, and she had, of course, seen nothing of me, looking, as she was fully privileged to look, right over my head.

The second, third, and fourth times I rowed softly and reverently past I saw nothing of the girl, but this glorious fifth time, while the *Thetis* lay in the ebbing tide, I caught the flutter of a white skirt under the awning, and my eyes were glad. As I rowed a little nearer, circling astern of the white craft, I became aware of a curious change in the driftage that was going out with the tide. From coco-husks, dead tules, splinters, and planks it had changed to green and yellow globes that dotted all the waterscape. Melons—hundreds of them! They had probably been thrown overboard from an up-river schooner whose consignees had jettisoned the cargo rather than flood the market and lower the prices.

As I swung slowly astern of the yacht, I saw the girl looking curiously down at the melon-patch. This prodigal strewing of fruit upon the waters was no doubt a strange sight to her. A long, lean sailor in white pushed off in the ship's dingey, possibly to please the girl's idle whim, and was picking up cantaloups and watermelons one by one and disgustedly throwing them back into the creek.

"This is a rum go," I heard him say. "They ain't no good—all got 'oles in 'em. But they're fresh-lookin'

enough. It's bloomin' strynge. They must 'a' chipped 'em so nobody would want 'em—the muckers! Ah, 'ere's a good 'un. No, blime me if it ain't scuttled, too!"

The tide and my slow, unwilling oars were moving me away now, along with the melons. I gazed over the stern of my boat at the girl of the *Thetis,* but I don't think she gave me more than a glance or two. The sun blotted itself out below the island, and in the twilight I rowed back, pulling stoutly now, as I was bucking a rather strong current. I was almost afraid to glance over my shoulder, for I feared that the girl might be gone, but when I passed the stern of the *Thetis,* venturing very close this time, there she was, blithe and winsome as ever, chirping a little song that sounded ever so sweet upon the evening air. So rapt was I in the contemplation of her pretty profile, as she looked townward across the water, that I must have pulled away like a man in a state of hypnosis superinduced by the rare vision of her.

Of a sudden there was a rough bump at my bow, and a booming yell:

"Hi, there! Mind yer eye, you lubber! Wot you mean by runnin' me down this wye?"

These pleasant words were accompanied by a smart blow upon the back of my head from the flat of an oar. Whether the knock was intentional or not was all the same to my quick blood. Hotly and rather dizzily, I reached behind me, grasped the wet oar-blade, and almost wrenched it from the hand that had wielded it against me. As I did so, I faced about, and there, in the roughly rocking dingey, was the long, lean man whose melon salvage had been so disappointing. He commanded me to let go the oar, giving it another tug as he did so, and nearly sending us both into the water. Still hot and dizzy from the blow, I grimly held on, with a vague, punitive notion in my aching head. While we struggled the little craft rocked violently and threatened to capsize.

"You won't let go, eh?" the man bellowed fiercely; and before I could sense his action, he had leaned over into my boat and sunk his sharp fangs into my forearm, bringing the red blood out with a spurt.

I loosed his teeth-hold by a handy blow on his jaw, and with all the urge of my young spirit I made at him, and, clamping my claws about the lean, loose-shirted waist of him, I yanked him over the side of the dingey and into my skiff, his long length topping neatly across the thwarts, threshing in my hard grasp and finally coming down under me upon the clean bottom planks, where he lay gasping between my knees.

"'Elp, boys, 'elp!" he gurgled throatily. "'E's choking me! 'E's killin' me! 'E's desperit, 'e is."

A wild cry rang from above us as the girl of the *Thetis* found her tongue at last. "Don't hurt him—don't!" she called to me imploringly, her face as white as the skirt she wore.

"Oh," said I, looking up at her as she leaned over the rail, and speaking as calmly and reassuringly as I could, "I don't intend to injure him. He has probably learned his lesson by this time and will let inoffensive boatmen alone."

As I said this, I let go of the prostrate man's throat, and, rising, stood over him rather unguardedly.

"I hope you saw how it was," I went on—"how the affair began."

"Oh, yes," said she; "I saw it all, and he shouldn't have been so—— Look out! Look out!"

At that instant I felt a hard grip on my ankles. The man had seized them tightly, with the evident intention of tripping me and throwing me overboard. The boat was rolling wildly, the gunwales scooping water. With my legs well braced, I leaned over and tried to grapple him in turn, but only in a defensive way. I could have struck him in the face, had I cared to, and thus ended his foul tackling, but I felt the constraining presence of the girl. So I merely gripped his shoulders while she cried out, her voice now sounding a little farther away, as the tide carried the boat along:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Will nobody

stop this terrible fight? Sir Charles! Sir Charles! They'll kill each other. Why don't the men forward do something?"

I had caught a glimpse of the "men forward," whose grins fully evidenced their hearty appreciation of the row.

There were hurrying feet on the deck and a great, round, red face, surmounted by a white cap, glared over the rail at us.

"I say, my men, what's all the row? Here, you fellow, break away! Let our man alone! He's a peaceable sailor. I'll have you run in."

"Oh, yes, he's peaceable," I panted, without taking my wary eyes off my man. "He's——"

The brute pushed heavily to one side, giving the boat a mighty lurch, which threw me over the gunwale and into the water, and letting go my ankles with a shove that sent me down like a piece of pig iron. When I rose, spluttering, with a quart of muddy water gurgling inside me, I was near the boat, and I threw out my hand to clutch the side; but at that moment down came the club-end of an oar upon my unguarded head. There was a great buzzing in my brain, as of a mighty machine, a gurgling in my ears, a raspy feeling in throat and nostrils, a far-away throb-throb-throbbing, and then the stark emptiness of a mind inert.

CHAPTER II.

"It was a bully scrap, that's what it was, but a mighty unfair one. That Bill Jenkins is the most cowardly cuss. Steward, he's opening his eyes. He's all right!"

"Yes, he's all right."

I blinked in the fierce glow of an incandescent light in the little cabin. It seemed as though it would blind me. My head ached, my lungs were sore, but there was a quick revival of the spirit, so that presently I bobbed my head up, and, though all abroad at first, soon took in my situation. It seemed natural enough that I should find myself aboard ship, so much had the *Thetis* been in my mind of late.

"Where is he?" I demanded. "Where's that fighting fellow?"

"Jenkins?" said the sleek-faced steward. "Don't bother about him. He's safe enough. In irons, I guess."

"Am I on the yacht?"

"You are, but you came near being on the bottom of the creek by this time. How does your head feel—pretty rotten, eh? That was a nasty knock Jenkins gave you with his oar. He's the foulest fighter that ever went to sea—a regular stingaree, don't you think? But the captain will fix him, all right—fighting like a wild Indian, and all before Miss Braisted, too. He'll get what's comin' to him, don't worry about that, and he'll get his walkin'-papers, too."

"That's what he will," said the other man.

There was a light footfall outside the cabin door, and a sweet voice asked solicitously: "How is he?" It was the voice of the girl of the yacht.

"He's come around, miss. He's all right now."

"Thank you; I'm awfully glad to hear it. See that he doesn't want for anything, and let him rest all he will."

She went away. Soon afterward I thrust my legs out of the bunk and sat up, with my hands to my head.

"Don't worry about me, please," I said to the steward. "I'm going ashore. I've bothered you folks enough. You couldn't help it because that fellow was such a crazy-horse fighter—where's my boat?"

"She's tied alongside. She's all right."

The steward tried to induce me to stay on board until morning, but I was all for getting ashore. My head throbbed under its tight bandage, but before long I felt fit to take care of myself.

When, about eight in the evening, I left the steward's cabin, dry and clean in an odd assortment of old toggery—a pair of dark-blue trousers, a world too wide and with a broad, white stripe running down the leg, and a frayed smoking-jacket of a faded wine-color, strangely patterned and padded and also

grotesquely loose—there was the girl of the yacht, smiling from a piano-stool in the brightly lighted, wonderfully carved and paneled little saloon, and near at hand on a divan was the big, red-faced, Anglified man whom she had called "Sir Charles," and who addressed her with what to me was sickening solicitude as "Hazel." I had never known a girl named Hazel. It was a neat name.

Sir Charles eyed me with cold disdain, but whenever the girl looked at me she laughed amusedly. I could bear the refrigerant Sir Charles very well, but what was intolerable to me was the thought that my odd appearance should excite to laughter this beautiful vision of young womanhood which had floated so seraphically in and out of my dreams. That laughter pricked my proud spirit.

There was this, though, about her laugh—it made her seem a little more like the girls I knew, and it gave me courage to say, with a slight note of injury: "I am very sorry to have given you all this trouble. I didn't want to alarm you or bother you, but the fight was forced upon me, as you saw. Thank you very much, indeed, for your kindness. Thank you and good-by."

"I'm awfully sorry it happened," she said, with becoming concern, "the man was a brute. He's always looking for trouble. I don't know why the captain has kept him so long. If it's any satisfaction to you, you may rest assured his term of service on this yacht is over." This with the air of one in whom resided authority.

I bowed and left the saloon, glancing back once as I did so into the mischievously laughing eyes that had caught a rearward and newly ridiculous view of my wine-colored jacket and all-too-ample trousers. But beyond her shoulder Sir Charles, the snow man, sat as rigid and refrigerant as ever.

When I reached the deck, I was told by the first officer that the captain had said he wanted to see me before I left the yacht. He had gone ashore to meet the owner. I had better stay until his return, which would be soon. But I was in no mood to wait. I got into my skiff a little stiffly, and the head-pang still reminding me of the combat.

I rowed ashore with quick stroke, my wet clothes dripping from the stern seat. Over the quiet water there came the rumble of men's voices from the yacht, and once I heard the "Haw-haw" of the baronet, whom I had come instinctively to loathe.

Of a sudden the voices ceased as the men went below. A few minutes later, looking back in the moonlight, I saw the white skirt of the girl of the *Thetis*. She was standing on the upper deck and clear of the shadow of the awning. She turned toward me as I rowed farther inshore. Was it a trick of my fond sight, or was that white something in her hand a handkerchief, and was she waving me farewell?

When I reached the long, empty dock, I saw one of the yacht's boats lying alongside a float by the steps, with two of the crew.

"There's the young fellow, now," I heard one sailor say.

"Yes, that's him," said another.

When the boy at the dock had taken charge of my boat, I climbed the steps wearily. A man was about to descend. As he came down I recognized him in the moonlight as the captain of the *Thetis*. He was followed by a stoutish gentleman who wore a white waistcoat and was smoking a cigar.

"Good evening," came the captain's rather stiff greeting. "You're the young man who was in the fight, aren't you? How do you feel now? Did they take care of you aboard? I told them to."

"Oh, I'm all right," I said. "How's Jenkins? What became of him?"

"He's ashore," said the captain significantly, "and I guess he'll stay there. He'll never do any more fighting aboard or about the *Thetis*."

He went back up the steps with me to where the stout gentleman stood on the wharf—a smoothly groomed, elderly man, whose air bespoke an easy command of affairs. He seemed bland enough when, after the captain's explanation of me, he asked, with friendly concern:

"Can we do anything for you, young man? I wasn't aboard when it happened, but Captain Dumble has told me all about the mix-up in the boat, how you were nearly drowned, and the part my daughter played in the matter."

His daughter! She was his daughter! Then he was a man to be respected. There was no room for doubt that I was face to face with the owner of the *Thetis*.

"It was certainly not your fault," the great man went on, "and you were very harshly treated. As the man was one of our crew, I thought we owed you——"

"Oh," said I, bent on checking any benevolent scheme he might be evolving on my account, "don't bother about it. It's all over now, and I think I got in a few digs that Mr. Jenkins will remember."

"You look as though you could give a good account of yourself," said he. Then, to Dumble: "But, by the way, captain, you didn't introduce us."

"My name is Tevis," said I, "Edwin Tevis."

"Tevis? I know a banker back East named Tevis."

"He's probably no relation of mine," I said proudly. "My family haven't much to do with banks."

"Maybe they're just as well off," he said, sighing, and I thought I understood the significance of the sigh. "My name is Braisted," he went on, "and this is Captain Dumble."

The captain and I bowed. I trusted that the moonlight was subduing the picturesqueness of my oddly matched suit. I was uneasy, but, although I was all for making away from them and getting home, I felt myself held by their talk, and lived for the moment in their polite expectancy.

"Mr. Braisted is the owner," said Captain Dumble, in the deferential tone of a man who is owned along with a boat. "We're from New York."

"You have voyaged a long way," I ventured, addressing Mr. Braisted.

"Yes." Again that pitiful sigh, and again that look of misgiving—a look as of a swift lapse into some strange terror. Then the face became firm. "It was a long trip, but we had pleasant weather all the way."

Captain Dumble changed the subject. "You were pretty well soaked when you were rescued," he remarked.

Rescued! To be sure—some one aboard the yacht had saved me from drowning in the creek, and here was I ungratefully anxious to get home without having made a single inquiry about the man who had saved me.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," I said, feeling rather mean, "but I have forgotten to thank whoever it was that fished me out of the creek."

"Bless me!" said the captain, and there were odd looks on both their faces. "Don't you know? Didn't the men tell you? I guess they forgot to, because they were a little ashamed. Instead of lowering a boat on the instant, as I ordered, they went running and fumbling about with life-buoys and other silly things that couldn't have been of any earthly use to you, as you were stunned by the blow and clean under the water."

"Yes, but who was it—who did it?" I asked hastily. "I want to thank and reward him."

"It was Miss Braisted," said the captain simply.

"Miss Braisted?" I gasped.

"Yes, sir, my daughter," said the stout gentleman, full of fatherly pride. "She's a wonderful swimmer. Of course it was a risky thing for her to do in skirts, but she didn't have to swim very far. She just threw off her jacket and shoes and jumped right in."

You could have knocked me down with a pencil, so utterly was I taken aback. "But—but——" I stammered.

"Yes," said the captain. "She didn't lose a minute, but just leaped from the rail, and struck out for the place you had gone down. She had to dive to get hold of you—you never would have risen again—but she came up, clinging to your collar, and made to the skiff where Bill, who was pretty badly scared by the outcome of the affair, sat like a stone until she commanded him to pull

you into the boat. She's a mighty brave girl, is Miss Braisted."

"She is that," I fervently affirmed, "and I must see her and thank her. She is a heroine, if ever there was one. But how did she do it?"

"Oh, she simply struck out and did it," said the proud father. "She's perfectly at home in the water."

He rattled on about some of his daughter's swimming exploits. I don't remember what I said on my side, but I am sure I felt sufficiently embarrassed, for through it all ran the thought: What manner of man did she consider me?

"Excuse me, gentlemen," I said at last. "But I'm going home to get these togs off. Then if it isn't too late to see Miss Braisted, I'll go aboard, with your permission, and give her my heartiest thanks. Meantime, Mr. Braisted," said I, grasping the full, soft hand of the owner of the *Thetis,* and giving it a wrench that made him wince, "please explain to your daughter. Thank her for me now, and I'll do so in person when I am presentable."

I hastened to my room, feeling at every step of the way a cringing sense of my seeming ingratitude. The air of my hot, stuffy little room seemed intolerable when I entered it and began to dress. I had such a febrile, depressed feeling that I sank for a moment upon my bed and felt the grateful ease of it. It was hard to pull myself together to rise again. Would not to-morrow do for my errand? No; it must be to-night. But I owned this much to myself: For no other creature on earth would I have made this harsh call upon my flagging spirits—for no one but the girl of the *Thetis.*

It was fully an hour later that I reached the dock. Looking down the creek just before getting into my boat, I paused of a sudden and ran my hand across my eyes. Was my wound or my excitement blinding me? Where was the *Thetis?* I rowed over a little way, stood up in my boat, and looked down the moon-path over the unquiet waters. Was she really gone? The cool night wind fanned my face, and the gug-gug-guggle of the low waves under the bow of my boat mocked the emptiness of my vision.

Yes, the yacht had run out on the ebb tide, whether to sea or only somewhere down the bay I could not tell. I clutched the oars and made the skiff fly along in mighty bayward sweeps. Rounding a point, I saw a low smoke down by the mole at the mouth of the creek, a good two miles away.

I turned and rowed slowly back toward the town. My lovely girl savior was gone, unthanked, without a word, without a sign of appreciation from one for whom she had risked her own life. Well, the hour would come—maybe on the morrow, if—insufferable thought—she were not out upon the open sea by that time, and the muddy Oakland creek and I were to her but passing dreams. But she had saved my life—she could never forget me—of that much I felt assured.

CHAPTER III.

Out of the low smoke-drift of the speeding yacht a luminous idea came to me: I would hasten ashore and telephone to the Marine Exchange. There I could learn if the *Thetis* was leaving port. It took almost the last remnant of my day's strength to do this, but I did it. From the nearest telephone-station I rang up the exchange. Was the steam-yacht *Thetis,* of New York, going to sea that night? No. To what anchorage was she moving, then? The clerk did not know—probably somewhere up the bay. No other words, but they were enough. She had not sailed.

I walked joyfully home, and threw myself down upon my bed. The room went round for a while, but in an hour or so I felt easier, and soon sagged down into a heavy sleep.

In the morning, so potent are the recuperating processes of youth and love, I was up early and again at the telephone. Nobody could tell me where the *Thetis* was. At nine o'clock I called up the exchange once more, and was rejoiced to learn that the yacht was at anchor off Sausalito. Good! I would

take the ferry-boat and call over before noon. It was a strange, but, as it seemed to me, an imperative, errand; and I should see Hazel again. Hazel! How much acquainted I had become with that name! It seemed that I had known it and its owner all my life.

But it was a rush morning in the shop. Customers came filing in, and the telephone kept buzzing forth all sorts of superfluous orders. I was the head electrician, and you may be sure I sent the other men out on all the jobs that offered themselves that morning. If my employer had not chosen that time of all others to absent himself, I might have got away, but just at the hour when I surely counted upon his coming, he rang me up to say that he had gone to San Pablo to figure on a big contract for lighting a new hotel, and would not be back before two. While I had him on the wire I tried to beg off for a couple of hours. I did not care to impart the sacred nature of my mission, but tried to impress him with its urgency. The reply was that he would like very much to oblige me, but this was an emergency day. He would return at two, and I could be off all the afternoon, if necessary.

Fuming, I slammed the receiver upon the hook and glanced toward two persons, evidently more tiresome customers, who were slowly entering the shop, closely scanning everything as they came along. They were a man and a woman. The man was a grizzled sea-going-looking old chap, short and rather slim, with a fuzzy beard, a mild blue eye, a small chin, and a flabby underlip. He paused and leaned against the counter, fingering some wire-coils that lay upon it.

I looked at him inquiringly, and, with the tail of my eye, took in the figure of the woman. So remarkable was she that I found myself turning to look at her, rather than at her husband, for such was his plain relation to her.

She was tall—a full head higher than her husband, and she had a cold, hard, compelling eye, black as obsidian, and yet of a wonderfully penetrating quality. Her thin, dark hair, parted in the ancient manner, was touched by the first frost, and yet she seemed unaccountably old and knowing—a woman of cosmic, seeresslike wisdom. There was a deep, vertical line in her forehead, with some smaller ones on each side of it. This prominent line gave her face a look of fierce severity at times.

She looked like a "Down-easter," probably from one of the coast towns. With all her Puritan-seeming severity, she had a salt-sea ruddiness about her, and I should not have been surprised to note a trace of seaweed in her hair. The marine sentiment she suggested was heightened by a wide, wabbling gait, which is that of sailor folk the world over. She was dressed in a dark-blue blouse and skirt. On her head was a little sailor hat that gave her a jauntiness not very becoming to her years, yet well in keeping with her marine air and make-up.

"Well, Jim," she rasped sharply to her hesitating husband, "why don't you tell the young man what you come for?"

The little man played with the wires a moment longer, while I looked over the counter expectantly and with an all-too-apparent impatience, which probably had a repellent effect upon the mild-mannered man who stood before me.

"I wanted——" he began, and then stopped, waving one hand, as if to clutch the fugitive words out of the circumambient air.

"Don't mind him." The woman bit off her syllables as she spoke, and looked at me with a mixed air of business and bravado. "He's barnacled."

"I beg pardon?" I asked, interested in this odd pair in spite of myself.

"He's barnacled and a little down by the head—can't get it out all at once; but it will come in a minute. He knows what he wants."

"Course I know what I want," said the little man, with surprising alacrity, considering his first faltering. "I want to know if you've got all the stuff needed for submarine lighting—wires and water-tight globes that give a lot of light, and a man to run the outfit?"

"That's right," said the woman, "a

man to run the outfit—only you ought to have asked about the man first. He'd tell you what you want when you get him."

"You want an electrician of some experience, I suppose," said I, looking at the man. "I can get you one, no doubt, if you will tell me what kind of a plant he is to handle."

"Submarine, he said, didn't he?" clicked out the woman with a hint of contempt for my suggestions. "That means under water—the lights are to go under water."

I breathed an impatient sigh. "Yes, but how far under water, and for what kind of work?"

The man and woman looked at each other. Evidently they did not care to discuss their plans with anybody but the electrician whom they should engage.

"Oh, tell him," said the woman, and, as the man remained silent, she said, with another touch of bravado: "Wrecking. Going to raise a bark down to the islands. That's all you need to know. Now, how about the man—the electrician? Is this the right shop to get one at, and, if not, where is it?"

My heart was beating fast. The islands! Did fate send this man and woman here in the hour of my revolt, and to what purpose?

"What's the pay?" I asked.

"I don't know," said the mariner. "Perhaps two hundred a month, if he's an expert. Don't you think so, Emily?"

"When do you start?" I cut in before the woman could reply.

"About ten days," he said.

"Well, now, you don't know that, Jim," objected the woman, with a look that I took as a warning that he was telling too much to a stranger. "There's things to be done—a lot of things."

"It will be before long," said her husband, a little more vaguely.

"And you go to the islands—what islands?" I asked.

"Look here, mister," said the woman resentfully, her forehead barred with the sinister lines, "we asked you if you knew of a man for this job. We didn't say he was for us or when or how or where. We don't want to drop anchor till we get into port."

"That's all right," said I, "but how do you know I'm not your man?"

"You?" The little mariner looked at me like one relieved. "They tell me you're an expert in your line. Would you really go?"

"Yes, perhaps; if I knew a little more about the enterprise. Wait a minute. There's the phone."

I went to the telephone, which grated into my unwilling ear the pleasant information that it would be four o'clock before my employer could return. A plague on shops! Here was an island adventure, and fifty dollars a month more than my present salary. Going quickly back to the counter, I said:

"I'll go, if it's all straight, and there's a full month's pay in advance."

"Why," said the old salt, "it's straight as a tow-line, and I guess you can have the two hundred down; don't you think so, Emily?"

"Sure," said the woman. "Now, let's get down to business. Haven't you got a place where we can talk privately? You know this is to be all confidential."

"Certainly," I replied. "It shall be kept quiet enough on my part."

In the little back office, where, with much inward excitement, I put question after question, it came out that the couple were Captain and Mrs. Thrale; that Captain Thrale was the owner and master of the two-hundred-ton schooner *Tropic Bird* of the island trade; that the wreck he was undertaking to exploit lay in a sheltered cove off Tutuila, one of the Samoan group, and that if I had any doubt as to the standing of the owner of the *Tropic Bird* or of his vessel I could easily satisfy myself by inquiring at the exchange or of Captain Dollar of the Hawaiian line. Then we entered into the details of the electric outfit, though, as the captain said, he was only "figuring on it that day"; he wanted to get "some idea." He had a little piece of penciled paper which he consulted from time to time, checking off, scratching out, or adding to his list.

"How about that new kind of light,

Mr. Tevis, the powerful one that comes in long tubes?" he asked.

"Mercury arcs?"

"Yes, I guess that's it. How'd they go?"

"Oh, you don't want mercury arcs for that work, captain," I suggested. "You couldn't carry them around very well under water, and they're awfully expensive."

"But we need a good strong light—one that will make deep bottom look like that carpet there, and so as we can work all night, if we have to. But, of course, it's got to be portable and handy and not get out of order too easy."

"Then what you want is triple-glower Nersts—hundred candle-power would be about right. That'll give you a light you can pick up pins by at ten fathoms on a dark night. I've seen them tried in the bay. For the kind of job you're talking about you'll need about two dozen. Some will burn out and some will break, but two dozen will do you."

"And the water-tight globes and sockets?"

"No trouble about them; but I've got to do a little figuring on the wiring. Is it going to be used in rough places—over rocks and the like?"

"I guess so," mused the captain, with a far-away look in his eyes. "Oh, it will be rough enough."

"Well, you know the covering wears off under such conditions. There's an extra heavy insulated wire they make for just that sort of work. It comes in thousand-foot coils. You ought to take along about three coils, so as to have plenty."

"Whatever you say," said the captain. "You're to be boss of the lighting outfit, and, of course, you know we don't want to get caught out of material a thousand miles from nowhere."

He fingered his memorandum-sheets. Just then a medical customer thrust his head into the office and asked for a cauterizing instrument in a hurry. The memorandum-slips seemed to remind the captain of something important.

"May I use your phone?" he asked suddenly.

"Certainly; take the one on the desk," said I, going out to wait on my customer.

I was gone but a few minutes from the back office, during which I saw as I glanced through the glass that Captain Thrale, who seemed to have no great acquaintance with the telephone, was having some difficulty in making himself understood by the person at the other end of the wire, but never once did he raise his voice. As I reentered the little room, he was speaking low into the transmitter and repeating: "Yes, to-morrow night; to-morrow night; same hour; same place."

Mrs. Thrale gave a furtive glance as I entered, and, reaching over, touched her husband's arm.

"Good-by," he said, in the same low tone, and hung up the receiver with a jerk, turning toward me with a startled look. Whatever he had said over the wire he evidently did not wish to be overheard.

"Well, Mr. Tevis," said he, "if you'll come down to the schooner Thursday, any time before noon, I'll be glad to see you again and talk things over. She's at Taylor's wharf, just below the railroad bridge. And, remember, you are to say nothing about this cruise of ours."

"Absolutely nothing," I promised.

They passed out, Mrs. Thrale walking ahead in the superior manner which characterized her attitude toward the captain.

A few minutes later I glanced at the desk in the back office. On the blue blotter by the telephone lay a little slip of paper. I looked at the slip. On it was scrawled in pencil:

Dumble, Clay 1006.

Captain Dumble, of the *Thetis!*

I recalled the words I had heard Thrale repeat into the telephone: "To-morrow night; same hour; same place."

The baffling witchery of events! All day long had I been awaiting a chance to go to the *Thetis,* the vessel of enchantment, the floating home of the girl who now meant more to me than any living creature, and here, out of my

own office, had gone a message to her captain.

It was strange, but not so very strange. For, after all, in the free comradery of sea-going folks, why should not the captain of the *Thetis* know the captain of the *Tropic Bird*, and make appointments with him by wire or otherwise?

CHAPTER IV.

It was not until late in the afternoon, when the sun was dropping behind the brown hills of Sausalito, that I stepped from the ferry-boat, from the deck of which I had already noted the white hull of the *Thetis* lying in the mouth of Richardson's Bay. I hired a boat and rowed out to the yacht, passing up the gangway without challenge. The first officer, who was on deck, looked inquiringly at me.

"Is Miss Braisted aboard?" I asked.

"Yes, just come over from the village. In the social hall, I think, sir. I'll show you the way. You look all right after your trouble of yesterday," he observed. "Guess you weren't much hurt, after all?"

"Not very much," I replied.

"That's the door," he said, pointing to an entranceway, "go right in." He went back, and I hesitatingly entered the social hall.

In a pretty pink-and-white afternoon gown, which made her look less the sailor than when I had seen her before, Hazel Braisted sat in an easy chair in a richly ornate room which now leaves in my mind a suggestion of innumerable carved figures of mermaids swimming around a mahogany wainscot. She laid aside her book as I entered. A maid who had flitted in at my entrance flitted out again, and I was alone with the girl of the *Thetis*.

"Oh, this is Mr. Tevis," she said, welcoming me with a pretty, outstretched hand. "Mr. Braisted told me your name, and I remembered it easily, as we have friends who are Tevises in New York."

"Yes," I said, not quite so uncomfortable as I had thought to be, for she instantly made me feel at home in her presence, "and you are Miss Braisted. I have come to thank you for saving my life. You must have thought me an ingrate not to have done so before, but I knew nothing about it until I went ashore and met Mr. Braisted and the captain."

"I knew you didn't," she smiled graciously. "And I want you to pardon me for laughing at you; but in those odd clothes you did look so—so——"

"Ridiculous," I finished.

"I didn't say that," she said, smiling again. "How have you been? Were you much hurt? You certainly recovered quickly. We wanted to keep you until morning, but you ran away."

"Yes," I replied, "and you ran away, too."

She raised her dark eyebrows a little.

"I mean," I explained, "that when I came back to thank you last night, the yacht was gone."

"Oh, we didn't like to stay in that smelly old creek, among the melons and things, so we came over here, where it's so beautiful."

"This is a wonderful boat," I remarked.

"Yes," she said, "it seems like home to me—everything so convenient."

She leaned over a little and touched a push-button. The dark interior instantly flashed forth in the light of a score of soft little electric lamps. This led to a talk on the electric arrangements aboard the yacht. I explained my interest in the matter, and it seemed to please her.

"An electrical engineer?" she said. "How interesting! I should like to be something of that kind if I were a man—something wonderfully advanced and scientific."

I said nothing of my commonplace duties in the shop and of the dreary round of bell-hanging jobs, but her eyes glowed when I told her of some of the big things that had been done in our line on the coast. But, of course, we came back to the yacht again.

"She's such a steady boat," she remarked, "and fast, too. We expect to

make Honolulu from this port in seven days."

"When shall you sail?" I asked.

"In about two weeks—the seventeenth, I believe."

"And you're not coming back?" I think my voice must have wavered a little here.

She fingered some flowers on the table at her side as she said:

"No, we're for Japan, China, India, and home by Suez."

"I expect to make a voyage myself before long," I said thoughtfully, "and to the islands, too. You spoke of Honolulu. Perhaps we shall meet there. But, no, I sail in a slow boat—a schooner."

"Well, it may be that I shall see you down there," said she encouragingly. Before she could say more, the door opened, as doors open on a stage, and—enter the baronet!

He was dressed in smart London clothes, and was followed by Mr. Braisted, who had politely waved him in ahead, a deference to which the aristocrat seemed quite accustomed. Of course there were greetings, after their kind—a pleasant one from Miss Braisted's father, and a distinctly disapproving one from Miss Braisted's lordly admirer, now formally introduced to me as Sir Charles Walden.

I did not stay long after their coming, but long enough to see the face of the money king relapse once or twice from its social pleasantry into the wan look of misgiving which I had noted the night before. That he was a man with "something on his mind" seemed plain enough to me, but that his daughter knew what that something was and shared the dread of it with him seemed altogether unlikely; for she was blithe enough. She must have become used to his look, which may have been nothing more than a remnant of Wall Street worry.

I imagined that the girl's face changed just a little when we said our farewells—that she seemed a bit grave and thoughtful. But her gravity could have been nothing beside mine. As I stood on the deck of the ferry-boat and saw the *Thetis* blur out in the darkness and distance, it seemed that something was catching at my heart and dragging it down into the depths of the bay.

Just as I was leaving the ferry on the Oakland side, I caught a glimpse of Captain Dumble in the crowd. Was he going to keep his appointment with Captain Thrale? This was "to-morrow night," and the hour and place were doubtless near. This trim yacht captain, as smart in his blue uniform and cap as any Sousa—what business or social relations could he have with the fusty little master of the *Tropic Bird?*

CHAPTER V.

The tide-rip battled above the bar outside the Golden Gate, where the *Tropic Bird,* heeling under the gusty trades, bravely fought her way out to sea. Before night the headlands would sink into the blue Pacific, and the Coast Range would be lost to us. The *Thetis* had steamed out that morning, and I had hoped we should be leaving port about the same time, and that I might get sight of her. But we had to wait for the tide, so that when we put out we saw nothing of the yacht, which, I thought dejectedly, must be racing away from us, gaining eight knots an hour, at the least.

Down by the Farallones the trades took us in their teeth. The cordage began to hum, the dingy sails of the old schooner puffed out, and her nose dipped under a souse of spray. There was around me all the suppressed excitement of the long voyager's first plunge into the open ocean. But soon we sailed into a racing drift of fog which blotted out everything but the near water and dampened the elation of the start. A mournful siren wailed from the Farallones, and continued its unhappy call to us until we were well out to sea, pitching on a vast world of unquiet water amid cold sweeps of misty scud.

I had been looking over the schooner and the crew, and getting acquainted with my assistant, a likely lad named

Jim Reynolds, engaged at the last moment of my hurried start on the voyage.

Of the *Tropic Bird* there is not much to be said. She was small, with cramped but clean cabins, covered with the peeling paint of many years. In fact, everything about her suggested age, even to the rigging and the patches on the old weather-darkened sails.

But the crew had been a surprise to me. A little craft like the *Tropic Bird* might easily have been handled by four or five men, but we must have had a score, not counting the eight taken along especially for the diving and wrecking work. Whenever an order was given, there would be more men come tumbling up from the forecastle or along deck than were needed on a square-rigger. And as for boats, we had half a dozen, including a twenty-four-foot gasoline launch.

At dinner, or "supper," as Mrs. Thrale called it, I sat at the captain's table, where his wife poured the tea as if she were sitting at her New England board. In fact, the whole scheme of affairs in the cabin suggested a sort of marine housekeeping, in which her presence was dominant and pervasive. Captain Thrale said grace, and she bowed her head very low and reverently and responded with a clear "Amen."

After dinner I went aft and stood near the wheelman and could see the whirling patent log marking off the miles. About ten o'clock the fog lifted, and a friendly little troop of stars shone out in the dark sky overhead.

So I turned in, with a feeling of cheer, but lay awake a long time, thinking of that other ship in the wake of which we were sailing.

In the morning, finding nothing else to do and not caring to read, I suggested to the captain that I take a look at the electrical outfit and see if everything were all right. He was on deck talking with the mate. A dozen of the superfluous sailors were smoking their pipes forward, and the mate was pointing to them, or was it to something out at sea?—that little mass of dun smoke on the southern horizon.

"Why," said the captain, looking at me rather queerly, as I thought, "you don't have to do anything with—— There's no use—you can't get at the stuff, anyway. It's all down in the hold and safe enough."

The mate was looking through his glass at the smoke-drift.

"It's her, all right," he said at last. "It's her stack and masts."

I wondered what the vessel might be. Of course it was not the *Thetis*. She should be a clean hundred miles away from us by this time. I sauntered aimlessly about the deck, and from time to time there came to me the queer look which Captain Thrale's face had worn when I had spoken of the electric outfit. Being with the boatswain a little later, I ventured to ask him about the matter.

"Electric fixtures?" he laughed. "We ain't got no electric fixtures. This ain't no liner."

I explained that they were part of the cargo—they were along with the diving-apparatus.

"Cargo?" he laughed again. "Well, if you call eighty tons of Oakland rock cargo, all right. That's all the cargo we got, except them steamer-hands there forward." He laughed again, this time contemptuously. Then of a sudden he bethought himself. "Who are you, sir? I mean what is your berth to be? Quartermaster?"

"No. I'm the electrician."

His face took on a rigidity equal to that of Mrs. Thrale's.

"Why didn't you say so?" he exclaimed. "Of course I ain't had no time to git acquainted, so I didn't know. But—it's all right. You'll find the things all there when you want 'em." He walked aft, leaving me to puzzle over his strange contradictions.

I went over and hovered around the captain and the mate, who had been joined by Mrs. Thrale. They stood near the rail, looking off at the smudge of smoke in the south, which seemed to be a little nearer.

"That's her, all right," said Mrs. Thrale, with a note of excitement in her voice. "Must be, for there's Point Sur to eastward. I was afraid we wouldn't

pick her up before afternoon, but the wind has held good." Turning, she saw me and said: "Fine day, Mr. Tevis," and began to talk about the gulls that were following the ship, leading me aft to see them.

"What vessel is that out there—a coast steamer?" I asked.

She looked toward the gulls as she replied: "I guess so. Ain't it strange how they carry their legs? See that one with his foot hanging down—must have been wounded or something."

We talked for a while about the birds, while I thought of the steamer. Then Mrs. Thrale went below. I walked over near the wheel, and by the binnacle-box I saw a pair of marine glasses, which I picked up furtively, clapped to my eyes, and pointed toward the distant steamer. I screwed the glasses down a bit to get the focus, and suddenly, in the little circle, there danced before my eyes the familiar lines of the *Thetis!*

All day long we kept the yacht in view, sometimes away out on the hoop of the horizon, then again so near that one could see the moving dots of people aboard. On one or two long tacks we almost lost her, but at night, with a fair wind, we kept her lights in sight, and from my little round peephole of a window they swung up to me out of the sea over and over again, while I lay in my berth, and gazed over the dark water.

Thinking of the excitement of Mrs. Thrale and the officers when the *Thetis* had first been picked up, I could come to no other conclusion than that there was a relation of some sort between the two vessels; and the thought was a welcome one to me. But clearly that relation, whatever it might be, was to be kept in the dark, for not only had Mrs. Thrale and the captain discouraged my questioning, but now they seemed to pay but little attention to the distant steamer. Here was a puzzle, or, possibly, no puzzle at all; for what could the dingy little old hulk in which we sailed have to do with the splendid *Thetis?* What could her master have to do with ours?

It occurred to me that I had within the fortnight asked myself that question before, and then the remembrance of the Dumble telephone came to me. Clearly there *was* some relation between the two oddly assorted craft. What could it be? What was the meaning of this strange chase of the *Thetis* and of her deliberate cruising?

Day after day we kept the yacht in sight; and in the night I saw the twinkling lights play over the sea, flashing on the wave-tips and running along the walls in whimsical vagrancy. What deepened my now well-fixed impression of some sort of understanding between the masters of the two vessels, was the fact that, once or twice at night, when the *Thetis* must have feared she was losing us, her search-light gleamed suddenly out of the dark. Once when it lighted up our somber sails with mild refulgence, I caught sight of the lone figure of Mrs. Thrale, standing on the poop-deck, her glass to her eyes, staring seaward through the night, and I could not dismiss from my mind the fancy that she was a sinister sea-hawk, peering at her prey.

I wanted to go over to her and plump out a question as to the meaning of this odd chase. But as I approached her, she turned upon me sharply and said that the first mate was looking for me for a game of euchre.

"Not that I approve of cards," she added, with one of her Puritan touches. "They're a device of the devil. But if you don't play on Sundays or for money——" And she turned again abruptly, walked over to the binnacle, and looked at the compass with a fixed stare.

I went below to seek the mate, a very decent chap, named Flamel. He sat under the lamp at the side of the cabin table.

"Aren't we heading nearer south than the regular course for the islands?" I asked of him. "I thought I saw some shore lights just now." Which was the truth—the lights had glowed dully in the west and we were assuredly not far from the Californian coast.

"Must have been some ship," said Flamel.

"No," I returned positively, to see

what he would say, "the lights of the *Thetis* were due south. She was playing her search-light on us."

"You must be pretty smart to know the names of all the steamers we run in sight of," he said evasively, while he fingered the cards. "Shall I leave in the joker?"

I could not put my mind to the game, lost carelessly, and turned in early.

Next morning I rose betimes. There was the *Thetis* within a mile, standing clean white above the dark-blue of the sea. But little smoke was coming from her funnel; she was moving slower than ever. Over to the west the brown hills of the coast stood out plainly. I asked one of the idling hands what port we were near.

"Looks like San Diego," he said unhesitatingly. "Yes, there's Coronado over there."

A little later I chanced in at the captain's cabin. He was not there, but spread out on his table was a chart on which our course was marked. The red line ended at the mouth of San Diego Bay.

We made no headway that day, nor did the steamer. She idled up and down or lay to off the harbor mouth. In the afternoon she steamed into port, while we hovered a little farther offshore. Indeed, I feared at one time that we were putting out to sea on our long voyage to the islands and had seen the last of the yacht. I had hoped we might be going into port, too, and that I might see Hazel again. But after a long tack to the west, we veered north, and then stood over toward the shore.

It came on toward dusk. There were the lights and the smoke of a steamer coming out of the harbor in the growing breeze. She sailed directly toward us, the sea getting rougher as she came and the wind coming puffy and uncertain. I saw Mrs. Thrale give an impatient signal to her husband.

"Ready about!" he called.

The schooner's head was laid due west. The mainsail was close-reefed, and the foresail shortened a bit. Looking astern, I saw the *Thetis* steaming toward us in the gathering darkness. She was now well out of the harbor and not more than half a mile away. The sky was somewhat overcast, so that the stars shone out only now and again, and there were shoreward streaks of mist through which the street lights of San Diego shot forth as they were turned on for the night.

I was looking fondly toward the oncoming yacht, when, of a sudden, I saw a great cloud of smoke puffing out from amidships, a little forward of the funnel. At the same time I saw a bustle aboard, a running to and fro, and heard the quickly clanging strokes of her bell.

CHAPTER VI.

The *Thetis* was afire. Of all this smoke and confusion there could be no other meaning. And Hazel—she was in peril. The thought sent me excitedly up and down the deck. Of a sudden she had become more dear and necessary to me than ever. What could be done to help her?

There was not much commotion aboard the *Tropic Bird*. She was ordered about again, and lay to in the freshening wind. Two of her boats were lowered—the gig and the dingey—and were bobbing astern, but not manned. It was evident that the captain was not greatly concerned about the lives of those aboard the yacht. But as for me, I was fairly beside myself.

A fever of anxiety consumed me as I looked toward the great cloud of smoke that now enveloped the *Thetis*, and then stared angrily at the silent Thrale, who stood upon the after deck, with his wife, in irritating deliberation.

"Captain," I cried, with devouring impatience, "aren't you going to do something for the poor souls aboard that yacht? Aren't you going to send——"

"Look here, Mr. Tevis!" snapped Mrs. Thrale, before the captain could get out a word. "You ain't master here, not by a jugful, and I think you'd better wait until you're called on for advice before you give any."

"We're standing by to see what we

can do for them," explained the captain rather hazily. "If they need help we'll do what we can. I've got a couple of boats lowered. Maybe I'll be going over before long."

"Will you let me take one of the boats?" I urged excitedly. "I want to do something myself, if I can."

"Let the boats alone," snorted Mrs. Thrale. "We'll take care of the boats."

"But you might——"

"Oh, 'save your health for the doldrums," she rasped forth. "Look there, captain! She's blazing up, ain't she?"

A red glare rose amid the smoke. I waited no longer. Running astern, I pulled in the painter of the dingey, and was about to lower myself in, cast off, and pull madly for the *Thetis,* when I heard a voice at my elbow:

"Please leave that boat alone, Tevis. It's the old man's orders."

I turned, and there was Flamel, the mate. I paused hesitatingly, and was about to let go of the painter, when the captain, who had shuffled aft, followed by three men, seized it from my hand.

"Right in there, now, Rodgers—Jansen! Hold to, here, Pederson. Run her alongside. No, I guess we better take the gig, after all—looks like there was quite a kick-up coming."

The gig was pulled alongside and held by the boat-hooks. I was not surprised to see Mrs. Thrale go handily over the side and take her place in the bow. The men pulled away, the captain steering. Soon they neared the yacht, from which no flame now showed, though the great smoke-cloud still hung around her, obscuring her deck and making it impossible for me to see what was going forward, though there was certainly turmoil enough.

It was more than likely that Hazel had been put into one of the shoregoing boats by this time, but still I was in a mad state of anxiety for her. Such a thing as a person being left aboard by accident in the confusion of a fire at sea had been known to happen. I chafed to go aboard or be near the scene and do what I could for her. She had saved my life, I loved her, and I would run any risk for her.

A filmy fog came creeping in from seaward, and presently a strong breeze was sending it in a little thicker. I paced the deck anxiously, furiously. A man ran aft and spoke to Flamel, who left his post astern for a moment. Here was my chance. I ran to the painter, yanked it in eagerly, dropped lightly into the dingey, and pulled away like mad.

"Hi, there! Stop! Bring her back!" yelled the voice of the mate, who had returned to his post. But I paid no heed and was soon a good distance off in the fog. I could see only a little way ahead, over the waves, but before long I heard cries from the yacht or from her boats, and I was guided by these sounds. I could see no gleam from the fire, which seemed strange. The twilight was settling down heavily with the thick mist. The voices came less distinctly, and then were lost altogether. I hardly knew where I was going, but of a sudden I heard the schooner's bell clang out, and as it rang quickly, again and again, I kept the sounds well astern and pulled forward.

Evidently I had missed my reckoning, for I did not seem to be nearing the *Thetis.* Where was the red glare of her fire? Had it died down, or had the fog and the smoke obscured it? I must have rowed aimlessly about for a half-hour in search of the yacht, and was almost despairing, when out of the fog I heard voices. I pulled hard in the direction from which the sounds came. As they were wafted a little nearer by the wind, I detected something familiar in them. I yelled again and again, and a big voice boomed back in reply. A few more strokes and, over my bow, I saw a small boat with a man standing up in her, and others sitting with motionless oars, as if listening to my call.

"I say, my man!" roared the voice. "Which way ashore?"

It was Sir Charles Walden. And sitting all huddled up in the stern was Hazel Braisted, with a white face under her little cap. There were four or five men in the boat beside the baronet, but I did not distinguish Hazel's father among them. Of course she did

not recognize me, and I doubt if she knew my voice when I shouted:

"I don't know the way ashore, but I'll take you to the schooner. That's her bell you hear over there."

"Well, anywhere out of this cursed fog!" bawled Walden. "Lead the way, my man. We want to get out of this as soon as God will let us."

I turned my boat about and headed toward the schooner. Her bell now sounded rather faintly. Suddenly on both sides of us I heard more voices, and then the low, deep note of a whistle droned out of the mist from not far away. Was the signal from the *Thetis?* She had blown no distress whistles before. How was it that she was beginning to sound them now? Besides, the fire must have gained upon her by this time, and all hands must have left her. But no flame lit the bank out of which the whistle issued. It was all very strange, as of a tragedy going on behind a lowered curtain. Now we were nearing the bell, for the fog-muffled note rose a little clearer.

"We'll soon be there!" I called back encouragingly to the other boat. "We'll soon reach the schooner."

Then I listened for the next brassy note. It did not come. I pulled away, paused, and strained my eyes forward through the mist. Nothing but the wash of the waves about my boat, then once again the long-drawn wheeze of the whistle.

"Where's your schooner?" called Sir Charles, as both boats slackened headway.

"I'm looking for her," said I. "She's over there somewhere."

"Hello, there!" cried a new voice out of the fog, coming from my left.

"Hello!" I replied. "Is that the *Tropic Bird?*"

"No—one of her boats—going off to the yacht. Are you from the schooner?"

"Yes."

"Better pull along to the yacht, then; all hands going aboard. That's her whistle."

The boat showed shadowily through the murk.

"But the yacht's afire," I yelled. "We want to go to the schooner."

"Fire's all out!" came the reply out of the fog. "Follow us if you're going aboard." The boat loomed a little nearer. She was piled dangerously high with luggage, and there were at least eight men in her.

"The fire is out! Oh, good! Good! The fire is out!" It was Hazel's glad voice ringing from the baronet's boat. "Is she much damaged?"

For a moment there was a strange silence. Then the answering voice blew out of the fog: "No—not to speak of. Didn't amount to much."

The girl called out other eager inquiries, but there was no reply. It may have been because the gusts whisked her cries away; but I heard them plainly.

My boat ran up a long, dark wave, with the baronet's just astern. As we topped the watery hill, a great flame leaped from the sea not far away. It was volcanolike in its suddenness, and it shot through the mist, turning it to a shimmer of red and gold.

"There's the fire again!" I heard Hazel's despairing cry. "The yacht is gone!"

Then the whistle moaned dolefully, dead ahead.

"Come on!" shouted the men in the schooner's boat. "Follow along."

Bewildered and well-nigh dazed, I rowed in their wake, and Sir Charles' boat followed me. The wind scurried down more briskly, and the sea kept rising. Captain Thrale's "kick-up" was coming.

Presently dull lights glowed uncertainly ahead, and out of the fog stretched the low, white length of a steamer, her hull, masts, and funnel showing ghostlike in the mist-softened glare which arose from the other ship.

"Why, there's the *Thetis* now!" cried Hazel, standing up in the boat and waving her hand toward the steamer. "And she's safe and sound. But what's that other fire?"

Yes; here surely was the yacht, apparently as trim and whole as ever. And the other blaze that had flared out

of this bedeviled sea—it could come from nothing else than the schooner! The flames shot higher and illumined the night, and illumined, too, some of the blankness of my mental vision. I saw boats coming from the *Tropic Bird,* full of men and luggage, and other boats, also loaded high, were being hoisted at the *Thetis'* side. And it flashed upon me that a part, at least, of the plot was about to be unfolded. I was soon to understand the mysterious relation between Captain Dumble and the Thrales—soon to know the meaning of the strange chase down the coast, of the lying to outside the harbor, of the fire which did not consume the *Thetis,* and of that other and greater conflagration which was now licking up the timbers, spars, and sails of the poor old *Tropic Bird.*

CHAPTER VII.

Sir Charles' boat was hoisted first. I had to await my turn below the davits in the gathering storm, so that my craft was badly knocked about, and once came near side-wiping the yacht, which would have been an ugly circumstance for me. Two other boats were lifted before mine, and in each case they had rather a rough time of it. When I reached the deck I did not see Hazel or Walden.

Looking about the dimly lighted yacht—the electrics were not burning—it was clear to me that little damage, if any, had resulted from the fire. Above decks there was certainly none. It seemed likely that the flames had been confined to the hold. Aboard the boat were all our old crew, with Flamel, the mate, and others whom I knew. I stepped up to Flamel, who was standing forward, giving orders to the boatswain.

"Who is in command?" I asked.

"The old man."

"Captain Thrale? Where is he?"

"Up there on the bridge."

"Where's Captain Dumble?"

"Gone ashore with the owner and the yacht's crew. They got out in a hurry. It looked for a time as though the ship was gone."

"Who put out the fire?"

"We did. It wasn't much of a blaze. I wonder they didn't get it out themselves. But the captain got scared, and ordered all hands into the boats. There wasn't a soul here when we came aboard."

"Captain Dumble was here, wasn't he?" I asked rather sharply, for I was filling out the plot in my mind as I went along, and with Dumble off the yacht when Thrale came aboard it did not work out.

Flamel looked away furtively.

"No, Captain Dumble wasn't aboard," he said simply.

"How did the schoner get afire?" I pursued.

"I don't know. I wasn't aboard." Again the averted gaze.

While we were talking, the yacht's screw gave a tentative grind, and a quiver ran over her. I went to the rail. The *Tropic Bird* was already burning down close to the water. In half an hour the waves, which were now running high, would be closing over her, and the wind, which was scurrying over the sea and filling the night with flying scud, would be singing her requiem.

I hastened forward, and clambered to the bridge. Through the window of the wheel-house I saw Captain Thrale, laying off the course, while Mrs. Thrale leaned over the chart-table. I opened the door, and the wind blew me in.

"Why, it's Mr. Tevis!" exclaimed Mrs. Thrale.

"Yes—Tevis," echoed the captain. "Well, how do you like the new ship?" he said, trying to carry off a light air, though I could see his loose underlip working nervously.

"Captain Thrale," I began, in my hardest tones, "I understand that you are in command of the yacht."

"Yes, sir."

"How did you get command of her?"

"Yes; you see, she was afire, deserted—a derelict—and I came aboard with some of my men and put out the fire and took charge of her."

"And then burned your own boat," I flung out in a flash of inspired conjecture, "so that those ashore would think it was the *Thetis,* and you could steal her. I shall tell you what I think o' that—it's arson and piracy. You ought to be jailed for it, and shall be, if I live to enter charges against you. I demand to be put ashore."

The captain was already nervous and apprehensive, but my sweeping denunciation completely cowed him. He gasped, smiled a sickly smile, and said with a breaking bravado: "That's all right, Mr. Tevis. But you've signed for this cruise, and you've got to go along. We need you to handle the electric lights aboard ship, and for the diving later."

"I signed for the *Tropic Bird,*" I said, "not for the *Thetis.*" Then I thought of Hazel. "There is a young woman aboard, the daughter of the owner; and an English gentleman, a guest of his. I found them in a boat that had put off from the yacht while she was afire, and I helped to get them aboard again. I demand that they be cared for and then be put ashore, and that I be put ashore with them."

"Oh, you do, do you?" sniffed Mrs. Thrale, with a cynical smile, to which I paid no heed.

"Sorry," said the captain apologetically, "but I can't let you land now. You see we're headed out on a long cruise. As for the young lady and the Englishman, we'll take good care of them."

"I think you'd better, sir!"—I brought each word out broadly—"that is, if you take them along on your cruise, which I don't intend you shall do. You doubtless have very good reasons for keeping us aboard—you don't want anybody telling about this affair."

"Gracious sakes alive!" broke out Mrs. Thrale. "Hear the man talk! He don't know what he's saying. Ain't Captain Thrale just as good a master as Captain Dumble, and ain't we got a good crew, and ain't you on a better lay than ever?"

"May I be permitted to ask," I said, with no little asperity, "what is my lay?"

Mrs. Thrale glanced at the quartermaster at the wheel.

"Let's go down into the captain's cabin," she suggested.

The three of us left the wheelhouse, bracing ourselves along the deck. I gazed about for the *Tropic Bird,* and I saw the captain and his wife look, too.

"There she is!" cried Mrs. Thrale, with a sort of sinister delight.

"Where?" asked the captain.

"Hull down, to shoreward."

There was a faint glow far astern.

"Not much left of her by this time," said the captain, with a sigh, which raised him a bit in my respect.

"Less the better," said Mrs. Thrale dryly. "Did you hear them tugs tooting in the fog back there? They're out after her."

"Guess they won't find much," remarked the captain.

Even as he spoke, the glow paled to utter blankness. The *Tropic Bird* had vanished.

"She's gone clean. I knew she'd sink before they could get near her. They won't pick up as much as a gasket." He sighed again very deeply this time, and looked sadly across the sea to where the schooner in which he had sailed on so many voyages had gone down.

No sooner had we seated ourselves in the captain's room than there was a knock at the door, and in came Sir Charles Walden and Hazel Braisted. The girl's round face was white with excitement, and her black hair was in beautiful disarray.

Walden looked sullen, and then stared hard in his slow way at the captain and his wife. I was sitting in a corner, and neither he nor Hazel saw me at first.

"Is this Captain Thrale?" demanded Sir Charles in his big voice.

"Yes, I'm the captain," replied Thrale, in his little voice.

"Then, sir," cried Hazel, stepping forward in sweet dismay, her dark, lustrous eyes dripping with tears, "perhaps you can tell me about my father.

Is he aboard the yacht? I can't find him anywhere. Did he go ashore?"

The captain faced the picture of beautiful, confused young womanhood, and cleared his throat apologetically.

"My dear young lady," he stammered, "your father—I suppose you are Miss Braisted—your father isn't aboard. He must have gone ashore in one of the boats."

"I'm so afraid something has happened to him," said the girl, with quivering lips. "Do you know which boat he went in? He made me go in the first one, and he waited aboard to see if they couldn't put out the fire. I wouldn't let the men row me ashore at first, but made them stay near the yacht waiting for him. After a while he called to me that the yacht must surely go, for they couldn't get the fire out, as the pumps wouldn't work; and he ordered our boatmen to row in. We started, but were caught in the fog. The men quarreled about which way to go, while we drifted about. Then a boat came, and another, and they guided us back to the yacht. I was surprised to find the fire had been extinguished. I heard that it was you and your schooner crew that came aboard and fought the flames after our men had given up the boat as lost. You must have worked very hard, captain, to put it out," she added, looking straight at Thrale, her big, dark eyes pearled by tear-drops.

The captain cringed a little, and stared at the flat top of the desk.

"Yes, they did," assisted Mrs. Thrale. "It was an awful job. The heat in that hold was something horrible. One man was nearly suffocated."

"Terrible! Poor fellow! I hope he'll soon recover!" said the girl, with a sweet and ready sympathy that I felt was native to her. "But my father—don't you know anything about him? I am so—so anxious to know if he is safe."

"Oh, don't worry," said Mrs. Thrale, in a strangely tender tone that startled me. "He's all right. He went ashore with the rest, you can depend on that. There was nobody aboard when we came."

The words seemed to comfort the girl. She pressed a dainty little handkerchief to her eyes, and said:

"Oh, no doubt he's safe—he must be safe; but you know I couldn't help worrying. The fog was so thick and—— But the yacht is moving, and moving fast. Are we going back to San Diego?"

Neither the captain nor Mrs. Thrale was prepared for this quickly turned question. Thrale stared at the desk-top again, and Mrs. Thrale pressed her lips tight in perplexity.

"No, we're not going to San Diego!" I cried, of a sudden, starting from my corner, for I thought it time for me to say something. "We're putting out to sea. These people have seized the ship, and are trying to make off with her."

Hazel turned, and there was large wonder in her deep eyes.

"What! are you here, Mr. Tevis?" she exclaimed, a little show of color coming into her white face.

"In company with these pirates?" fleered Sir Charles.

"Yes, I am here," I explained, warmed a little by the insinuation, "but I am no part of the plot. I shipped aboard the *Tropic Bird* as an electrician to go on a cruise to raise a wreck."

"And instead of raising a wreck," was Walden's fling, "you're raising the wind with these precious pirates by stealing a valuable yacht."

"I believe Mr. Tevis has been acting in good faith," said Hazel quickly, "though I am surprised to find him here."

She spoke with a show of friendliness that was grateful to me. Indeed, she seemed to be greatly pleased and relieved to find in this new and alien company one upon whom she evidently felt that she could count.

"I was just demanding of the captain," I went on, "that the yacht be headed back to port, and restored to her rightful owner."

"Yes, to my father. Oh, how I want to see him—to know that he landed safely!" She turned to the captain

again, and I could see that indignation was beginning to blaze in her eyes. "Captain Thrale," she said determinedly, in her clear, round tones, "you have saved the *Thetis,* and my father will reward you—reward you handsomely—but you have no right——"

"Well, you see," said Thrale slowly, his fingers fidgeting with the edge of the table, "we came aboard from the schooner *Tropic Bird.* We found the yacht afire. All her crew and officers had gone off in the boats. We put out the fire. Then, as there was nobody to take charge of her, we just put our whole crew aboard—you see, we had a large crew—and——"

"And then you played pirate and ran her out to sea," was Hazel's firm and frigid accusation.

"After setting fire to his own schooner," I declared, "so that those ashore might be misled into the belief that the *Thetis* really burned, as Captain Dumble has doubtless reported by this time."

"Oh, that's how the other vessel came to be afire, was it?" cried Hazel, remembering the blaze she had seen at sea.

"Yes," I replied, "that's it."

"But, captain, even though you saved the *Thetis,*" said Hazel, "she doesn't belong to you. Of course you must have thought so, or you wouldn't have burned your own vessel. The yacht belongs——"

"Mercy sakes!" broke in Mrs. Thrale, her eyes burning like points of crude fire and her forehead bar showing severely. "I guess you don't know much about marine matters, young lady. People who sail in yachts generally don't. Goodness me! Can't you see she had been abandoned by her master and crew—she was a derelict, and anybody happening along had a right to her, if they could save her?"

There were further expostulations and demands from the three of us, and on Hazel's part even entreaties; but Mrs. Thrale was iron, and the captain, so ably backed up, was also rigid enough, though I think we all had secret hopes of prevailing upon him a little later, when he should be importuned alone and not in the presence of the woman who so plainly dominated him.

"You can keep your same rooms," said Mrs. Thrale, when Hazel and Sir Charles turned dejectedly from the captain's cabin. "Your Jap—the little fellow who was in the boat you came aboard in—told me which ones they were. If you don't mind, the captain and I will keep the two large ones just forward of yours, Miss Braisted."

The girl sighed, gave me a little bow, and went out with Sir Charles.

Stepping on deck at the last stroke of seven bells, I went immediately to Thrale's cabin. I wanted to find out what had become of the baggage I had left on the burned schooner. The captain said he supposed my things were all right. The steward would know. He asked if I would not get the generators to working, and turn on the electric lights. I hesitated, but when I thought of Hazel and how she must miss the cheer of the bright electrics, I was ready for the work.

I hunted up the steward. He said all my belongings were safe aboard. They were in the between-decks room which Mrs. Thrale had assigned to me. The steward showed me the room. It was a very neat little affair, paneled in oak, and prettily decorated.

I opened a valise, and took out a pair of old overalls, a blouse, and a cap. I must get the generators to work, and then I would begin to investigate. In my costume and capacity of electrician I should have a good opportunity to do this.

Summoning Jim Reynolds, the young man who was to act as my assistant, I went below with him, down the iron ladder that led into the engine-room. We soon had the dynamo burning away, and the current switched on. Now for my investigation. I quietly slipped a little electric lantern into the front of my blouse, and sauntered leisurely into the fire-room among the men. At that moment there seemed to be a scramble to get up steam, for the stokers were heaving in coal at a great rate. Nobody noticed me. I made my way forward, past the coal-

bunkers, and through a bulkhead door, and came to a low, narrow passage, leading into the hold.

Here in the passage I smelled lingering fumes that came to my nostrils as the odor of burnt rags. A little farther along my feet encountered a soft, soggy mass, that showed under the glow of my lantern as old pieces of wet sail-cloth and mattresses, partly burned. I kicked some of the stuff over, and revealed odds and ends of unconsumed tow and greasy waste. Here, then, was the *Thetis'* fire, at close range—a clearly concocted affair—a fire that was nothing more than a smudge, though a powerful one and well calculated to create terror in those aboard who were not in the plot. It was a perfectly safe incendiarism, for not only was the floor of iron, but the side walls were, too.

I kicked over some more of the half-consumed stuff. Underneath it and a little way up the sides I found some large sheets of asbestos. The whole mass of smudge stuff might have burned quite merrily without danger to the yacht. With that bulkhead door leading to the boiler-room closed, and the hatches ajar and pouring forth a dense volume of smoke, the fire panic could have been spread to the engine-rooms from the deck, and no one below need be let into the secret. Two of the yacht's men, entering from the forward hatch, could have arranged the whole job, and one man with a few buckets of water could speedily have extinguished the smudge in the passage.

I could understand how an honest though unwitting attempt could have been made by the men of the yacht, who may have sent streams of water from the fire-hose into the smoking hold, without once wetting the smoldering stuff in the little nook of a passage, and then have desisted without suspicion when Captain Dumble had ordered them away, telling them their efforts were useless.

But the red glare? I could hardly account for that. It came from the deck, and could have been seen by the crew, very few of whom where probably taken into the conspiracy. Yes, but when did that glare break forth? Probably not until everybody but the captain and his confederates had left the vessel. A safe and not too pyrotechnic blaze could easily have been made by the burning of a mixture of red-and-yellow fire from the iron top of a hatch.

Shutting the bulkhead door behind me, I stepped over the mass of smudge stuff in the passage, and peered from an open doorway into the hold, the floor of which was a few steps down from the alleyway. Flashing my lantern into the dark little room, I looked searchingly about. I was now well down in the bottom of the ship, where the angle-iron ribs and braces of her lower waist showed out roughly, and yet I could see no water, only a little suggestion of dampness here and there.

About me loomed huge packing-cases and crates, and, without looking very closely at these, I made sure in a moment that among them were the very ones that had been shipped from our shop in Oakland. They contained the wires and electric fixtures; and those others, doubtless, held the diving-dresses, hose, and pumps.

I passed my hand over my forehead in dazed perplexity, and then it came to me suddenly and with the certainty of perfect conviction, that the boatswain was right in his first unguarded statement to me that the electric outfit and diving-apparatus had never been aboard the *Tropic Bird*. It was clear now that they had all been stowed in the yacht's hold before leaving port. One thing seemed plain enough: their presence here was a part of the very peculiar plan, whatever it was, arranged by Captain Thrale and Captain Dumble.

From the absence of water in the hold, from the main hatchway of which the smoke must have poured in dense volumes, it was probable that the hose had not been directed into it. Or—and this was a likely conjecture—there may have been a tremendous display of fire-fighting activity on the breaking out of the smoke, which activity was nullified by some prearranged defect

in the pumps. Hazel had said that her father had told her they were out of order. A missing valve or two would have done the trick, easily and safely, and only one or two men may have been in the secret, the others all working desperately until ordered off by the captain.

Just as I was leaving the hold alley, with my lantern tucked into my blouse, I saw the boatswain and another man coming from the engine-room. I dodged in among the coal-bunkers and waited until they had passed me. The boatswain remained by the bulkhead door, while the other man gathered up fragments of the sail-cloth, mattresses, and other material, and took them into the hold. Then the boatswain followed, and soon I heard his voice call out: "Hoist away!"

The telltale stuff was being removed through the hatchway to be thrown overboard in the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

I went up to the deck, hastened to my room, got out some clean things, and made myself ready for dinner, hoping all the while that Hazel would be there, yet doubting it. I was anxious to see her, for there were many things I wanted to discuss with her.

In the richly decorated dining-room I met Mrs. Thrale, in her new-found state, and there, too, was the captain, looking a little uncomfortable in all the luxury of the place.

"Don't this beat schooner life by a few knots?" he asked, waving his hand toward the richly decorated panels, representing hunting scenes and shepherdesses with their flocks.

"All hand-painted, too," said Mrs. Thrale. "And the china and cut glass—it's grand!"

"Did they leave the silver?" asked Thrale abruptly.

"A little, not much, but there's plenty plated ware. And you ought to see the linen—napkins as big as pillow-slips, and the table's solid mahogany, padded like a mattress."

"What are you going to do with Miss Braisted?" I asked. "Aren't you going to let her go ashore? You could put in at San Pedro, if you don't want to go back to San Diego."

"Oh, we'll think about that later," said Mrs. Thrale. "You and I and the captain are going to have a little supper here and talk things over."

We sat down at the big, round table, with its clean, white cover and sparkling glass and cutlery, Mrs. Thrale confidently, the captain uncomfortably, and I just a bit morose.

"Miss Braisted and the lord ain't coming to dinner to-night," said Mrs. Thrale. "But we'll have 'em to meals regular after this, I guess; and you, too, Mr. Tevis."

"How about the mate—I mean the first officer," put in Captain Thrale, "and the other officers?"

"Oh, let them eat in the mess-room," snipped off Mrs. Thrale. "This is the owner's private dining-room, and we don't have to mix up with people who belong outside of it. Where is that buzzer?" She was feeling about on the rug with her foot. "There, I guess I struck it."

A door swung open from the pantry, and in came the little Japanese servitor, silent and stiff in his white jacket.

"Yo—— What's your name?" puzzled Mrs. Thrale.

"Yokio, ma'am," said the Japanese.

"Oh, it's too hard, and I'll always be forgetting it. I think I'll call you Charley. Charley, bring the steak right in, and the potatoes and things."

Yokio served the dishes and hovered about, his attention being just a little distasteful to Captain Thrale, who said he didn't mind doing his own "stretching."

When the captain and I leaned back in our chairs, puffing the perfectos which the Jap handed around in a big fat box, Mrs. Thrale said:

"Captain, we're going to own a boat like this ourselves some day, and sail all over the hull world. There's nothing like a private steamer, and we're going to have one."

"Maybe," he replied, through the blue tobacco smoke. "Maybe, Emily."

"Why," said I, just a bit satirically, "you own this one, don't you? You run her as if you did."

"Oh, we're running her all right," was the woman's dry little return. "But you don't suppose we're big enough fools to throw ashes to windward, or to think we can keep her, do you? All we want of her is just for this cruise."

"You mean for the wrecking work?" I asked.

"Now, Mr. Tevis," said she, resting her lean elbow on the table, "does it stand to reason we'd need this fine, expensive steam-yacht, burning I don't know how many tons of coal a day, just to go down to the islands and raise a little old schooner, worth, maybe, three thousand dollars? No, we've got a bigger thing than that." She paused a moment and looked toward her husband, who smiled an uncertain little smile. "You've been making some objections, Mr. Tevis, wanting to be put ashore, and so on. My country! Do you know what you'd throw away if you went ashore and we got another electrician to go on with this thing? Why, you'd throw away a fortune!"

"That's what you would," affirmed the captain.

"Granted," said I, with more than a shade of severity. "You doubtless have some profitable enterprise in view, but I ask you if this thing looks right? To begin with, you seize a valuable yacht, and then you——"

"Hold on," rasped Mrs. Thrale, the bar sinister deepening in her brow. "I've heard enough of that kind of talk. She ain't stole. Didn't you see us pick her up as a derelict? We're on an even keel here."

"But you knew she was not fairly and regularly derelict. You were in a scheme—some would call it a conspiracy—with Captain Dumble, by which you were to gain possession of her on pretense of a fire. I can't imagine how Dumble could do such a thing, and right under his owner's eyes. He must be a pretty rascal."

"You don't understand," said the captain, offering me a fresh cigar.

Mrs. Thrale sniffed and shook herself. "Why don't you tell him how it stands?" said she.

"Well," said the captain, "supposing that a very rich man—a big Wall Street millynaire—had dragged anchor in his business and drifted into white water near an ugly reef. Supposing he finds his affairs in such bad shape that all he can do is to cut his cable and make a run for it, which he does, and sails to a port a good many thousand miles to westward. Then supposing he gets news by wire that his business is gone all to smash, and he ain't got a dollar in the world except what's tied up in a steam-yacht on which he's squandered a pot of money, but which he can't sell right out of the dock because she's so many thousand miles away from any place where they buy steam-yachts. He thinks about her insurance, don't he?—how he can get hold of it?"

"Yes, but Mr. Braisted isn't that kind of a man," I protested. "I could tell that."

"Oh, that kind of a man!" retorted Mrs. Thrale contemptuously. "A man that's been rich—and you know how them Wall Street people get rich—he'll do anything to raise the wind when he's adrift in a bad current. He knows he's in for it, anyway, so what's the difference? Didn't he try to get Captain Dumble to burn her? The captain—now there's an honorable man—he let on that he would, but the more he thought about it, and how he loved the ship and all, the more he made up his mind he wouldn't."

"So he pretended to burn her, after making a bargain with you!" said I, the truth flashing upon me at last. "How much did you agree to pay the grafter?"

"That don't cut any figure," was Captain Thrale's evasion.

"Well, let's say a few thousand. How much is the insurance?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand?"

"As much as that?"

"That wasn't too high," insisted the captain. "She cost him nearly half a million."

I reflected a moment.

"But how was he to collect the insurance money?" I asked. "The creditors would count the policies as an asset. They would——"

"Policies all in his daughter's name," explained the captain. "He transferred the yacht to her six months ago. His wife was dead. He had only his daughter."

"Then this yacht belongs to Miss Braisted. You have seized her property," I declared.

"Nothing of the kind," snapped Mrs. Thrale. "Tell him how it stands, captain."

"Why, you know how them things are," said the captain. "Transferring a ship that way is like taking a dollar out of your right-hand pocket and putting it into your left. It was a makeshift—a ruse—just a neat little business trick."

"And, of course, perfectly justifiable," I sneered, "and your part of the affair, too."

"So far as we are concerned it was," said Mrs. Thrale. "All we did was to pick her up after she had been abandoned, put out the fire that was burning her——"

"A smudge of wet sail-cloth and old mattresses, with a little red fire to make a good stage effect," was my sharp thrust—an unexpected rejoinder that brought queer looks from both the captain and his wife.

"But she was a derelict, just the same," insisted the woman defiantly; "and we went aboard and manned her. The owner didn't want her—he gave up all claims to her, didn't he, when he set her afire and abandoned her? We have done him a good turn, though he doesn't know it—we have saved him from what-do-you-call-it?"

"Arson," said the captain.

"Yes, arson; and he'll no doubt be thankful in time, when he repents of the deed."

"And you needn't think the underwriters are going to make any kick," said the captain. "They'll be too darned glad to find out, after a few months, that the yacht's all right. I suppose he's declared his loss already—he wouldn't lose any time. The underwriters may pay out the money on her, but they'll get it all back when she returns to port. She's good for it."

"But they'll make trouble for you when you land," was my final objection.

"Oh, we'll just run in to some little California harbor, anchor, skip ashore, and disappear after we've sent a note by a messenger reporting her. That will be the way of it, and nobody harmed that I can see."

Then they disclosed their plans, or, at least, a part of them. These were to run the *Thetis* down to Mazatlan, coal her, and cruise up the Gulf of California, along the narrow strip of coast which divides that long inland sea from the Pacific. There it was their intention to make use of the diving and electrical appliances, but to what purpose they did not at first divulge.

"Well," said I, angry because of all this duplicity, "I hardly know what to believe now, after all your falsehoods, but I shall insist upon being told all there is afoot. It will not change in the least my present attitude toward you, nor my desire, I should say my demand, to be put ashore."

"Oh, yes, it will," said Mrs. Thrale, smiling confidently. "It's too big a thing for a young man like you to throw over his shoulder."

"What is it?" I demanded, and out of his mouth there shot, as it seemed involuntarily, the words:

"Pearls—thousands of 'em—the biggest, richest pearls in the world!"

"That's right," affirmed Mrs. Thrale. "They're down there, and we mean to have 'em. And the shell, too—that's worth something."

"The shell?" I repeated.

"Yes—the mother-of-pearl."

It seemed to me that if pearl-fishing were really the object of the cruise, the Thrales would merely be sharing in what must be a general search for the gems. If the industry were so profitable there would probably be many vessels engaged in it. I said as much to the captain.

"Oh, yes," he acknowledged. "The banks have been worked all up and

down the coast ever since the days of the old mission padres. The Mexican Government grants concessions to four or five companies, and they try to keep everybody else out, though they don't half-work their concessions. The biggest boat any of 'em has got ain't sixty feet long, and we're a hundred and twenty-two. But they've got nothing to do with us. We'll go to work on a scale that'll make them slow-going dagoes and Chinamen open their eyes, if they see us."

"But they won't see us," cried Mrs. Thrale, with the air of one already in possession of a great prize.

"That's what the submarine electric lights are for," owned the captain, looking at me half-apologetically. "That's my idea. I've been waiting for years for a chance to do something down there, but I never had the right kind of a ship. You'll have nothing to complain of, Mr. Tevis. We're going to treat you handsomely. Your share will be a twentieth."

"But it's poaching," I declared. "From what you say, it looks to me as though Mexico had granted the same kind of rights to these pearl companies that the United States has granted to the Alaskan sealers. You can't go pearl-fishing in the Gulf of California any more than you can go seal-hunting in the Bering Sea."

"Oh, but it's different, entirely different," persisted Mrs. Thrale. "A seal is something that goes ashore and climbs upon the rocks. The pearl oysters are down at the bottom of the gulf, and you have to fish them up. Nobody can give anybody else a right to anything that's down in the sea and stays there. If they can, why, then, I want to stop sailing God's free ocean, and go back to farming on the Penobscot."

"Yes, Mr. Tevis," said the captain. "We'll make Mazatlan in about two days, and La Paz in about two more. Then for the banks. The richest ones are off the western islands. We can gather shell in fifteen fathoms, where them Chinamen and dagoes can't reach with their old-fashioned outfits. We can work all summer around them islands, and rot enough shell to make us all rich for life."

"And you're going to come right along," said Mrs. Thrale, turning to me sweetly, "and so is Miss Braisted and the lord. Mighty pleasant sailing down there in the gulf. Mazatlan—La Paz. You just ought to see La Paz. Palms, white beach, bright, warm sun—just like places you find in fairy-land."

"I've never been to fairy-land," said I rather testily, though somehow I could not help feeling that the dominant force of this strange woman was bound to work in its own way, and would carry me wherever she willed.

CHAPTER IX.

We lay to in a little cove off the island of Espiritu Santo, in the soft southern twilight. Hazel and Sir Charles were under the after-awning, looking ashore and talking in the desultory way which had often assured my prejudiced mind that, as an engaged pair, they were wholly unsuited to each other.

I went over to where Flamel stood on the lookout. On the way down, Flamel and I had become chummy after a fashion, smoking many a cigar together in his cabin or mine. Although as captain's mate of the *Tropic Bird* and first officer of the *Thetis,* he was to be counted in the plot, the chap had such a manly way with him that I couldn't help liking him. Aside from his other virtues, one thing that drew me to him was his perfect detestation of Sir Charles Walden.

Now, as I approached the first officer, he said:

"Well, here we are! Isn't this a great night and a great place? It's the kind of thing you get in the tropics, though we're just a little too far north to see the Southern Cross."

"When do we begin our diving?" I asked. "The captain hasn't said anything about commencing right away."

"Oh, we'll be all day to-morrow getting the things ready. It will be to-morrow night, I guess, when we start

to work. The island looks pretty in the evening, doesn't it? But wait till morning, and it will show up ugly enough." He pointed toward the land, which rose gently from the gleaming white sands of the beach up to the long, saw-tooth range, softened with a purple glory that was not of earth. "It's as brown and dead and dry as a desert at this time of year," he went on. "Nothing but cactus and agaves. And it's the same on all the islands from Ceralbo up to Angel de la Guarda. You'll hardly find a soul on them, except, probably, a few goat-herders, though I believe there's a band of fierce natives on Tiburon—the Seris. They're all pretty well rock-bound, these islands; and there's no end of shoals and reefs and nasty currents about them. A good many seagoing men call this group the Difficult Islands, though that's not the name on the map."

"The Difficult Islands!" I exclaimed. "That doesn't sound very promising."

"Oh, they'll be easy enough for us," said Flamel. "We've got all the latest charts, and there's good surveys of everything."

"Will you tell me," I asked, "why we put into Magdalena Bay, and why we haven't made port at Mazatlan or La Paz, as the captain said we should?"

"You needn't think we're hunting up any ports," said Flamel, with a dry little laugh, "unless we have to. I don't mind telling you, Tevis, now that we've got this far—though you needn't go to the old man with your information—that Mazatlan wasn't on our sailing schedule at all, nor was La Paz, for that matter. You can understand why."

"But the coal! Shouldn't we be coaling up before long?"

"Coal? Why, bless you, man, we've got coal enough aboard for a liner! The bunkers are heaped high, and it's stowed in sacks in every nook and cranny of the ship, except the after-hold, which is reserved for the shell. Even the shaft alley is half-full of coal, and the lower cold-storage room, and the upper boiler-room, and the trunk-room, and the fish-well. There'll be a lot of time when we'll be laying to and not burning any to speak of. You count all that in, and you'll find we've got enough for the whole cruise. Besides, we have a good sailing rig, and can make five or six knots in a fair breeze without the engines, if we have to. But we'll not be running short of coal, and, if we should happen to do so toward the end of the cruise, we can get enough to run home with up at Guaymas or Altata."

"Why, I thought you said the *Thetis* couldn't make any ports."

"Not as the *Thetis,* but she isn't the *Thetis;* she's the *Searcher.* That's what they did up in Magdalena Bay, bright and early in the morning, so none of you knew anything about it. Perkins did the lettering, stem and bows—he's a mighty neat man with the brush. None of the boats had any marks on them, nor the life-buoys, so there's no reason why we shouldn't run into port on a pinch——"

He broke off suddenly. There was a rattling forward, and a splash in the stillness. "There goes the anchor," he said.

Next morning found me in blouse and overalls, down in the hold, seeing to the getting out of the electric material. The men, most of whom were web-footed Swedes, with a sprinkling of Mexicans and Kanakas, worked with such zest and alacrity—they were all on lays, as it turned out—that we were ready with the helmets, tubes, wires, and lamps by noon.

The scheme of lighting was simple, though it had probably never been adapted to such a purpose before. Long coils of heavily insulated cable were to be stretched from the yacht's generator into the boats from the ends of improvised yards. Each boat was supplied with a tall mast, at the foot of which was a reel. The wire worked through a pulley at the top of the mast and then down, through the reel, to the lamp, which was fastened to the top of the diver's helmet, just like a miner's light. The boats could readily follow the dull glow sent up from the depths as the diver walked along the bottom while the man at the reel paid out the wire. In this way there would be very

little loose wire to tangle or kink, and the diver would not be encumbered by a long trail of it.

In each boat, beside the reel, there was placed an air-machine and two wire baskets, in which the pearls were to be collected. By the old-fashioned method a signal-rope was also used, but I had arranged to dispense with this, and to use the lighting wire instead. By this system our complete device required no more men or lines than were employed by the daylight fishers, and as for efficiency, I felt, as I looked at the apparatus, and mentally compared it with the crude arrangements for pearl-diving—drawings of which the captain had shown me—that nothing could be more serviceable.

We had a trial of the lighting, in which the divers clumped over the deck in their leaded boots, the powerful lights gleaming from the crests of their great helmets, though the sun was shining brightly.

Hazel watched this diving-dress rehearsal intently, her large eyes lustrous with curious interest. The big-snouted helmets appealed strongly to her sense of the grotesque, and she laughed merrily whenever one of the divers shook his head or turned suddenly. She hovered around us all the morning, and seemed to get as much entertainment out of our doings as she would from a vaudeville act.

Although at the first she had lost no occasion to let the Thrales feel the force of her indignation and sense of injury, she now took a calmer view of the situation. She was still anxiously looking forward to her meeting with her father, about whom she gave herself much needless concern, as it seemed to me. But she was wholly in accord with me on the point that it would be idle to be constantly rebelling against the superior force which, for the present, controlled our destinies.

As for Sir Charles, after he had satisfied his first curiosity, the arrangement of our mechanism was plainly a matter of indifference to him. He seemed possessed of a prodigious ennui, and did not follow Hazel as she went about the deck from boat to boat with me.

Once I saw her looking landward, but it was not with a longing gaze, for, as Flamel had foreshown, the island, as seen by daylight, was inhospitable enough. I went over to speak to her, but before I could say anything she started up with a cry:

"What's that?"

For around the point, well out of reach of the rocks, a queer sail and a high, dark hull showed with the suddenness of a vitascope picture. The craft was coming on under a light outside breeze.

"What a strange boat!" she cried. "I never saw anything like it before. It's something like the pictures of the old galleons."

The newcomer was, indeed, an odd craft. She was low amidships and high in bow and stern, and she carried on her single, slanting mast a great lug-sail, fluting against dozens of small yards.

"It's a Chinese junk!" I exclaimed. "I've seen a few sailed by shrimp-catchers in the Bay of San Francisco. And there's another! Wonder what they're doing here."

CHAPTER X.

Captain Thrale was standing on the forward deck, his glass to his eyes, gazing at the junks. We went over to him, while he looked narrowly and nervously at each boat. By the time a third junk had appeared Mrs. Thrale joined us.

"Goodness me!" she exclaimed, taking the glass from the captain's hand and staring through it at the strange craft. "Ain't they filthy-looking things? That deck hasn't been scrubbed for ten years. And talk about tempting Providence! Why, them boats are about as seaworthy as so many chopping-bowls!"

"I'm afraid," began the captain anxiously, "that they'll be up to mischief."

"Them pigtails? Them opium-smoking, mice-eating laundrymen?" snorted Mrs. Thrale contemptuously. "Gracious sakes! I wouldn't be afraid

of them. They ain't got the spirit of guinea-pigs. Want to look at 'em, Miss Braisted?" she asked, turning to Hazel and handing her the glass.

The girl peered through the binocular and exclaimed:

"What a lot of Chinamen! The boats are alive with them."

The lug-sails slanted under the stiff breeze, and the first junk tacked a little nearer.

"It's the On Yick Company, that's what it is," said the captain reflectively. "They've got Espiritu Santo and three or four islands above. Wish we hadn't dropped anchor here. See that fellow come on? He's too darned curious to suit me."

"My land!" cried Mrs. Thrale. "You do beat all, captain. Well, a scurvy lot of Chinks like that ain't going to scare me. There! They're gone off on the other tack. They ain't going to bother a big boat like this—they know they'd get their bellyfuls."

"Where do you suppose they hail from, captain?" I asked.

"From some camp down the island," he replied, breathing freer as he saw the junks sail by. "On Yick works a lot of men and takes out stacks of shell. He used to have a six-year concession from Magdalena Bay north. Now he's got the islands. He takes turtle, too, and whale and seal and abalones—anything he can get his hooks onto. But he's a hull year doing most nothing, in the pearl business. Just wait till we get to work. It won't be close inshore, where the water's waist-deep, and the bank's fished out. But all the same," he added, "I wish them highbinders hadn't showed up the first day. Looks like bad luck."

The afternoon was very hot, and we rested under the awning. Dinner, or, as Mrs. Thrale would have it, "supper," was served at four bells—"an ungodly hour," according to Sir Charles.

"You were speaking of black pearls," said Hazel to me, as I sat next to her at the table. "Are they all that are found here?"

"Oh, no," said I. "There are plenty of white ones, too. But the black ones are as valuable as the white."

"Are you sure?" she asked. "Why, I know in New York we don't esteem the black one half so highly as the others. In fact, I have rarely seen them worn."

"But New York isn't the whole world," I said. "In Europe they prize the black ones as much as the others—that is, when they're of perfect shape."

"Is it true that pearls can be made?" she asked. "I've read about their putting shot into the shells of live oysters, and that fine, large gems would form around them."

"Oh, that's right enough," said the captain. "Chinamen do that. I'll bet On Yick does it. You see, a pearl is only a sort of accident. You don't get a good one in more than four or five hundred shells. It's an accidental growth—a bit of sand, a little sea-bug, or something gets inside the shell, and around it is deposited the nacre, as they call it. That makes the pearl. Why, Chinamen even take little images of Buddha and put them into the live oyster, and the pearl forms all around them."

"How wonderful!" said Hazel.

"Yes; but they ain't much good," said Thrale. "Experts can tell 'em every time."

After dinner I stood amidships with the captain, watching the sun go down into the pink-and-purple evening sea. We were both eager for the approach of night and the first dip of the divers. It was strange how, from actual rebellion toward the enterprise, I had changed my attitude so as now to have a burning interest in it; but the novelty of the adventure and my professional pride in the outcome of the engineering plans compelled me. And so the sun could not sink quickly enough for me, nor could the shades of evening fall too fast. All was in readiness, and the crews stood about their boats or attended to such details as stowing their lunch-boxes and water-jugs. The men were all as eager for the start as the captain and myself.

Up to the time the boats were to be

lowered I remained with Hazel on the after-deck. It was delicious being alone with her, even though our talk for the time was all of the pearl-fishing, of which she evidently thought I had an endless supply of information. She seemed to be as eager as I was for the beginning of the work.

At eight bells the six divers appeared on deck, clad in their grotesque suits, and Hazel was vastly pleased with them.

"I could look at them all day," said she. "They make me think of the fascinating monsters in 'Der Freischütz.' They've got eyes like giant June bugs."

"Yes, and they'll have antennæ enough, too," said I, "when the ropes and wires are connected with their suits. I hope the trailing lines won't be too heavy for them."

The men took their places in the boats. I connected up and tested the Nersts again, covering each light with a dark cloth as I did so, and switching off the current immediately. The concealed flashes showed the powerful lamps to be working at their highest candle-power, and it only remained for me to stay aboard and see that a sufficient current was steadily generated. This might keep me down in the engine-room all night and out of sight of the boats, so that my share in the beginning of the work and until I could safely leave the lighting in the hands of Jim Reynolds, my helper, would be tame compared with the picturesque proceedings of the boatmen and divers. I determined, however, that a little later I should concern myself more with the diving, and would find business in the boats, and even on the sea-bottom. Until the signal was given for the turning on of the divers' lights I remained on deck, my nerves a-tingle with the start of the boats as they stole off in darkness, sounding with the lead-lines as they went. It was thrilling, too, to see Mrs. Thrale, as she leaned over the bridge-rail, and took in with eager, searching eyes the first oar-strokes in the venture which meant so much to her.

It was not until the last boat had disappeared in the darkness that she left the deck, and came down into the engine-room with me to where Jim Reynolds, my helper, stood at the switchboard ready for the signal to turn on the lights. As we were using a three-core wire, the signal would be rung in from each boat. The bells now began to whir, and we switched on light after light. In five minutes after the last light was connected up no more signals were sounded. I knew that the divers were all down, and the lights were playing on the sea-bottom. I would have given much to have been where I could see the diving operations; but this I must defer until a later time. Mrs. Thrale had left the engine-room when the last signal was rung in. She had hastened up to see if any of the lights were showing above the water. It was for this same reason that I soon afterward turned the generators over to Jim and anxiously climbed to the deck.

"They don't none of 'em show, exactly," said Mrs. Thrale, when I rejoined her. "But you can almost make 'em out here and there—the nearest ones, anyway."

Out of the blankness of the night, down upon the water-level, irregular mistlike patches of luminosity, strangely uncertain to the visual sense, wavered, darkened, and straggled forth again in elusive glimmers.

"It's like faint sheet lightning, ain't it?" said Mrs. Thrale. "'Twould be kind of puzzling to anybody that saw it from a ship or from shore."

"But they couldn't really see it unless they were looking for it," I remarked proudly.

"That's right—they couldn't." She gave a sigh that spoke of the letting-down of nervous tension.

A few of the lights seemed to be working in closer to the ship, and once or twice we heard a sound as of a basket striking the bottom of a boat, and then a splash, as of its being thrown into the water again.

"They're getting up shell, all right," said Mrs. Thrale, in the low, pleased tone of perfect satisfaction. "They'll make a big haul to-night. Well, I'm

pretty tired. I've worked hard to-day. Guess I'll go to bed and get up early in the morning when they come in, and see how much they got."

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Thrale was full of a great and gleaming satisfaction on the following morning when the results of the night's work showed themselves in heaped-up piles of "shell," taken from the little bay. The pearl-oysters had all been taken ashore to be rotted on the beach, and I went over in the gig with Hazel and the captain's wife soon after sunrise, when the sea lay like quicksilver, and the kelp swayed gently on the smooth swells rolling inshore. I had had no sleep since the afternoon of the previous day, and was rather dull and heavy, but I was too much interested to consider that. There would be time for rest later.

We watched the men scattering the great oysters about on the dry sand above the mark of the highest tide.

"It's a pity they ain't good to eat," said Mrs. Thrale, picking up a large shell that had been broken in handling. "I'm hankering for some real oysters." She handed the shell to me. "See if there's a pearl in it," she said.

I opened the silver-tipped mollusk with my knife, and searched in the mantle and muscular tissue for a drop of the precious nacre. I scraped out the oyster, and exposed the beautiful, iridescent interior of the shell, with wave on wave of pink, opal, and silver-gray.

"No pearl," I said, "but something quite as beautiful."

"What is that?" asked Hazel, looking at the mollusk with curious eyes.

"Mother-of-pearl," I said, handing her the shell.

"Yes; it is beautiful," said she, "and more wonderful than the pearl itself, but, being so common, we don't prize it. There's a multitude of shells in these piles, but I wonder how many pearls."

"Maybe not one in a thousand," I replied.

Mrs. Thrale passed a little way down the beach to speak to the captain.

"Makes you think of people, doesn't it?" said the girl, poking at the edge of the pile with the toe of her low tan shoe.

"Do you mean there's only one pearl of a person in a thousand?" I asked. "It certainly applies to girls," and I looked at her frankly.

"Oh, don't limit it to one sex," she replied, her face pinking a bit.

We rowed back to the yacht with Mrs. Thrale and the captain. The shells had all been scattered on the sand, and so warm was the sun that they had begun to dry and to gape before we left the beach.

All the boats were coming back, the men sodden and sleepy after their long night's work. Reaching the deck of the yacht, I went immediately to my room, and within five minutes after getting aboard was sunk into a soggy slumber, from which it would have taken more than one jabbering junkman to arouse me.

Day by dreamy day, in that soft-aired, summer-time, while the sea lay calm and blue about us, and the low island breakers chanted their endless circle of song; day by day, while the sun stabbed down upon the awnings or sank into the purple glory of the evening sea, the white yacht lay to in the little bay and swung to her anchor-chain in the shifting tides that crept slowly up over the white sands, or left them lying wet and dark in long, wide reaches, over which the sea-birds squawked and shrilled in their flighty circuits; and night after night the boats went out, and the divers went down and came up, and the shell-piles grew upon the shore.

We had prodigious success on the banks, and seemed in a fair way to fulfil the dreams of the Thrales. We had made some test washes from time to time, and had found the virgin levels which we had been working to be unusually productive of rich gems. Mrs. Thrale had a dozen large and beautiful pearls, of perfect shape, wrapped in a piece of tissue-paper which I saw her

take out and unfold now and again with eyes full of avarice.

"You know they say," I heard her tell Hazel while I was repairing an electrolier in the saloon, "that pearls are often worth more than diamonds. I've seen some no bigger than these two here that brought twenty thousand apiece. But, of course, the general run of 'em is small, and a hundred as big as a pin's head ain't worth one as big as a pea. I don't suppose those flattened things would sell for five dollars apiece."

"Those large pearls are certainly very beautiful," said Hazel. "A dog-collar made of them would be priceless."

"A dog-collar? You don't mean to say them millynaires put pearls on dogs? Might as well cast 'em before swine. Though I've heard there's rich people's dogs that are fed out of gold basins."

"Oh," laughed Hazel. "By a dog-collar I mean a band necklace."

"Well, a pearl necklace would be all right, I guess, though it would be for some queen or princess or something." Mrs. Thrale wrapped her jewels up carefully in the tissue-paper, and put them in a little buckskin bag. "Wait till I get this full," said she, with a smile of cupidity. "Then I guess we won't have to work any more." And she went off smiling.

"Is that the anchor coming up?" asked Hazel, turning to me. "Well, I'm glad to be moving, even if it's only around to the next cove."

"It's the anchor," I replied. "We've fished them all out of here. I heard the captain say we'd be moving along before night."

I twisted in the last screw of the electrolier, and, gathering up my tools, went on deck, followed by the girl.

"Why," she cried, "we're under sail. Isn't the yacht pretty, with her canvas all set?"

"She is that," said Captain Thrale, coming around the corner of the house. "Seems like I was aboard the old schooner again. She takes the wind pretty fair, but her masts are too short. We can go up with the tide, all right, though. We ain't in no hurry."

"What about the shells we're leaving behind?" I asked. "Are they safe there, captain?"

"Oh, yes, safe enough," was the confident reply, "though Mrs. Thrale hated to leave 'em behind, even for so short a time. You see they're around the p'int in a hidden part of the cove, and it's as good as a cache. Besides, I left two men to watch 'em. I suppose we ought to washed them out and stowed the shell aboard, but I'm anxious to be working on another bank, and they're safe there, all right. Ole and Lars are good, reliable men. And we'll be back before long, anyway."

As we rounded the first point and looked astern we could see up on the cliff the sharp outline of a forehead, nose, and chin, which the sailors called Grandma's Face.

We sailed slowly along within easy hailing-distance of the arid island, on which we still saw no sign of life nor the slightest mark of human handicraft. About three miles to the north of Grandma's Face we rounded a low, breezy headland, and there, in an open bay, lay the three junks, with their small boats flocking about them, full of Chinese. We ran close in upon them before we were aware of their presence or they could note our coming. Gongs were booming out from the boats, while a long succession of vocal minor notes rang out over the water, sounding like an incantation.

"That's for sharks," said the captain. "Guess they've got no diving-suits, for there comes a fellow up out of the water with none on."

"And there's another!" cried Mrs. Thrale. "It's nearly all old-fashioned diving. Don't see more than two or three helmets among 'em."

"Then they can't be On Yick men!"

"See 'em scramble in!" piped Mrs. Thrale. "They're pulling back to the junks." She put her glass to her eyes. "They act for all the world as if they was scared of us. I see one of 'em running around with a gun—the dirty heathen!"

"I'll tell you what they are," cried the captain. "They're poachers! That's what they are. I might 'a' known it before."

"They're getting up sail," broke in Mrs. Thrale. "What's that mean? Land sakes! What funny sailors! See 'em pulling on that sheet and all falling over each other!"

Up went the great lug-sail of the nearest junk, which tacked away to leeward of us, and then pointed her high bow straight out to sea. The others followed.

"Wonder where they're going!" said Mrs. Thrale.

"Off for China!" suggested Sir Charles.

"Hope so!" she breathed devoutly. "I don't want 'em any nearer. What do you suppose they take us for, captain?—they act scared."

"Probably for a Mexican cruiser or something." Thrale smiled. He was the kind of man who, being easily frightened himself, most greatly appreciates creating fear in others. "This looks like a mighty good place for pearls. Not very sheltered, but clear of rocks. Guess here's where we anchor, and if they come back, we'll run up the Mexican flag and scare the barnacles off of 'em."

"Aw!" drawled Sir Charles, "another of those nasty, boresome waits; and there's nobody aboard that plays bridge. Gad, if Dumble and Braisted and Phelps were only here!"

"I'll play casino with you," suggested Hazel good-naturedly, falling in with his plans for pastime.

"Casino! No, I'd rather go to sleep. By Jove! This does beat the Dutch for a stupid cruise!"

The first night's work in the new cove proved very successful. Indeed, the pile of shells gathered between twilight and dawn was greater than any other night's haul we had made. But we had a bad time with the tubing. The bottom was very rocky, and an occasional "drag" was inevitable. Besides, the ease with which the hose kinked and cracked convinced me that it was of poor quality. I said nothing, however, as I thought there must be plenty of this essential material for our work.

The captain was rather perplexed as to what to do with the oysters, for he did not want to lose time by taking them back to the cove where the others were piled, and he did not care to risk the return of the junks and a probable loss should he scatter them out to rot upon the sands of the beach near which we lay. So he concluded to take the fresh shells aboard for the present.

"I guess you can stand the smell of 'em for a while," he said to Sir Charles. "It's no worse than some of that cheese Braisted left aboard."

"That Roquefort? Oh, but that's different, don't you know?" said Walden. "It's prime stuff. But I suppose when we go to sea with you old pirates we have to bear almost anything."

We went on gathering shells and stowing them aboard, with the intention of taking them back to our old treasure-pile as soon as the bank should be stripped by our divers.

About a fortnight after we had begun work in the Chinamen's cove, Thrale, who was constantly poking about the sky-line with his glass, made out three strange sails to the southeast one clear afternoon, and a little later he declared that they were the junks coming back. For an hour or so we were all on the qui vive, but we never saw their hulls. They veered off to the westward, and then the long headland to the south obscured them. All that afternoon I could see the captain nervously pointing his glass to the south and shaking his fuzzy beard.

One morning, after the last boat had come in with its load, I saw the captain talking earnestly with Flamel, and soon afterward the first officer came over to me and said:

"I'm going down with Pederson and Swenson to the shell-pile. Old man's getting anxious about it. Want to go along, Tevis? Going to take the launch. You'd come in handy if her sparker got out of whack?"

"Count me in," said I, glad of a break in the monotony of the night work, and

not minding the loss of a forenoon's sleep. We had coffee and rolls before we started, and stowed four rifles aboard, together with a water-cask; but the Swedes ate a hearty meal and spent an unconscionably long time over it, so that the last stroke of eight bells was sounding as I turned the crank over, and we started out in the trimmest little launch I ever smelled gasoline in.

Hazel was on deck to wave us a good-by.

"Going hunting?" she cried, for her eye had caught the guns and cartridge-belts.

"Yes!" replied Flamel.

"Good luck!" she called to us, and added something else which was drowned by the whir of the little engine.

"A mighty fine girl—that's what she is!" remarked Flamel to me, with a chuck of his chin, "but as for that Sir What's-his-name, I'd like to—— Here, Tevis, have a weed. They're pretty dry, but they smoke well."

"Thank you," said I, taking a cigar and lighting it from the match he offered. "And, now, maybe you don't mind telling me what we're going down to the shell-cove for, and why we have brought along the arsenal?"

"It's the old man's idea," he replied. "He's awfully cautious, you know, and he's got it into his nut that there may have been trouble down there for Ole and Lars. It's the junks, you know. They keep weighing on his mind. Said he dreamt about 'em last night—that there was a hell of a fight, and that both of our men had been hatcheted."

"Ay dank maybe isso," said Pederson, shaking his Viking head, while his white brows closed over his blue eyes. "Ay bin hear dem echoen what you call, Master Tavis. Ay dank it vas somet'ing—it was somet'ing."

The other Swede moved his chin affirmatively.

"Look here, Pederson, Swenson, don't cross the dead-line till you come to it," said Flamel. "Here, smoke up and be cheerful." He handed them each a cigar, which they took and lighted solemnly. "And don't throw the matches into the boat or we may blow up. Where there's gasoline aboard you can't be too careful."

The launch flew over the low waves, tipped with lucent gleams from the morning sun. We rounded point after point, running close inshore to get the good of the return eddies, for the tide was against us.

"There you are," said Flamel, as we swung out of the last eddy, and I was steering seaward to clear a kelp-patch. "There's Grandma's Face. We're making it in less than an hour, and will be back by ten and turn in for our morning snooze. Gee! I'm sleepy enough. You know this all-night business ain't exactly what I'm looking for. Makes me feel pretty bum." He yawned prodigiously, and then half-closed his eyes. But in another moment he was alive and subtly alert, with every sense astir. For, just as we turned the little cape below Grandma's Face, Pederson called out from the bow:

"Lookadare—lookady Cheenamans! All going by der shell-pile. Ay yoost bin dinken ve see um, and now dey dare, all right."

"Easy, there! Stop her!" cried Flamel softly. "Don't make any noise. Run her in behind that high rock. We'll make a sneak on 'em, if we can."

CHAPTER XII.

As the swell was light, we were able to approach the high, rocky islet to which Flamel pointed, but the strong tide threatened to carry us out into view of the Chinamen again. So we turned and ran the launch back and up to the first cove north—a tiny affair, well sheltered and secure. We anchored the boat, and, leaving Swenson in charge, waded ashore, our rifles in our hands. A strip of gravel beach led back to the point below the Face, and we skirted the shore down to a place where we could spy upon the invaders—for that they were invaders and bent upon the looting of our pearls, we had not the slightest doubt.

Flamel peered first past the rocky

wall. "They're at it, all right," said he. "The highbinders!"

I looked over his shoulder and along the curve of the beach to the nook in the rocks where our shells were cached. Thirty or forty repulsive-looking Mongols were washing out the shells in little pools of sea-water which stood in holes they had dug in the sand near the lower edge of the beach. They were working rapidly and had washed out about one-half of the shells. The others were being carried in sacks along the beach toward their boats. Half a mile away, down near the southern end of the cove the three junks bobbed on the gentle waves.

"What's become of Ole and Lars?" said Flamel. "Wonder if they hiked out when the Chinks landed?"

"No!" Pederson was shaking his head and making doleful sounds in his throat. "Dey bin dead—dey vas good mans, but dose Cheenamans yoost yumped down on dem likeadot and killady dem dead."

"I shouldn't wonder but what he was right." Flamel was staring hard and pointing into some cactus clumps near the shell-pile. "See those two dark objects lying there? Can you make 'em out?"

"Yes; they're dead men, right enough," said I. "Poor Ole! He didn't like this cove—none of the Swedes liked it."

"No—not. It vas dose dead mans' songs vot Ay bin hearen—dose echoen vot you call!" wailed Pederson. "An' now you see Ay bin tellen true for dot. Ah, Ole vas my bruddern as leekady vas. Ay dank I kill some Cheenamans yoost now—dot's vot Ay dank."

Whr-r-r! Pederson's rifle barked so briskly, right in our ears, as to confound us for an instant.

"Here, you silly Swede—what the devil have you done?" Flamel glared at Pederson.

"Ay dank I yost got one!" cried Pederson. "See him yump!"

One of the Mongols danced in the air and plumped down upon the sands. The others looked up from their work affrighted, and some of them pointed in our direction, while three men who evidently were acting as guards raised their rifles and aimed them at Pederson, who was exposing himself excitedly and had to be dragged back behind the rocks.

"Now we're in for it!" said Flamel. "Keep your heads protected and aim low if they come. Here, you crazy Swede! Stand back here, or they'll plug you, sure."

Pederson's rifle rang out again, and he danced in glee, as he cried:

"An under von Ay got—Ay got him, all right. Dot's two for Ole and Lars. Now Ay get an under von, you see."

Zip! zip! The bullets flew past us or flattened against the rocks.

Flamel and I answered the fire, and Pederson pumped lead like mad.

"There they go!" Flamel lowered his rifle. "They're off for the boats, and they're taking their dead Chinks with 'em. They'd put up a better fight if they'd brought more guns. Come on, boys, let's give 'em a parting rally."

We ran out from behind the point to some low rocks near the shell-pile, and, dropping down behind them, fired again and again, while the scurrying coolies made off to the junks. When they were well out of the way, we went over to the cactus clumps and looked down upon the bodies of Lars and Ole, while Pederson mourned, and punctuated his grief with occasional long-range shots at the murderers of his friends.

We buried the dead Swedes amid the cacti, and piled stones upon their graves. Then, sweating after our heavy work with the shovels in the hot sun, we threw ourselves down upon the beach for a few minutes' rest.

"Now, some of us will have to stay here," said Flamel. "I guess that's Pederson and me. You take the boat, Tevis, and go back and tell the captain what's happened. And there's Swenson—better send him over here. We'll need him, if those chaps come back."

All the speed that was in that launch—and she was good for ten knots—I got out of her on that flying run back to the yacht. Within an hour from the

time I left Flamel the anchor was up, and we were steaming back to the shell-cove.

Mrs. Thrale stood on the bridge with the captain when we ran into the cove, and Flamel from the beach waved his cap to us. The sea-hawk fluttered wildly up and down the little railed platform and scanned the shore eagerly.

She was one of the first to get into the captain's boat after the anchor was dropped, and when she sprang ashore she dashed straight to the shell-pile, getting there ahead of the men and easily leading the tired electrician. She gave one glance over the empty, scattered shells, and shrieked back to the captain:

"Mercy sakes alive! See what they done! They've washed over half of 'em and packed off a lot unwashed. If that ain't what I call the meanest, lowest-down kind of sneak-thieving! Now, we'll have to sail right after them high-binders and get them pearls back. I ain't going to stand for any such piracy as this, you needn't believe. We ought to known better. We ought to seen what they was up to. This is their regular business, robbing shell-piles. No doubt they've got a heap of treasure somewhere. We ought to get right after 'em."

"But we ought to wash out what's left first," pleaded the captain, "or we'll lose 'em all."

"Well, maybe we'd better," yielded Mrs. Thrale, "and I don't suppose them old junks will get very far in a day's sail. We can overtake 'em by to-morrow night and surprise 'em and get the stuff back."

All hands were set to work on the beach, washing out the remaining shells and taking the empty ones aboard. Although they had lost their morning's sleep, the men did not grumble, but went at the washing with a will, using the Chinamen's water-holes and throwing the shells into sacks, which were quickly taken into the boats and aboard the yacht.

Mrs. Thrale stood in the center of operations, her little buckskin bag in her hand, and, swivel-eyed and keen, she saw to it that the pearls were all handed over to her as soon as they were taken from the shells. Sometimes it would be a half-hour before a drop of the precious nacre would be found, and then again a dozen gleaming gems would be brought to light within a few minutes.

Although the Chinamen had washed out so many of the oysters, they had taken none of the mother-of-pearl away, leaving it in sacks on the beach, in their haste to embark. On this fact the captain strangely felicitated himself, though Mrs. Thrale sniffed at his cheap satisfaction. She had occasional belligerent spasms in which she wanted to quit work and steam after the pirates, but the captain held stoutly for conserving what was already in hand. Then, too, he had no stomach for a fight.

"Well," Mrs. Thrale had conceded, "if you *will*, let 'em go. But, remember, they may get away from us entirely; and remember, too, that we're going to grab the first shell-pile we find of theirs, no matter where it is. I shouldn't wonder but there was one in that last cove where we worked."

"We'll go back and see, after a while," said the captain.

"Maybe; but don't say anything more about your old shell. One pearl like this is worth the whole stack of it." She held up a beautiful, round jewel just handed to her by one of the washers.

When I overheard this strange colloquy I was standing about waiting to consult the captain on the important matter of the tubing, which had been giving out at such an alarming rate during the past few nights that there was very little of it left. In fact, one of my men had just told me that there were not a hundred feet of good hose on the reels. There had been such a stress of affairs of late that I had not thought to speak to Thrale about the matter until now. It was clear to me that if we were to pursue our work much further it would be necessary to procure a new supply of the precious air-pipe. When I was able to get in a

word, I presented the matter to him, putting it as mildly as possible, but he began at once, in his usual nervous manner, to make the worst of it.

"Well, if that don't beat all! Dog-gone their hides! I told them shop-sharks that foreign tubing was no good—that I must have American—and I'll bet a dollar foreign is what they sold me."

"Of course they cheated you!" Mrs. Thrale gave her head a knowing shake. "They always do."

The captain stroked his fuzzy beard thoughtfully. "There's La Paz," he mused. "But it wouldn't be safe to run in."

"Have they got it there?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. They've got everything there, the biggest warehouse in that line in the country."

"How far is it?"

"About ninety miles."

"Why couldn't Flamel and I run down there in the launch? It wouldn't take long. You'll be washing and stowing shell here for a day or two."

"Be all right if they'd sell it to you," objected the captain. "But they wouldn't do it."

"Oh, they'd have to, if I went after 'em," said Mrs. Thrale. "But I've got to watch these thieving washers. Mr. Tevis can do it. He's up to their shop tricks."

"We'd have to take along an interpreter," I reflected. "José Martinez would do. If you'll let us go, I'll guarantee the tubes, and be back before you're through work here."

"That's the talk." Mrs. Thrale made a choppy nod with her chin. "That's the talk. Let 'em go, captain."

And so, toward evening, we lowered the launch with a goodly supply of "chow," and some extra cases of gasoline, stowed away in her.

"Look here, Tevis," said Sir Charles, coming along the deck to the gangway where I was just ready to get into the boat, Flamel and José being already aboard, "I want you to take me with you to La Paz, and Miss Braisted, too. We've lost enough time on this cursed cruise, and now that your people have got the yacht, we can't go round the world, you know, and we want to get back to San Diego, find Braisted, and run home."

"Does Miss Braisted really want to go?" I asked, for I would give myself the satisfaction of doubting it.

"Of course she does," he said, with such emphasis that I suspected he was speaking without warrant.

"Why, she seems to me to have become reconciled to the idea of staying aboard," said I. "This is her yacht, and she is interested in her fortunes. I thought she wanted to stay aboard and be ready to assert her ownership when the Thrales gave her up."

"Oh, that's all gammon. Now, I've talked with the captain and Mrs. Thrale, and they're almost up to the point of letting us go, as there's nothing to gain now by keeping us captives on this beastly cruise. I know they'd do it if you put in the right word. They set great store by you, Tevis, particularly Mrs. Thrale, and she doesn't like me. Come, old chap, they'll be here in a minute—just help me out a bit, and I'll remember it all my life."

I saw Hazel approaching the gangway with Captain and Mrs. Thrale.

"Very well," said I, though my heart remonstrated with me, "I'll ask them, as you wish, if Miss Braisted will tell me of her own accord that she really desires to leave the yacht."

He scowled rather uncertainly at this, but led Hazel forward.

"You want to go to La Paz in the boat, don't you?" he said, in dominating tones. "You want to go home. Tell Mr. Tevis you desire to go."

It was not so dark but that I could see Hazel color a little. She looked demurely down, and I thought for a moment, with a sinking heart, that she made an affirmative movement with her head.

"Tell me, Miss Braisted," I said boldly, "what is your wish? Do you want to go to La Paz—do you want to leave the yacht?"

She looked up resolutely, and her dark eyes met mine.

"No," she cried decisively, "I shall stay aboard."

"Enough," said I, with infinite rejoicing of heart. "All ready, Flamel," I called, for the mate was awaiting me with some impatience. I bade them all a feverishly hasty good-by and sprang into the launch, fearing at every moment that Hazel might change her mind under the compelling influence of her fiancé.

"Good-by!" cried the girl, from the rail, waving her handkerchief as we cast off and the little engine began to throb in response to my quick turning over of her wheel. "Good-by! Good luck!"

"Don't forget—American tubing!" called Thrale. "And bring some cigars, if you can."

"And some fruit, too!" piped Mrs. Thrale.

"All right! *Adios!*" And we darted out into the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

All the liquid glory of the gulf was outspread for us as we glided out of the cove and fled southward down the long, glittering moon-path toward La Paz. From the great arch above us the pensive stars trembled in their southern largeness and luster, and dipped down to the sea on every side save where the somber silhouette of the island ridges rose to the east, while the distant but pervasive roar of the surf, from miles of reef and beach, crooned lullabies to our sleep-fasting senses.

"It's due south," said Flamel. "Keep the shore in sight all along till we get to the end of the island. Then there's the strait and Pichilinque Point, and then the mainland to the eastward all the way down. If you'll take this watch I'll sleep till midnight or a little after; then you can turn in."

He stretched himself out on some blankets in the bottom of the boat. José was already inert in the bow. So all in a moment I had the sea and the sky and the throbbing little launch as much to myself as though I had been sailing alone.

Never such a night! Never, though so greatly in need of sleep, was I so much awake. For the visible beauty of the watery world and of the moonlit, star-strewn sky filled me with an ardor of life—with a greedy lust of the senses for the poetry that is more to man than his workaday nature ever admits.

It was hours before we were off the end of the island, but at last its southern cape was abreast of us, and there was the great strait and then the dark headland of Pichilinque, lying low under the blazing stars, while to the southward opened the wide bay of La Paz.

We made the trip safely, and on arrival at La Paz were able, thanks to the suave José, to get not only our supply of tubing but several boxes of Mexican cigars, three huge bunches of bananas, and a half-dozen boxes of oranges. In truth, the boat was so full of freight that it was hard to get about in her.

We left La Paz at noon, and had not gone half a mile from the wharf before Flamel cried out: "What the deuce is that smoke coming down the harbor? Do you suppose she's a passenger boat?"

"I can't say," I replied, looking sharply forward at the incoming craft.

But as she came on we made her out easily enough as a Mexican gunboat—a small cruiser of modern build that cut the water prettily. As we drew near and could see the officers and marines on deck, we noted their interest in us.

"The *General Torres*, eh?" said Flamel, reading her name on the bow. "Ten to one she's out here to protect the fisheries." We waved our caps in reply to a similar salute from a little group of marines. "She'd nab us quick enough if she knew what we were up to. Gee! but they're looking holes through us. Glad that tubing is covered up by the other stuff."

We putted past the gunboat, showing as little concern as possible. We had left La Paz a little after noon, and by six o'clock we were in sight of Espiritu Santo. We ran close in by the island. There was one point from which extended a long, black, broken reef, spat-

tered with spray, about which we had to make a wide détour. Flamel was blaming himself for not having kept farther to seaward and thus saved time and distance, when José, from the bow, called out:

"There's the junks again!"

We were just rounding the reef, when we caught sight of the ugly sails. The junks were running toward shore.

"Let's follow 'em in a little way, and see where they go," said Flamel. "We can run all around 'em, if we want to. And we can't get back to the yacht before nine o'clock, anyway."

So we steered straight for the junks, following them for an hour and nearly overtaking them. We lay so low in the water and the evening shadows were gathering so fast that the pirates did not see us. But of a sudden we lost them, behind an unsuspected point of land.

"What's this?" cried Flamel. "A hidden cove? I don't know whether we ought to go in or not. The heathen might turn their guns loose from some ambush or other."

"Then you think there's more of them ashore!" I peered forward as we neared the obscure point.

"That's what. If this isn't their camp I'm no good at guessing. I'll bet they've got a big shell-pile in there somewhere and a lot of loot of all kinds. See their fires?"

Our boat had slowly poked her nose beyond the abrupt little headland. There we could see three or four campfires twinkling on the beach and a dozen men running down to the water's edge to meet the boats from the incoming junks. The mouth of the cove was narrow, but the inland water broadened into a quarter-mile stretch, which lay darkly before us in the shadow of high cliffs that ran out from the east.

"Pretty snug, isn't it?" said Flamel. "They've found here a tight little lagoon, well guarded by that outside reef and those rocks you see over there, and no doubt so shallow that nothing but their horse-troughs can sail into it. The only way we could get in to attack them and get back our pearls would be in small boats, and it would be pretty risky. It's a mighty safe little camp, don't you think?"

"Well," I replied, "it may be safe from On Yick and it may be safe from Mexican gunboats, but it isn't safe from Mrs. Thrale."

Flamel laughed. "I know what you mean. She'll have that loot back from those highbinders if she has to clean out the whole camp. But I don't know whether we'll tell her about our discovery or not. It will mean a heap of trouble if we do."

The last stroke of four bells was sounding when we stepped upon the deck of the steamer, worn and tired, but full of victory. Thrale looked upon our success as incredible, but Mrs. Thrale took the common view of all forceful spirits.

"Of course they got it," said she. "They had to get it; and when things has got to be done, they're done. Now, there's them highbinders—they've got to yield up our pearls. There's no two ways about it. We've got all the shell washed out, even to the last stinking one we had aboard, and all stowed away in the hold. We're cleaned up in good shape, and now we've got to get after 'em and get our good, lawful treasure back again." She glanced at Flamel and me. "Did you see anything of them heathen while you were down the gulf? They went down on this side of the island. You didn't happen to set eyes on the measly pirates, did you?"

I looked at Flamel and Flamel looked at me.

"Are you tongue-tied—both of you?" She glared at us narrowly. "I'll bet you've seen 'em, or you wouldn't be so tight-mouthed."

"Yes," blurted out Flamel, "we did see 'em; but if you go down that way you may run into trouble. I wouldn't advise——"

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Flamel, what you'd advise. The captain and I will do the advising, and we're going to run down there and make them pagans give up our pearls."

"But there's a Mexican gunboat down that way. We saw her."

"Where?" piped the captain tremulously. "Not along the island?"

"No, she was just entering port at La Paz."

"Good land! She's safe enough there." Mrs. Thrale assumed a confident air.

"Yes; but she saw us," declared Flamel, "and she may run up to have a look at us."

"Much good it will do 'em," said Mrs. Thrale. "We could show the whole Mexican navy a spick-span pair of heels any day in the week. We've got to get down there and get them pearls back. We ain't going to be robbed that way and let it go as if we liked it. Them pirates has got to yield up. Nobody knows how many thousand dollars' worth of our treasure they've got; but it's all coming back—every pin-head of it."

We told her all we had seen of the junks and the hidden lagoon and the camp, and I went below, leaving the three of them on deck arguing excitedly over the proposed chase of the pirates.

It was still night when Yokio rapped on my door and said that the captain wanted to see me on deck. The yacht was lying to, rolling on a gentle sea, and the moonlight sparkled over the water. On the forward deck I found the captain, the first and second officers, Mrs. Thrale, and a dozen of the crew. Some of the men were armed with rifles and shotguns. Others had knives and revolvers. As I came up, a revolver and some cartridges were handed to me. I looked at Flamel inquiringly, and, glancing ashore, saw the high headlands that marked the mouth of the Chinamen's lagoon.

"We're to row in, surprise 'em, and hold 'em up for the pearls," explained Flamel, in low tones to me. "It may be a desperate game. Neither the old man nor Mrs. Thrale has any idea what it means to do this, but she has hypnotized him into the notion, and as he's to stay with the main guard, and 'protect the ship,' I guess he ain't quite as nervous as he might be if he was going ashore with us. You go in the launch with me, and we're to lead the attack. Pleasant morning pastime, eh?"

"I'm with you," said I simply.

"Well, we've got the pick of the men for our boats, and I guess the Chinks won't make much of a stand. Ready, men!"

The launch crew stepped down the gangway, and I started to go with them.

"Mr. Tevis! Oh, Mr. Tevis!" It was Hazel's voice, calling from the deck.

I went back to where she stood, gazing anxiously at me. She put out her hand, and I took it, pressing it gently.

"I just wanted to say good-by," she said, with a grave sweetness of tone that made me love her more than ever before. For to think that she should be up on deck at that hour to see me off filled me with a proud sense of my importance in her eyes. "Those Chinamen—they're not such dreadful creatures as they say, are they? Oh, I'm so afraid you're putting yourself in the way of great danger—and all for what? Just a chance of getting back those paltry pearls. But, of course, you don't like to be robbed and do nothing about it. I understand that. But you'll be awfully careful, won't you?"

"Yes," said I, looking into her serious eyes. "I'll be careful for—for your sake. Good-by!" and I turned and left the ship.

"Good-by!" she called over the side, and she said "Good-by" again as the launch sped away.

I was glad, in looking over our little boat's crew, to see the face of the doughty Pederson, resolute in the moonlight. A quartermaster handled the engine, and Flamel steered straight for the mouth of the lagoon. After us came two other boats, rowing silently, with three or four gun-barrels bristling and gleaming in the moonlight.

When we rounded the high cape which hid the cove from the seaward side, we caught sight of the low-burning camp-fires on the beach.

"We're going on the theory," said

Flamel to me, "that the junk's men sleep ashore, and that they've got the pearls there."

When we were well in the middle of the lagoon, the engine ceased to throb and the oars were quietly slipped into the rowlocks and as quietly pulled by the silent men. The wash of low waves upon the little beach drowned whatever slight noises issued from the boats. We passed the junks closely enough to note that there were few if any men aboard —a fact further proved on nearing the beach, where we saw in the moonlight the silent forms of the Mongols lying about the dully glowing mesquit fires. Not a sentry rose in sight—the three-o'clock-in-the-morning summons of drowsy nature had subdued the spirit of watchfulness. We waited until the other boats were abreast of us, and, leaving one man in each of them, we waded ashore and walked up the soft, wet sand as with padded feet.

The Chinamen lay in scattered groups, their feet to the fire, huddled in blankets.

"You go up against that gang," directed Flamel to me, as he pointed to a group on the left. "Pederson, you take care of that crowd, and I'll 'tend to the middle fellows." He told off the men to help us in these three separate attacks.

"Now, the trick is to get hold of the boss, whoever he is," whispered Flamel, as we approached the sleepers. "He knows where the pearls are. If we can get him we're all right. Now, all ready! Rush in and grab 'em, any way you can, and get their hatchets away from 'em the first thing."

He ran for the central group, and Pederson and I made a rush for the others, over the silent sands. It seemed such an easy thing to descend suddenly upon the sleepers, lying there unaware, and to make them all our prisoners before they could guess who their captors were, that I am afraid we were a little overconfident. At any rate, we had not gone ten steps before a sharp whistle-call shrieked out of the silence, from the center of the camp, where a coolie had jumped to his feet, blowing so hard and so long that the rattle caught in the rift and the whistle piped high and wild.

"Go for 'em, boys!" yelled Flamel. "Grab 'em! Grab 'em!"

There was a wild uprush of the bundled Mongols, as though a cyclone had swept in among them, a screeching gabble of voices—high, frenzied, and quickly changing from alarm to defiance. A shower of shots ripped in among us, hatchets and knives gleamed and clashed, and a clamor of strange calls rent the morning air and was re-echoed from the cliffs.

I sprang upon one of the rising bundles and bore it softly to the ground. Out of it poured shrill, piping cries of strange anathema, queer gasps, and spasmodic gurgles, while a pair of knees dug me in the stomach and a pair of hands clutched wildly at my throat. I felt the breathing, straining body under me, and, thrusting aside the claw-like, pricking fingers, I grasped the shoulders of my man and held him to the earth, coming down hard upon him. As I did this, I felt a rush of air above my head, and, turning, saw that my quick descent had saved me a blow from a hatchet wildly wielded by a fierce pirate, who stood over me with upraised weapon, ready to strike again. I grasped him by the loose-clothed legs, and he came down like a tree beside the other man.

I had the two of them to wrestle with, and the unequal combat must have resulted badly for me, but that a big Swede took my new assailant off my hands with a quiet knife-thrust. At the same time some one in the struggling mass kicked me inconsiderately in the face. It may have been the Swede, for some outside force had brought him limply down upon me. I reached for my revolver. It was gone. It must have dropped from its loose holster into the sands. The hatchetman beside me was lying quietly, and so was the Swede, but my first bundle was now wriggling out of my grasp.

With my eyes near the sands, I saw two black, snakelike objects lying there —the long cues of the dead man and

the living, and, reaching down, I kinked the braids in a hard knot that brought the two heads together, while my assailant squealed and piped like a dying pig, and tried to free himself from the loathsome toils. But I rove those cues together loop by loop, and drew them so tight that the two heads lay close up, and my man was securely anchored. After I had tied his hands together with a big cotton handkerchief which I took from his blouse pocket, I sprang to my feet and searched about in the sands for my revolver, finding it at last, and grasping its handle with a fierce joy.

Looking about, I saw, in the gray light of the quickly approaching dawn, the dark figures of our men running toward the cove, in full cry after a band of coolies, while others of the pursued were getting into their boats and pushing off for the junks. In making this move it was plain that the Mongols knew with whom they had to deal, for with a gunboat's marines in pursuit of them, they would not have been safe from seizure aboard their craft, where they might easily resist a small and poorly armed enemy like ourselves. As I ran down the beach I caught sight of Flamel and Pederson, the long-limbed Swede, well in the lead.

What seemed strange about the flight of the nearer hatchetmen was the fact that they ran all bunched up, like football players in a flying wedge protecting the man with the ball, only that in this case the wedge was flying backward, as the thin end was behind. Soon I saw who the man with the ball was. He was a stout chap, in a big purple blouse, and on his head was a round cap. He was doubtless a red-button man, and the "boss" of the band. They were protecting him and covering his waddling flight to his boat. It was for the reason that he was fat and slow-footed that he must needs work toward the rear of the inverted wedge in its retreat, and as our men pressed down upon them, I saw the purple blouse flagging behind as the others lost loyalty and compactness in their frantic efforts to escape their pursuers.

While I overtook and ran with the rest of our men, the fleet Pederson sprang in among the thinning rear-guard, and seized the "boss" by the collar. The loose blouse came off in Pederson's hand and fell to the ground, while the man, freed from the clutch of the Swede, rushed ahead after the rest. But, strangely enough, he did not go ten steps before he turned, his revolver in his hand, and his round, oily face a picture of fat defiance. He made a desperate plunge back to the fallen jacket, and, planting his feet firmly upon it, swung his glittering weapon to right and left in the frenzy of a grizzly at bay. Pederson paused, for the pistol popped viciously and two shots whizzed past his head.

"Run around behind him, some of you!" yelled Flamel. "Don't shoot him. He's the boss, and he knows where the pearls are."

Three or four of our crowd rushed to the rear of the frantic Chinaman, but he faced about suddenly and sent a bullet in among them, bringing down one man before our eyes.

Pederson rushed in upon the mad fighter and grasped his pistol-hand.

Bang! bang! The bullets whisked through the sand.

"There goes his last shot," said Flamel, while the pistol clicked on empty shells.

Pederson seized the boss around the waist and bore him to the ground, where he kicked and yelled, and clawed like a cougar, and would have fought off the burly Swede, but that two other men laid harsh hands upon him. Even then, with three men holding him down, he squirmed and heaved, and the veins stood out on his fat forehead, from which the sweat rolled in streams. Defiance still glittered from his eyes, while his hands clutched at the jacket.

"Now, boss," said Flamel, "you got heap big lot of pearls—all belong to us. Where you keep 'em?"

"No sabe!" persisted the man, with a grunt as some one's knees pressed upon his chest.

"Oh, you sabe, all right. You heap sabe. Where's the pearls?"

With one hand the prostrate man had

been working at the purple blouse until it was now stuffed into the sand at his side. Flamel noted the action just as Pederson was reaching for the fallen heathen's throat, with the grim words:

"Ay dank I maken him tell, all right."

"No, Pederson," cried Flamel, "don't do that. Let's have a look at this jacket first. He risked his life for it. It may be what we want."

He seized the blouse and was pulling it out from under the man's body, when it was clutched tightly by the long-nailed fingers.

"You no takee coat!" gasped the boss. "Him my velly good coat. You letta me go now, you catchee heap money—gol' money—tlee—fo' t'ousand dolla'. I catchee coat, go junk—fo' t'ousand dolla'. You sabe?"

"Ah—ha!" cried Flamel. "They're in the jacket, all right. Tlee, fo' t'ousand dolla'? Not on your blooming pigtail! Let go!" He pulled at the coat, the Chinaman still retaining his clutch upon it. A violent yell, and it was free from his grasp.

"Hold on, Mr. Flamel," I cried, for out of the rent lining poured a half-dozen big white pearls. They fell in the sand, and I picked them up, while Flamel gathered the garment together and rolled it up tightly.

"Come down this way where the sand's harder, Tevis," said the mate, "and we'll look into this thing on safe ground, where we won't lose anything. Tlee, fo' t'ousand dolla'! I'll bet there's a hundred thousand in this thing."

He took the coat down to the wet beach, where the sand was hard as a plank, but when he unfolded the blouse no more pearls fell out. We looked closely at the garment, which was made of coarse silk, heavily padded. It was not old, but it was greasy down the back from much contact with an oily pigtail. Turning it over, we saw that it was lined with a satinlike cloth, stitched on in curious ribs, or strips. We fingered the lining closely, even into the loose sleeves, but we could feel nothing that semed to us like pearls; but pearls had rattled out of that lining, and there must be more in it somewhere. We laid the coat down on the sand, inside out, and pressed firmly down upon it with our finger-tips and palms, but through the cloth we could feel none of the hard little objects for which we were in search.

"This is a trick coat," said Flamel, mystified. "Let's cut out a little more lining and see what's inside."

I took my knife and ripped up the lining from the bottom rent made by the boss' claws on the left side of the blouse.

"Ah," said I, "leather! The thing's got an inside lining, and these strips are put on to keep it in place." I made a lateral incision across several of the strips and through the leather. "Here you are," I said—"long inside pockets, not much bigger than pencils." I squeezed along one of the pockets, and out of the cut I had made rolled three or four good-sized pearls, white and scintillant in the morning light.

"Yes," cried Flamel, "that's where they are. It's our lucky day. The thing's chuck full of pearls. I can feel 'em now. Just run your finger along that pocket. It's like a snake that's swallowed a string of beads. Let's try the other side."

I cut through the double lining in the right side of the blouse, and squeezed out a half-dozen black pearls.

"White on the left side, black on the right," cried Flamel, in his high excitement. "The thing's as good as a gold-mine. They've no doubt been robbing shell-piles all up and down the gulf." He rolled up the coat and tied it together with a handkerchief. "We needn't look any farther until we get aboard," said he. "Now, what will we do with the boss? Guess we'd just better bind him hand and foot and leave him on the beach for his folks to look after later. Then we'll take care of those poor chaps of ours who went down in the fight."

"Did we lose any men beside the one the boss shot?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, quite a number—pretty well chopped up by the hatchetmen, too. They're lying back there by the camp-

fire. We've got to give 'em a decent burial, and there's three or four others that have got bullets in 'em. We've got to take care of them. Guess we'd better hurry and get 'em aboard as soon as we can. If you'll stand guard with one or two others over the boss, Pederson and the rest can 'tend to the wounded and throw our dead into the lagoon. They can look after their own when we clear out."

"There's one live Chinaman back there cued up to a dead one," said I. "What are you going to do with him?"

"Cut his pigtail and let him go. We're not going to make any prisoners."

He went back to the scene of the battle, while I guarded the boss, after a man had brought some tag-ends of rope from our boats and we had secured the now submissive prisoner.

When I saw the Swedes bearing the bodies of their comrades down to the water's edge I had to look the other way, for in their sorrow some of them were weeping bitterly and lamenting unto high heaven. If there is a sight on earth calculated to undo me it is that of a big burly man in tears. I heard the bodies splash into the lagoon from where they were thrown off a rocky scarp into the sea. The wounded men were already in the boats. There was nothing to do but to get aboard and speed away from the place which had been the scene of our great fortune and our greater disaster. We rigged tow-lines from the two rowboats to the launch, and, giving the junks a wide berth, we speeded down the lagoon toward its mouth, the curses of the coolies coming to our ears over the low waves, and a half-dozen badly aimed rifle-shots making the water spout about us.

We reached the yacht without further mishap, and piled aboard, dragging up the wounded men. A few minutes later we were under way.

"Oh, Mr. Tevis!" It was Hazel's voice in my ear, full of sweet and sympathetic agitation. "I'm so glad you weren't hurt." She caught at my hand and gave it a convulsive little squeeze, while I thrilled to the warmth of it and of her precious words. For there was more than mere friendly interest in her touch and tone—there was the tender concern of one who cared deeply—and my heart leaped to the music of her voice.

Mrs. Thrale gloated over the Chinaman's blouse, and cut it to pieces in her wild anxiety to get every pearl that might be concealed there. We had caught a glimpse of the *General Torres*, and, deeming it wise to give her a wide berth, steamed north at full speed, passing the islands of Santa Catalina, Monserrate, and Carmen.

As we neared Tiburon Island, I saw the old avid look come into Mrs. Thrale's eye.

"Nothing has ever been done on these banks to amount to anything," she said to me. "There's been a very savage tribe—the Seris—living on the island, and they'd go for anybody that came near. But they're thinned down now so there ain't many of 'em left, and it's safe enough. Let's try our luck here."

We worked along the island coves for a week, keeping always to the northward. The diving was all done in the daytime, but we were never molested. Not a sail did we see out on the gulf, not a soul ashore. If the Seris saw us, which is likely, they made no demonstration. Once or twice the captain thought he made out some moving figures among the mesquits, but, as Mrs. Thrale said: "Eyes that are always on the lookout will see a heap sight more than there ever is to see, anyway."

The banks were rich, but not so fruitful as Mrs. Thrale had anticipated, and with only two divers at work, we did not greatly increase the bulk of the treasure in the buckskin bag. It is not strange that, under the circumstances, the work began to pall upon me. I could make no use of my electrical craft save in the simple duty of lighting the yacht, which Jim Reynolds could easily attend to.

At the end of a fortnight the captain began to fret and chafe. He wanted to steam down the gulf and away, declaring that the season was nearly over, and that very few more pearls could be

gathered. But Mrs. Thrale, eager to secure the last grain of treasure, held him as firmly as our good bow anchor. And, strange to say, the luck turned just when we thought she was ready to yield. The divers brought up heaping boatloads of fine, large shells from the bottom of a cove near the northwest end of the island.

"While our luck lasts I'm going to stay here," she announced to the captain.

But the luck did not last. It changed in a very unexpected manner. One afternoon, while the boats were out and the men were washing shells on a little strip of beach a half-mile away from the yacht, we saw the junks come trailing around the lower end of the cove. They made straight toward us under a fresh breeze, and they looked "desperately like business," as Flamel phrased it.

"I'll bet a dollar they've been hunting us all over the gulf," declared the first officer. "They've probably armed up for a scrimmage, and have been waiting for a chance to surprise us. Wonder if Thrale will make a stand, or will he run for it?"

There was a great stir on deck. The captain was sounding his boat-call, blowing until he was red in the face, but the men did not hear him, as the wind was off shore. So he blew the steam-whistle, and the crew rushed from the shell-heaps to the boats. They sprang in and pulled hard, but a brisk breeze favored the pirates, and before we could begin to sense what had happened, they were pelting the boats with rifle-shots and at such close range as to cause our men, who had but three or four weapons among them, to fall like flies.

We fired volley after volley from the deck of the yacht, but there were few of us to handle the guns, and the distance was too great for anything like execution.

Never before had I seen Sir Charles so excited. He ran about the deck, flourishing his rifle and stopping now and then to rest it upon the rail and blaze away at the nearest junk. As for Hazel, nothing could induce her to stay below. She saw Mrs. Thrale flitting darkly about, and she declared to me, when I begged her to leave the deck: "I don't see why I can't be allowed here as well as another woman. I am armed. See!" And she flashed forth a tiny revolver.

Our long-distance firing was all against Mrs. Thrale's notion of defense. She wanted the launch and the gig lowered and a charge made upon the enemy; but to this Thrale and Flamel made strong objections. They pointed out to her that the evident intention of the Chinese was to cut off the boats and then run alongside and board us before we could get up our anchor and steam away. They saw the great advantage of an attack on the yacht when there were so few men aboard to defend her. They would not hesitate to board us now if they could reach us.

"If we could only run in a little closer," groaned Mrs. Thrale, "we might save the boats yet."

"We can, I think," said Flamel, and the captain assented, though I believe he was all for making off and away.

So the anchor swung up in a hurry with a great clank of the chain, the screw began to whir, and we headed about, moving slowly, while the lead-lines swished in the shallow water. All the men had been ordered to cease firing until we should be nearer the junks, but Sir Charles kept banging away until Flamel seized his rifle and told him he would take it from him unless he stopped wasting ammunition.

I had been in a frenzy of apprehension for Hazel, who was constantly exposing herself. For though the junks had not yet answered the yacht's fire, they might do so at any moment. At last I managed to get her below, and made her promise to stay there. I gave her a big British bulldog, and showed her how to load and fire it.

She was in a fever of fear when I started to leave her; but it was not for herself.

"You're putting me down here out of harm's way," she cried, "while you are going up on that horrible deck."

Her round cheeks whitened as she spoke. "Promise me you will take good care of yourself. Promise me."

I promised, with a highly gratified sense that she should be so solicitous for me, when I had heard her say nothing about Sir Charles, and rushed back to the deck. A shout from Flamel greeted my ears.

"The gunboat! Do you see her? Look there!" He pointed to southward where, whisking around the cape with belching funnel, the *General Torres* was coming on under full steam. "And the Chinamen—see 'em scoot for shore! That's all they can do now. They've sunk both our boats—the murderers—and there's nothing left for us but to vamose."

CHAPTER XIV.

Already the yacht was heading northward, and the propeller was beating wildly. The Mexican was coming on, sending an occasional shot hustling about us, but amid all our excitement the view of the shoreward flight of the Mongols presented itself as the most vivid part of the picture. The quick, scrambling vitascopic action of the highbinders as they made away from the junks, some of them leaping over the side in their frantic rush for shore, piping mad calls to each other, fighting wildly for places in the boats, and pulling like demons at big-bladed oars that splashed in the water or "caught crabs" in the lurch and toss of the overloaded little craft.

But on the smaller junk of the three a number of men remained. The bow was pointed obliquely inshore, and the lug-sail started down until its boom dragged in the water.

"They're going to beach her," exclaimed Flamel, "and let the others drift. Wonder if the dagoes will think they're worth picking up. Yes; they're slowing down."

We watched the slackening cruiser, while our wake widened and we flew north like a wedge of wild geese.

"They're lowering a boat," said I. "She's full of marines. And there's another."

But no sooner were the boats in the water than the cruiser headed for us again. She had merely sent the marines off to secure the junks while she renewed the chase of the yacht. I went with Flamel toward the bridge, where the captain and Mrs. Thrale were studying the movements of the gunboat through their glasses.

We found Mrs. Thrale in a very thoughtful mood, and the captain fidgeting more nervously than ever.

"I don't know what we're going to do," he said, scratching his beard. "Even if we get away from the gunboat, we're so short-handed there's hardly going to be men enough to fire up. We shouldn't have let any of the coal-passers go out in the boats, Emily."

"Well, maybe not," she admitted. It was one of the few times I had heard her admit anything. "But we'll have to get along some way. Maybe we can sneak some Mexicans aboard somewhere after we get out of this fellow's sight."

"If we ever do," sighed the captain. "He's making pretty good time."

"May I come up and see?" Hazel's soft, round face showed above the edge of the bridge. "What has happened?"

I gave her my hand to help her up the last step. I explained to her our position, touching the disaster to the boats as lightly as possible, and saying hopefully that we would probably be able to run away from the Mexican before long.

As I looked back to the cove we had left I was sad. I thought of the brave men who had gone down in the boats sunk by the pirates. Among them had been the doughty Pederson and poor Jim Reynolds, my faithful helper in the dynamo-room.

We remained on the bridge half an hour, during which the positions of the two steamers seemed to be practically unaltered, although Captain Thrale declared from time to time that the *Torres* was gaining. We hugged the northwest shoulder of the island, and then

stood eastward toward the Sonoran coast, it being the captain's idea that in dodging the numerous headlands he could better shake off his pursuer, as he was bound to lose sight of us now and again. Thus in rounding the northwest cape, with its upstanding cliffs, the smoke of the gunboat vanished from sight.

"I'm glad we've lost her," said Hazel, "if it's only for a little while. She seems to be following us like a hound after a deer. Where are we now?" She addressed the question to me, but I could not answer her more definitely than to say that we were off the north coast of Tiburon Island and were running eastward.

"Let's go and see," I said, and we stepped into the pilot-house, where the chart of the gulf lay outspread upon the table. "Here is Tiburon," I pointed out the island.

"Why, it's close to the Mexican coast," she said, leaning over the map, the tip of her pretty forefinger on a long, narrow strait that separated the island from the mainland. "I hadn't any idea it was so near. Let's see—what is the name of that coast land? Desierto Encinas. The Encinas Desert. And look at all those rugged mountains. A very forbidding coast, isn't it?"

"Yes; everything about the gulf seems to be rugged, harsh, and dry. That land is a waterless waste, and has probably never been crossed by a white man."

"Then here's where we are," said Hazel, as we both leaned over the chart-table, our backs to the strained, abstracted man at the wheel. "See—Bahia Aqua Dulce. Doesn't that mean Sweetwater Bay? And we're sailing toward Punta Perla."

"Pearl Point. But I don't believe Mrs. Thrale will want to stop there to gather any this time."

As I looked at the chart I wondered what the captain's object was in making toward the mainland. If the Mexicans gained on us at the present rate, they would run us down in less than three hours, unless some fortuitous circumstance should present itself in our favor. I measured off the north coast of the island by the scale. It was fifteen miles from the northwest cape to Pearl Point, above which the mainland made a great gulfward sweep, rounding itself into a curved enclosure, forming a large bay, to which the strait between the island and the mainland formed a long, narrow southward-stretching outlet. It seemed likely that it was the captain's intention to run down the strait, which was four or five miles wide and twenty-five miles long, and by dodging the headlands keep out of the Mexican's clutches.

Hazel saw me pause with my finger upon the long outlet, which might be our way to freedom.

"What is that name—Estrecho Infiernillo?"

"Little Hell Strait," said I. "See at the opening of it, there, Boca Infierno —Hell Mouth."

"With Punta Tormenta on one side and Punta Desesperación on the other. I can tell what those mean."

"They look cheerful, don't they?" said I, "but they may not be so bad, after all."

As a cold matter of fact, however, I was not at all pleased by the outlook. What was this Little Hell, into which one voyaged between Point Torment and Point Desperation?

Glancing ashore, I saw that we were rounding another headland, and were making toward the Little Hell as fast as steam would propel us. Then I looked astern. The Mexican was coming on, grimly and swiftly, gaining on us at every turn of her screw.

"It ain't any use, Emily," Thrale said, as he and his wife stepped nervously into the wheel-house. "He's got us. We may run along for a mile or two, but we might just as well head about, and wait for him."

"And run up a white flag—a sheet, or a table-cloth, or something, eh?" she sneered. "And take our pearls aboard and hand the whole bag over to the greasy dago, with our compliments and best wishes? No, siree! That ain't my style, Jim Thrale. We're going to run

that strait, just as I told you we would. He won't dare to follow, and you know it."

"You're going to run the Little Hell?" I gasped. "Have you looked at the chart? Have you——"

"That's just it," cried the captain, clutching at my implied remonstrance as a friendly support, "she doesn't know what it means. I've looked it all up. It isn't navigable. It's got a worse tide than the Bay of Fundy. It's full of ugly cross-currents, rips, williwaws, reefs, rocks, and everything. We'll never make it in God's world."

"Don't swear, Jim!" Mrs. Thrale objected fiercely. "I ain't afraid, and you oughtn't to be. You got us into this thing—you've bottled us up in this little bay. There's only one way out." She thrust her sharp-nailed forefinger down at the strait. "That's through the strait. We'll be around that point in twenty minutes, and then we'll run it just as slick as lightning down a slippery-elm tree."

"It can't be done," groaned the captain. "Let's head over to the island. We could beach her over there and get ashore in the boats."

"Yes, and land on a desert, and be hacked to pieces by them hatchetmen that are ashore back there! They wouldn't like anything better. I say we're going to run that strait."

"And I say——"

"Oh, go to bed!" she yelped. "I guess I know what we're going to do."

"My God! What a woman!" groaned the captain, fleeing down to the main-deck, Hazel and I following him. He disappeared behind his cabin door, and, after I had conducted Hazel down the companionway to the saloon and left her with Sir Charles, I returned to find him very red of face and with a defiant look in his eye. That he had been bolstering up his invertebrate back with strong drink I made no doubt, but, as to the influence of these libations upon our fate, I could only surmise. Was the man in him, whatever its minimum measure, about to assert itself at last? With Flamel and the boatswain I followed him up to the bridge, where Mrs. Thrale was giving undisputed orders to the wheelman.

"Emily," the long dominated but now rebellious husband cried sharply to his wife, "I want you to get out of that house and off the bridge. I can run this ship, and I'm going to do it."

"Ha-h-h!" she flamed forth, at these words of insubordination. "I guess I know you, Jim Thrale, and I guess—— What's this? Are we slowing down?"

"Yes; I gave the order just before I came up," said Thrale, with a mixture of deference and defiance.

"You did?" she blew out like the back-draft of a furnace.

"Yes; I did, Emily. Come out, now, and let me run the ship. First thing you know we'll be in that hell-mouth, and God knows where we'll land."

"Swearing again, are you? Seems to me, Captain Thrale, something's the matter with you." She came over close to him as he stood half in and half out of the wheel-house. "Your face is as red! Mercy sakes alive! You've been drinking. I smell it on you."

There was a dull roar astern, and a shot flew over the deck.

"Hear that!" she shrilled. "He's close onto us now. He wants my pearls, but he ain't a-going to get 'em." She flew to the speaking-tube and yelled down: "Full speed! Crowd on all steam! Get every coal-passer to work! Get every knot out of her you can! Captain's orders!"

"But it ain't captain's orders!" protested Thrale, pale with fright.

"Straight ahead!" she shouted to the wheelman. "East, one point south."

"Head about!" yelled the captain. "Head about!"

She turned upon him, while the wheelman stood confused, and another gun boomed forth.

"Mrs. Thrale!" cried Flamel, "do you know what you're doing? I've stood enough of this. You can't run me any more!"

"Mrs. Thrale!" echoed the boatswain, "you ain't going to run me, neither."

"I think," said I, "that we'd better do as the captain commands."

The quartermaster spun the brass spokes of the wheel, and they glittered in the sunlight. The yacht's nose turned to starboard, in obedience to the captain's order.

"Let go that wheel!" shrieked the sea-hawk, her face a black cloud of wrath, and her beak in the air, as she grasped the wheelman by the shoulder, thrust him out of the house, banged and locked the door, and yelled through the glass:

"Run up your white table-cloth! Surrender, if you want to—the whole cowardly pack of you! I'm not going to give up this ship to any garlic-eating greaser. I'm going to save my pearls!" And she grasped the wheel in her bony hands and sent it whizzing back.

The captain threw up his hands in despair and ran about the bridge like one obsessed. The yacht flew around the point in a sweeping, swirling tide, and dashed straight into the mouth of the Little Hell.

CHAPTER XV.

Flying down the great flume of the Infiernillo, the *Thetis* was no more in that Homeric tide than a snarl of kelp or a dead rush. Whatever of independent motion the yacht held by the twirl of her busy screw was barely to be perceived. Staggering like a wild inebriate, reeling from this side and then to that, she was sucked into the Boca Infierno. Her bow rose heavenward, and presently pitched down into awful depths, her stern out of water, and her propeller racing like a windmill in the empty air. Now and again the whole bulk of her would be tossed back and forth like a tennis-ball.

At times great twisting devil's holes in the wicked water appeared suddenly at her side, and when one of these giant whirlpools flung against her with harsh impact, she shivered all over, and the cry would go up, "She's struck! She's struck!" But when she had swung half-about and lurched free from the whirlpool, she would plunge on again, snowy sweeps of spray flying to the tops of her masts, while she settled, rose, and darted crazily down the strait.

Captain Thrale, to all essential purposes clean daft, clung to the handle of the wheel-house door, his baggy clothes a-flutter, glaring in upon the wild woman at the wheel, who stood with set teeth and gleaming, far-away eye, as oblivious of him as of the strip of oil-cloth under her feet. But Flamel, stirred by the peril, flew about the ship, ordering the hatches battened down, sending the boatswain and me on this errand and that, and making all the men labor like fiends. So that, although I was desperately eager to reach Hazel's side and to aid and comfort her, I could not get down to her. It must have been a terrifying experience for the poor girl, sitting in the darkness below deck, and I wanted to give her the cheer of the electric lights, but the first officer would not listen to my suggestion that the dynamo be set to work. Even when there came a respite from my labor on deck, and I was clutching at the rail abaft the funnel, he would not let me go.

"Keep your station there," he cried, as he ran forward. "You'll be needed at any minute. There'll be hell to pay here before long, or I'm a Dutchman. This is what comes from petticoat piloting. I'll see 'em both damned before I ship with 'em again, and you can bet your last bean on that."

Between Punta Tormenta and Punta Desesperación, and for a mile or two farther down the strait, we saw the land on either side, as it lay sharply under the afternoon sun; but a little farther along the turbulent tide gusty flows of wind shot over shore and sea, sending up great puffy clouds of gray pulvis from the desert reaches of the mainland. These strange powdery mists swept over the ship and obscured the sun, so that we could see but a little way about us.

Quickly the wind rose to a booming gale, and everything aboard was clattering and swaying, while the already extravagant motion of the ship was increased to a sort of demon's dance. There was a terrifying helplessness in

her strange lurches and rolls. She would fall headlong down a watery slope, tumble with a side twist, and be righted by a merciful blow, while the gale scuffled about, and the dun clouds swept gigantically down.

Looking aft in the growing darkness of the dust-storm, I caught dismal glimpses of the battened companions, the foot of a mast, or the sprawl of a parted guy-line.

A door near-by banged hard, a snowy skirt fluttered at my side, I heard a gasp, and Hazel's hand clutched the rail near mine.

"You!" I cried, my heart knocking desperately in my breast. "How in the world did you get here?"

"Through the upper boiler-room passage and out the side door. I had to fight to get it open." Her voice rose high. To be heard above the roar she had almost to scream.

"But you must go back!" I commanded. "I can't let you stay here. Where's Sir Charles? You must go to him."

"He's in the saloon. He's—he's ill." And I made no doubt that he had been resorting to Dutch courage. "Please —please let me stay. I'll do everything you say."

I reflected that to leave her below with a drunken man in this imminent peril of tide and storm would hardly be wise. Beside, there was a glorious feeling of elation in her sweet companionship.

"Very well," I said simply, "but come in here close to the lee of the house, and cling hard to the companion-rail. Don't let go for a minute."

A sousing sea swept over the stern, and the yacht rose, shook herself, and flung sidelong into the trough. We did not speak for very terror, until. as by a miracle, she righted herself and plunged on.

"Do you think she can live through it?" Hazel shuddered, and crept nearer to me.

A hooting blast swept down upon us, threatening to tear us apart, and the whole dun world reeled with the ship. I threw an eager, defending arm about her, and drew her close to me, in a precious, grateful contact.

"I don't know," I said, full of the exaltation of her close presence, of the feel of her warm body next to mine. "It looks bad, but whatever comes we shall face it together, and if we die, Hazel, we shall die together. I don't care to live a moment longer than you; for I love you, love you, love you!"

She drew back a little, struggled in my grasp, her bosom heaved, the tears came to her eyes, and the gale swept them from her white cheek.

"I know it," she said. "I know it. I have realized it from the first. But we can't—I'm not free—you know how it is—I'm promised. I'm——"

The wind blew her words away. She struggled out of my arms, and stood gazing through the murk and the flying spray. "But we'll go through this all right!" she cried, with a burst of confidence. "She's a wonderful boat. Look! The sea isn't so rough down here. We're in smoother water. We'll soon be out of it."

There was a rending shock, the ship shivered like a man collapsing under an awful blow, she listed frightfully, swung half-about, and one of her masts crashed over the side.

"What was that?" cried the girl, in an access of terror, as I threw my arm about her again to save her a fall to the deck.

"We've struck!" I exclaimed hopelessly. "It can't be anything else. Cling to me! Why don't you cling to me?"

She obeyed, trembling in every limb, and I seized a life-buoy that hung against the house, tearing it down and fastening it about her waist.

I saw Thrale running aft, waving his arms like a man bursting from a madhouse and screaming orders to the terrified crew. I saw Yokio and two other pantry boys, with the cook and a quartermaster, fly from a doorway. Then came MacLaren, the engineer, two coal-passers, and, last of all, Sir Charles lumbered forward, clutching at the side of the house. I did not see Flamel nor the boatswain, and feared they might

have been washed overboard. As for Mrs. Thrale, I fancied her as still hugging the wheel. The captain and the men all made for the boats, tearing at the davit-lines which swayed wildly in the swinging blocks. To me it seemed perfect folly to try to launch one of the boats. If there had been a life-raft, there would have been some good in getting it out, but no small craft could have lived a moment in that awful sea. It seemed to me that our best chance was in staying by the ship, hopeless as was the outlook; but Hazel sprang forward nervously, as if to break from my grasp, and ran to the boats at the wild call of the frenzied captain.

"Don't move," I commanded, tightening a knot in the buoy-line about her waist. "She may right herself."

I waited while the sea flooded high over the lower side, and she begged me to seize another buoy that was near at hand. I was about to do so, when the swinging yacht pitched sternward, and a mighty wall of water swept over and engulfed us. Clinging tightly to the loose sleeve of the girl's stout jacket, I was tossed upward like a fish-bob, and heaved forward by the resistless avalanche of water. Nothing seemed more certain than that we were both overboard, and at the mercy of the mad waters.

It occurred to me that in hanging to the girl I was lessening her chance of escape on the life-buoy, and I was actually debating whether or not I should let go, when of a sudden my feet struck something hard, and a white object rose before me. It was a rail stanchion, and I threw my arm about it, hugging it desperately, still clinging to Hazel, who was being tugged away by the embracing wave. I pulled her back and close to me, and rejoiced with mighty exultation, for the receding sea had left us upon the wheel-house deck. Yes, there was the little bridge in its railed enclosure, and there was the white side of the house, and the plate-glass windows, and Mrs. Thrale standing inside, still clinging to the wheel.

After a long, deep intake of air, I cried to Hazel, asking her if she were all right. She made no reply, and lay limp and inert in my arms. The deck now rose free from the water, for the stanch yacht had righted herself at last. Whether or not she was leaking badly as a result of her striking I could not tell, but this much I knew: She was still afloat and running in the stream, which seemed strangely quieter, though it was rough enough.

I worked my way along the bridge, dragging Hazel with one hand, while I gripped the rail tightly with the other, and, reaching the wheel-house door, I turned the handle. The door was still locked. I rapped desperately upon the glass. For a few minutes Mrs. Thrale paid no heed to my knocks, appearing not to see us. Then she glanced down through the glass, her face changed a little, and she reached out one hand and turned the key in the lock. I opened the door and bore my burden of collapsed womanhood inside, and, for want of a better place in the incommodious little room, laid it upon the table, chafed the little hands, tore off the life-buoy, and loosened the clothing about the throat. I could not see that Hazel had been injured, but judged that the breath had been beaten out of her by contact with something while the waves were tossing us about.

All the while that I worked to restore her, Mrs. Thrale stood silent, tugging at the wheel.

"Can't you do something for her?" I cried fiercely. "I'll take the wheel. How are you steering?"

"Take it," she said. "My arms are nearly broke. Keep her hard a-port. She's making water fast. There's nothing left now but to beach her. There's a place over there"—she nodded toward the island—"that seems like good water—probably an eddy—it's to lee of them rocks. I'm trying to run her in there."

I grasped the wheel, and Mrs. Thrale turned to Hazel.

"Poor child," I heard her say, and, when after a moment I turned anxiously, I saw that she had loosened the girl's clothing at the waist.

"She's beginning to breathe all right now," said the woman, after a while;

"but don't pay no attention this way. Stick to your wheel."

We glided into the eddy to the lee of the rocky headland, and the wind, with its obscuring clouds of dust, left us of a sudden. There was a slow cessation of the beat of the screw.

"Water's up to the furnace-grate," said Mrs. Thrale simply. "No more power!"

"What's keeping her afloat so long?" I asked.

"The compartments. Lucky thing she struck astern. I expect she banged sideways on a rock. Isn't this a splendid cove?—almost like a lagoon. We can beach her here all right. She's got head enough."

"Oh," I heard Hazel gasp softly, "am I still on the yacht? I thought we went overboard. Where's Edwin?" And I blessed the sweet voice of her, my heart vibrating to its music and rejoicing in the sound of my name from her lips.

"Mr. Tevis?" said Mrs. Thrale. "He's all right. Just lay back now and rest. My, but your things is wet! But they can't be changed now." She turned her eager eyes ashore. "Yes, we've got way enough to run her close up to that little spit, and the eddy will help, for it sets inshore. Good gracious! I didn't think she'd strike so soon."

For there was a great crunch, a heavy grinding down below, the bow swung about, and the *Thetis,* her head high and her after-sail down to the level of the water, lay aground on a bank of gravel within two hundred feet of the spit.

"She lays lovely!" cried Mrs. Thrale. "I guess them greasers won't be hunting us down here. My, what an awful run! We made it, though, and we're safe. But the captain! Has anybody seen the captain?"

She ran out upon the bridge and whisked down and along the deck with fluttering skirts.

I turned to where Hazel was leaning back in the chair, her clothes still dripping, and in sad disarray. But she smiled sweetly at me, the old shine and sparkle in her eyes.

"And you saved me!" she cried. "You saved my life."

"Yes," I said, "and by doing so saved my own, for I could not live without you. Are you quite recovered?"

She shivered a little in her cold, wet clothing.

"Yes," she said. "But there's Sir Charles. I must go and look for him. He may be drowned. I must go and see."

"No," said I, "let me go." I ran out of the wheel-house, and followed Mrs. Thrale along the deck. She was looking everywhere for the captain, but had not found him. On the whole deck we saw not a soul save Yokio, who appeared suddenly out of the upper boiler-room door.

"Where's the captain?" demanded Mrs. Thrale, the vertical furrows showing deeply in her brow. "Where is he?"

"No. I no see captain," replied the Jap. "I see firs' officer and engineah. Tha's all I see."

Flamel came out upon deck, followed by MacLaren, the engineer.

"It caught me down below," said Flamel. "Lucky thing for me I was forward. Had all I could do to keep that drunken fool from going aft and drowning himself. Wouldn't mattered much if he had."

"Is Sir Charles safe, then?" I asked, with strangely mixed feelings. "Is he safe?"

"Yes; he's safe enough—sobering up down in the mess-room. He and Mac and Yokio were on deck, but they got down below somehow."

"But where's Captain Thrale?" shrieked the woman. "Can't nobody tell me where he is? Why do you all stand gaping around? Why don't you hunt for him?"

We searched all about the yacht, above and below decks, down to the edge of the water, which stood knee-deep in the saloon, but we did not find him. In the mess-room I saw Walden, red-eyed and raging over the unhappy turn of affairs. He stormed aloud, and then leaned upon the table and groaned

and lamented over what had befallen the yacht, bewailing her loss as though it had been a purely personal one; which, in view of his marriage prospects, he doubtless considered it. He seemed to take it for granted that Hazel was safe, for not one question did he ask regarding her. I left him lamenting, and went upon deck. Mrs. Thrale was sitting forward, alone, in the high bow of the boat, scanning the sea sadly, her head in her hand, and her black figure strangely drooped and shrunken.

"She's given him up," said Flamel. "The engineer's told her how it happened. He saw the old man and the others washed over the side by a big wave after we struck. Poor old girl! I guess she's sorry now that she took things in her own hands. But I don't know. She's got her treasure, and that's a great consolation."

"Oh, don't say that," said I, looking forward at the desolate figure in the bow. "Remember how many years they sailed together."

"And remember how many jawings and henpeckings she's given him," sneered Flamel. "He's better off where he is. I'd rather be dead twice over than wedded to a thing like that."

I hastened back to Hazel, and assured her of the safety of Sir Charles. She received the news calmly, saying:

"I'm very glad." But there was no joy in her voice. "I wonder if my room is flooded," she said presently.

"Yes; but I can wade in there and get out anything you want."

"But couldn't Mrs. Thrale?" she began.

"I can't ask her just now. She's—she's very busy. I can bring anything you want."

Her eyes fell, and she colored a little as she said:

"I shall need a lot of things. A warm wrapper, a pair of shoes, and stockings, a sweater, a—— Do you suppose you can guess what else?"

"I'll try," said I, and I ran below to ransack her lockers in search of such feminine garments as I thought she would require. It took me a long time to make the selection, and I was fearful of the things getting wet, as I was splashing about, knee-deep in water. In the white coverlet of her bed I bundled up a red woolen wrapper, together with what I considered a fairly complete outfit of pretty white garments of various shapes, and all wonderfully sweet because of their association with their dear wearer. I handled them as reverently as if they were holy vestments, but I puzzled for a little while over the collected assortment, fearing lest I had left out something. Then my eye caught sight of a pair of dainty corsets, and I hastily included them, together with a bath-robe and some towels.

Gathering the four corners of the coverlet together, I carried my bundle carefully up to the wheel-house, without dropping anything in the water or dragging it along deck.

"Thank you ever so much," she said, as I laid the loose luggage upon the table. Then she blushed scarlet as the corsets fell out upon the floor. I pretended not to see them, and turned to close the shutters in the wheel-house windows.

"The key is in the lock," said I, as I went out.

She was not long in dressing, and when she opened the door again she looked fresh and sweet, and had mysteriously disposed of all her wet clothing. She was arranging her hair as I came to the door and asked her what else I could do for her.

"Nothing," she replied, "only I think every well-arranged wheel-house ought to be supplied with a mirror and combs. When are we going ashore?"

"Why," said I, "Mr. Flamel says we're very well off where we are for the present. The tide is falling so rapidly that we'll soon be high and dry."

"I don't suppose there's the remotest chance of the yacht ever floating again," she sighed, leaning back wearily in her chair.

"No," said I, "but we'll get off some way. Let me roll up that bath-robe and make a pillow for you."

"Thanks," she said, after I had performed this service. "That will do very

nicely. It's lovely of you to take such pains for me." Her head dropped upon the improvised pillow.

An idea seized me, and I left her abruptly, ran down to her room, gathered up the blankets, sheets, and pillows from the bed, and called Yokio to help me with the top mattress, which was in two sections. The Jap and I carried the bedding up to the house, where I piled the parts of the mattress, one above the other, upon the chart-table, and made a comfortable couch, into which I assisted her.

"Oh, this is so comfy," she sighed, as she sank upon the bunk.

"And Yokio can bring you up some tea and toast from the pantry," I said, as I went away, "and I'll send Mrs. Thrale to you as soon as I can get her."

Then I went down to my own room, which, being well forward, was not flooded, though threatened by the settling and shifting of the ship. I changed my clothing and came on deck again, where I found Flamel and the engineer. We discussed the situation. It was agreed that we were in no immediate danger from the sea. We had run aground at high water, the tide was now falling rapidly, and would continue to do so for a few hours. As near as we could make out, we were a little over half-way down the island, at the point where the strait was widest, which fact accounted for the water being smoother there than elsewhere in the Infiernillo; but, looking out from the cove, we could see, beyond the circling eddy, the wild waters of the channel, almost as turbulent and forbidding as ever, though the wind had evidently abated a little, as the dust-cloud was much less dense, and we could see through it to the shore of the mainland, seven or eight miles away.

"There's two of the boats left," said Flamel; "the launch and the gig. The gig's no good—it's had a bang from something. The launch will be all right when she's baled out. But I don't like risking that channel again until it's a good deal smoother. When a pot like this gets to boiling it keeps on for a while. It's that big wind that's done it, with the ugly tide they have here, and there'll be choppy seas and cross-swells, and God knows what all for a day or two yet. We can wait here aboard, I guess, unless something happens. As for me, I don't want to take any chances ashore. It's an awful country, and if the Seris don't get you the hatchetmen will."

"Do you suppose they'd dare attack the yacht?" I asked apprehensively, thinking of the girl in the wheel-house.

"Of course they would; but she's pretty well out of sight behind those hills there, and the island's a big place. They might not run across us for several days."

"How about the rifles?"

"What's left of 'em is forward there in the captain's cabin, and safe enough, but there isn't much ammunition, and mighty few men to handle the guns. You see, there's only five of us left, counting Yokio and the Englishman. This cruise has cost a lot of lives. The Jap's a good little fighter, and the Britisher may be all right if we can keep him sober."

"You haven't counted in Mrs. Thrale," said MacLaren, with Scotch canniness. "She's as good as a man. She's gone all to pieces over the loss of Thrale, but she'll pull together again. And there's the lassie—she can pull a trigger. So there's seven of us altogether. Don't you think we ought to get the rifles ready?"

We all went forward to the captain's cabin.

"Poor old man!" sighed Flamel, as he entered. "There's his pipe and pouch, just as he left 'em. He was a mighty good old chap, after all, if you let him alone. But that wife of his got the upper hand of him, like a bad habit."

"There's mighty few guns left in the rack," said I. "Only three—a rifle and two pea-shooters, for that's about all those shotguns amount to. But there's six or eight revolvers—pretty good ones, too—and, let's see—seven boxes of cartridges, three pistol, two rifle, and two for the shotguns."

"What's that safe open for?" asked the engineer, pointing to the corner

where the door of the strong box stood ajar. "Better lock it up, hadn't you, Mr. Flamel?"

Flamel glanced into the safe.

"Just as I thought," he said, "she's taken out the pearls. She's got the bag tied up in her clothes, no doubt, and wearing it around."

"She's canny," smiled MacLaren.

Flamel closed the safe-door and locked it. We armed ourselves with revolvers, and took the extra weapons over to the port side, which was nearest the shore, and stowed them in a tool-closet handy to the deck.

"Now," said Flamel to me, "if you'll take these glasses and go up on the bridge and keep a sharp lookout ashore, we'll have Yokio get us something to eat, and send you up a smack. We'll keep regular anchor watch—you and Mac and me. Mac, do go order the chow, and I'll see what I can do for Mrs. Thrale. She's up there in the bow, as still and stiff as a figurehead. Mighty sorry for the loss of the old man. Maybe she wishes she hadn't been quite so brash."

I took the glasses and the rifle and mounted to the bridge. The door of the wheel-house was closed, and the shutters were drawn. One of the windows was down from the top. I was glad to think that Hazel was resting so quietly. I tiptoed about the deck that I might not wake her, should she chance to be sleeping. I glanced fondly at her door now and again, but for the main part I was all eyes for the shore.

It was a wild and desolate land, this of Tiburon Island, and nothing more mysteriously forbidding could well be imagined than the picture I saw from the yacht. Bare, high buttes rose inland a few miles away, and the nearer foot-hills, arid, rock-dotted, and brown, rounded away to a low strip along shore, where the sand lay in little white dunes. A half-mile north the hills parted in a great gulch that ran down to the shore, and in this rift grew mesquits, palo verde scrubs, and sahuaros, with an occasional agave. If any enemy attacked us he would come through this gulch, for the bowl-shaped cove was guarded by high, impassable scarps both up and down the strait—rocky barriers that hung out over the water and terminated in islets of rock, over which the spray dashed high.

CHAPTER XVI.

The tide fell so rapidly that by five o'clock in the afternoon—about an hour and a half after I began my watch—the spit had stretched its narrow tongue out to and beyond the yacht, and, looking over the rail, I could see the water pouring out of the great jagged hole in the port side, near the stern. The steel plates were rent and bent where they had struck the rock, and the hole was a desperately ugly one.

Even with the advantage of having the yacht on the beach, it would be impossible for us to repair the damage, or even make shift till we reached port. An idea occurred to me, however, that before the turn of the tide it might be possible to dam up the leak so as greatly to lessen the flooding below decks. The thought must have come to Flamel or MacLaren at about the same time, for a little later I saw them at work with canvas, ropes, and planks, stanching the gaping wound in the *Thetis'* side. Yokio, too, was bearing a hand.

I looked to see if Mrs. Thrale did not take an interest in this important work, but she sat motionless in the bow—gazing out to sea, as though she expected to catch a vision of the captain out there where he had gone down in the tidal flood.

As the sun was dropping below the buttes I heard a movement inside the wheel-house. The door opened, and Hazel's face appeared.

"Oh," said she, "I didn't know I was to have an armed sentinel while I slept. Is there so much danger as that? This part of the island appears to be wholly deserted."

"It is," said I reassuringly. "My presence here is only a matter of form. We have to keep anchor watch, and we're very short-handed."

"Yes, I know," she sighed. "Yokio

told me all about our losses when he brought the tea. Poor Mrs. Thrale! Had I been able, I should have gone to her and tried to comfort her. Where is she?"

"She's away up forward," I said. "You mustn't try to see her now. Wait until you are better."

"But I *am* better—I feel quite refreshed. I must go and see her." And she passed bareheaded along deck, the last glints of the fading sunlight weaving an aureole in her hair, and the red wrapper fluttering in the breeze. She made her way down the companion and up the slanting deck to where the silent woman sat in the grief of her new widowhood. She put her hand gently upon Mrs. Thrale's shoulder, and the desolate woman turned slowly.

Glancing toward them again a little later, I saw that they were talking together as two women in their isolated position must talk, no matter what of misfortune or of sadness may have come to one of them. It was plain that, under the sweet sympathy of Hazel, the desolate woman had been led away from her dismal abstraction, and when, as the shadows of the buttes lay over the cove, they came up to the bridge together for a word with me, I could see that Mrs. Thrale was no longer the sea-hawk, but a woman, softened by sorrow and contrition.

"Now, if you'll go in there and sit down, Mrs. Thrale," said Hazel, after I had answered some questions put by the bereaved woman as to our situation, "I'll fetch you a cup of tea."

"Thank you, Miss Braisted," said Mrs. Thrale. "You're awfully kind, and I don't want to make you any trouble, but the tea would taste good. I'm—I'm so——" and she fell to sobbing, leaning upon Hazel's shoulder, and clinging to her while she led her into the wheel-house.

While Hazel went below for the tea, Mrs. Thrale wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, and, looking out at me, said, with great earnestness:

"Did you see the captain after I took the wheel? Was he very mad at me? I know I jawed him—I was always jawing him, and he was such a kind, patient man! But he wasn't mad—he wasn't very mad, was he?"

It was clear that a little deception was due from me, and I hastened to assure her that I had seen no great anger on the captain's part—he had probably felt that she was doing what she thought was best when she took the wheel.

"He couldn't have died cursing me, could he?" she cried appealingly. "He couldn't—could he? He was a good man, and a good captain. I knew him since I was that high. We went to school together. It's true I was always jawing him, but he understood—he knew it was only my way."

Having found her tongue through the well-meant influence of Hazel, the contrite woman kept on in a flood of self-reproach and self-vindication, mingled with pitiful praise of her dead husband. But when she had drunk the tea which Hazel brought up to her, her frayed nerves seemed to knit themselves up a little, and she was led more easily to the consideration of affairs aboard ship—the condition of the flooded cabins below deck, and other matters which Hazel brought forward to keep her mind off the captain. I was relieved when I heard her say:

"Where's Mr. Flamel? I want to know about the things in my room. I expect my clothes are all under water."

"I don't think so," said I. "They may be wet, but there's not much water down below at present, and there won't be until the tide turns. Now is the time to get your things out. Some of us would help you, but Flamel, MacLaren, and Yokio are plugging the leak, and I must stay here on watch."

"Well, Sir Charles—he ought to help a little," said Hazel. "I wonder if he's—he's recovered."

"Him? Oh, he can't do anything like that," said Mrs. Thrale. "I guess I can do it myself."

"I'll go with you," said Hazel. And they went below, Mrs. Thrale leaning upon the girl for support as they passed down. It was plain that she was nearly exhausted by her strained efforts of

the day, and overcome by the loss of her lifelong mate.

While they were below Walden came up on deck, bearing on his face every look of a sot just recovering from a revel.

"I say," he called up to me, "what kind of a rotten hole are we in now? We're stuck here, I fancy."

"You've guessed it right the first time," I replied coolly.

"Tevis, you're a good sort. Hunt me up a weed or a pipe. I can't find one anywhere, and the Jap won't come when I ring."

"Hunt it up yourself," said I, striding to the other end of the bridge and gazing carefully ashore.

He went away grumbling. Just then I saw something moving in the mesquits. It was the skulking figure of a man—a bunchy figure that instantly suggested a Chinaman. The shadows were deepening ashore, but I made him out plainly enough through the glass; and, while I stood staring, uncertain whether to send a shot after him or not, two other bunchy shapes joined the first one. The three men stood behind a bush, only their bare heads showing, for they had removed the big hats which would have made them conspicuous objects. They stood there gazing at the yacht a good fifteen minutes, evidently taking careful note of everything they could see aboard. Presently they turned and trotted back up the gulch. Whether these three Mongols were an advance-guard of the main body that had been driven ashore by the marines on the opposite side of the island, I could only guess. But it pleased me to note that none of them carried a rifle.

Reflecting a moment upon this sudden appearance of the hostile hatchetmen, it seemed plain to me that, having lost their boats, and being anxious to keep out of the way of the marines, the highbinders had all traversed the island, thinking to discover some means by which to cross the strait to the mainland. From the fact that those whom I had seen had no rifles, I argued that they had left them aboard the junks in the wild scramble for shore when the men from the gunboat attacked them. No doubt they still had their hatchets in their belts, and probably revolvers; so that, considering their large number, they were very dangerous foemen. In their desperation to cross to the mainland, they would not hesitate to attack and loot the yacht, particularly as our lack of men for defense must be clear to them. They had themselves sunk two boats' crews from the *Thetis,* and knew of the loss of others in the fight in their secret cove, as well as the two guards of our shell-pile, whom they had slain.

They would doubtless come on in full force in the night or in the early morning, when the tide would be low again, and the thought of what would ensue made me catch my breath, while the hands that clasped my rifle closed upon it with sweaty palms.

Flamel and his two helpers had just finished their work, and had come on deck. I ran over to them, and hastily reported what I had seen.

"It doesn't surprise me," said Flamel. "They're mighty anxious to get away from this island. The Seris have probably been paying their respects to them. Indians hate Chinamen, and would fight those chaps in a minute. Besides, the marines have no doubt smashed their small boats and sent the junks down to Guaymas. We've got to get busy, boys, and strengthen our position. We'd better tear down some of the upper works and build a barricade amidships. There's plenty of axes in that tool-closet. If they've only got a small number of guns, which is likely, we can stand 'em off for a few hours, anyway."

"And then?" said MacLaren.

"And then it's all up with the gang of us, I guess, unless the sea goes down and we can make away in the launch." He glanced out upon the turbulent stretch of the strait, where the gale still blew and the sea rose wild and high.

"Nothing doing there," he said despairingly. "We've got to fight it out right here, and do the best we can. Yokio, run and bring the axes."

The Jap hastened away. I saw Mrs. Thrale coming up the companion with Hazel. Flamel went over to meet them, and I was selfishly glad that it was he and not I who had the setting forth of our miserable situation to them. While they were talking I took MacLaren upon the bridge. This was not merely to renew my watch, but to ask him some questions, as an idea of defense had occurred to me.

"Is there much water in the engine-room now?" I asked eagerly.

"A little."

"Could it be pumped out?"

"Yes, if we had time. What for?"

"I want to get the dynamo started."

"But we don't need any lights now. They'd only attract attention."

"I know, but this is for a different purpose."

"What's that?" he asked curiously.

"Live wires—I want to run four or five all around the ship—along the rails and above them, and along the sides."

"Great!" said the Scotchman, slapping his thigh. "A guid scheme, I call it. But you don't need anything more than the winch-engine for that. It's got a separate boiler, you know. I could fire that little thing up in an hour, and have your deenamos spinning. Here comes Flamel. Tell him."

Flamel appeared with a couple of axes.

"I've had to tell the ladies," he said. "Miss Braisted takes it coolly enough, but the old woman has gone all to pieces. Wouldn't have told her, if I thought she was so shaky. Her nerve seems to be all gone. I've told the Englishman, too, and he's braced up and promised to help, though I don't rely much on him. Hear the Jap chopping? Some of that expensive woodwork has got to suffer. Wonder if we could get the pianos up. They'd make splendid deck barriers."

I told him my plan of the live wires.

"Bully!" said he, grasping my hand heartily. "Just the thing! Maybe we'll get out of this fix yet—that is, if they don't cut 'em with their hatchets."

"I've thought of that," said I, "and if you'll let me have some of that planking you're cutting out, a half-dozen good tight casks, and some of the grating from the boiler-room, I'll rig up a surprise for 'em before they ever get aboard."

"What's that?"

"A float, with the grating on top, charged with a good stiff voltage. We'll moor it against the side nearest shore. They're bound to get up on it, in climbing aboard, and if they wade out in their bare feet, or if their wet shoes come in contact with it, a good many of them will lose interest in the yacht in pretty short order."

"Hooray!" exclaimed Flamel. "All hands at work on the float—that is, Sir Charles, Yokio, and I. You and Mac better get the dynamo to running."

While the engineer was firing up the small engine, I got out some coils of copper wire and some strips of dunnage, on which to string the "juice lines" along and above the rail. I was fastening the strips upright to the rail stanchions and working hurriedly with my wire-twisters and cutters, when Hazel came over and said pleadingly:

"Can't I help? Let me do something, won't you? Mr. Flamel told me what you were doing. It's a splendid plan. I don't see how it can fail to keep them off."

"Yes, you can help," I said gladly. "I'll need some one to stretch wire with me."

"Sha'n't I begin to uncoil it while you are putting up those little posts?"

"No, I've seen many a good lineman tangle up a coil in a hundred kinks. Just wait a minute. I'll have these sticks up presently."

When the last post was in place, I stood astern, gave her the end of the wire, and told her to carry it up to the bow on the starboard side, which she did. Then I drove my first staple, and ran forward and helped her pull on the wire. While she held it fast, I drove a staple over the wire at the bow post, denting it deeply into the wood. Mrs. Thrale had resumed her position in the bow, and was gazing out to sea. She did not look at us, and we did not disturb her.

"Now, if you'll take this hammer and this handful of staples," said I to Hazel, "and nail the wire fast to all the sticks along the lower end, near the deck, I'll run the coil around the port side."

She obeyed each order promptly and with surprising sagacity. After three wires had been run on my little poles, which extended two feet above and below the rail all around the yacht, I uncoiled two strands of loose wire, to be thrown over the side later, one of them to hang down six or seven feet below the deck, and the other a little above it. This would give me five wires, each arranged so as to make a separate electric circuit, so that if any one of them were cut, the disconnection would not break the current on the others.

"It's splendid," said Hazel, when the wires were all strung, and the float, with its thin layer of grating, was moored alongside, and was riding neatly on the incoming tide. "It's just grand to think we can call electricity to our protection in this wild place. But we couldn't have done it without you, Mr. Tevis."

"Edwin, you mean," said I. "In this situation you surely don't have to 'Mr. Tevis' me. Besides, don't you remember?—you've said it once."

"Well, Edwin," said she, speaking the name shyly and very low. "Can I help you any more, Edwin?"

"Not just now. Mrs. Thrale needs you, doesn't she?"

"Yes; she's still up in the bow. I can't keep her away from that horrid, exposed place. She'll take her death of cold."

"Yes; and it's too exposed in another way," I said significantly. "You'd both better go down to my room. Tell her she must go—that the captain would want her to do it, if he were here. It's on the starboard side, away from shore, and it's the only dry one outside the crew's quarters. I'll ask Yokio to help you get her down there. I've got to go and look after the dynamo."

"Very well, but I'm going to be of some use afterward. See, I have that revolver you gave me," and she brought forth the weapon from the pocket of her blouse.

I ran below, and when the dynamo was actually whirring and the wires and the grating were all connected up and tested, I felt the first feeling of relief over the situation that had come to me since I had seen the hatchetmen in the gulch.

It was about three in the morning that the attack was made.

As I had anticipated, the hatchetmen did not wait for the ebbing tide to leave the stranded yacht high upon the spit. They waded out from shore, coming on in such a body as to present a truly terrifying appearance to the little armed company of three men, a boy, and one plucky girl, who could not be persuaded to leave the barricade and go below, though I tried to make her believe that Mrs. Thrale, now in my room, was in dire need of her.

We were three men, because MacLaren, though he was eager to join us, had to attend to the engine. As the dynamo required but little care, I had entrusted him with it, so that I should be able to handle one of the shotguns, Sir Charles, Yokio, and Hazel having the others, and Flamel the rifle. Beside these weapons, we each had revolvers, and, taking a hint from the hatchetmen's hand-to-hand method of attack, we also kept the axes near-by, ready for use.

When the dark figures stole over the white dunes and down to the water's edge, Flamel waited no longer, and opened fire upon them with the rifle, but the range was too wide as yet for the fowling-pieces, though all were loaded with buckshot. Flamel's fire, which was strangely and disappointingly ineffective, was not returned, and in the starlight we saw with satisfaction that there were only two or three long-barreled weapons among the attacking foe.

One of the highbinders fell just as he stepped into the water, but the others kept on, with a great show of courage, yelling and gabbling, all doubtless highly heartened by the fact that so few shots were sent their way. In truth,

it would have been easy to argue that there was only one man left aboard, though they may have seen others of us earlier in the night. Not a light shone from the shoreward side of the yacht, and that, too, added to the deserted look of the craft. It was clear that the Mongols expected an easy victory. They had but to wade out to the *Thetis,* clamber aboard, overpower the inferior guard, and the ship was theirs.

So they came trooping into the water, and even when the howling vanguard had waded out within a hundred feet of the vessel, and the buckshot began to sing past their heads or splash about them, they did not falter, but returned our fire with sharp insistence, and made directly for the float, upon which they climbed confidently until it swarmed with the chattering creatures. Now was the moment for my electrical surprise, and, full of the excitement of the act, I pressed the button; but, peering over the barricade, I saw no change in the position of the group on the float, and no wild yells of pain and terror rang out from them. I was wofully disappointed at my failure, and could not account for it.

"What's the matter with your current?" cried Flamel.

"I don't know," I called back despairingly, pressing the button tightly and looking down to where the hatchetmen were climbing up over their comrades' backs, and grasping the rail, regardless of the wires in which they were in close contact. But the copper strands, so carefully strung, were dead and utterly harmless to the boarders.

We emptied our shotguns among the pirates, some of whom were already up to the deck and climbing over the rail; but our aim was hasty, and few of them fell back into the sea.

Having discharged my last shell and not having time to reload, I threw down my shotgun and, seizing my revolver, rushed to Hazel's side, and, dragging her below to my room, bundled her in with the excited Mrs. Thrale, and locked the door on the outside, taking the key with me.

Then I ran up to the deck and along to the barricade, where I saw Flamel and Yokio in hand-to-hand encounters with the hatchetmen, the mate swinging his ax wildly about his head and bringing down two of the pirates even while I glanced at him.

Yokio was shrieking a Japanese battle-song, and stood with his back to the deck-house, brandishing his ax like a little Viking against the ancient foemen of his race. I did not see Sir Charles. There were at least ten of the hatchetmen now on deck, and others were climbing up. I reloaded my revolver and sprang to the top of the barricade, intent upon keeping back as many of the boarders as possible, but ready at any moment to hasten to the saloon companion and make a final stand before Hazel's door.

But the instant I leaped upon the barricade I saw a strange and wonderful sight—the men who were climbing aboard all fell back, their hands and arms working spasmodically, while the air was rent by wild shrieks of torment and dismay. Whenever they touched the wires they fell like ripe fruit into the water, splashing and shrieking and scrambling shoreward. The current was on!

I rushed to the button knob connected with the float wires, pressed it tightly, and instantly a chorus of tumultuous yells resounded from the float. Looking down, I saw the hatchetmen leap from the heavily charged grating, while those who had their hands upon it, ready to clamber up, fell back into the water. A few seemed to be unable to separate themselves from the charged metal, and these howled and shrieked louder than any of the rest.

But still the pirates already aboard fought on, and, dropping the button knob and turning to them, I devoted my attention to two Mongols who had set upon Flamel. One of the pirates had just rushed in behind his back when I fired at him. My bullet whizzed past his breast, and in the same instant he brought his hatchet down with a wild swoop that sent it crashing through Flamel's skull, and he dropped limply

to the deck. It was a horrible sight, that made my blood chilly; but I mastered myself, and sent the murderer down with a bullet in his head, while Yokio, having felled his man, rushed to my assistance.

This was a lucky move for me, for three panting hatchetmen were hewing at my head, and the Jap's smartly wielded ax stood me in good stead. There was a clash of steel on steel as the ax met the hatchets, and the sickening sallies were punctuated by shots from my revolver. It was a hard fight, but between us we put the three Mongols to flight, which was the easier done because they were becoming dismayed by the agonized yells and the falling back of their fellows, many of whom were already running up the gulch.

In five minutes the deck was deserted by the last of the boarders. I hastened to where Flamel lay gasping his last. He did not open his eyes nor say a word, but passed away quietly, and, as it seemed to me, with little pain.

I reloaded the rifle, and sent shot after avenging shot among the fleeing hatchetmen. The last of them splashed ashore, while others dodged in among the mesquits.

Then Yokio and I lifted Flamel's body gently and bore it forward, where we laid it sadly upon the bunk in his own room. As we turned to go, I saw tears in Yokio's eyes.

"Missa Flamel vay good mans. I am so misfortunate he die. My heart so sorrowful. But we have disappeared all the Chinamens. Look, see!"

He pointed to where the last of the repelled boarders were fleeing up the gulch.

"They thinking devils on the ship. But I am understanding—it is electric what you do, and very wonderful, very wonderful, but I am understanding."

Looking down at the float, I saw no one on or about it. The moment I had dropped the button knob the current had been disconnected from the grating, and, as the shocks had been far from deadly, all the Mongols had managed to get away. I could well imagine the mysterious prickly, burning sensations and the violent contortions they had undergone when the current was on, and I felt sure that the pirates would not care to repeat the experience of trying to board the bedeviled ship.

"Weel," said MacLaren, coming up from below, his face agrin. "It wurrked all right, except that time when the deenamo wouldn't buzz. But it drove them awa'—it drove them awa'; and they'll nae come back again."

The Scotchman was much distressed when he learned of the death of Flamel, and stood about, looking very thoughtful for a while.

We cleared the deck of the dead hatchetmen by the simple process of dropping the bodies into the sea. While we were doing this, Sir Charles came around the corner of the afterhouse, with a white face, and holding a pistol in his hand.

"Are they all gone?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," said I curtly; "and here's a job for you." I pointed to the blood that lay upon the deck near the barricade. "You couldn't fight, and you've got to do something; so just help Yokio clean up this mess before the women come up. That will be in twenty minutes."

"Just fancy!" said he, his lips curling.

"Get to work," I cried hotly, "or overboard you go."

"That's right," said MacLaren, turning to me, "and I'll help you do it."

"But I say, Tevis, you're not mawster here," whined Walden. "You're doing this just because you don't like me—you're an American, and——"

Yokio had brought the pails and scrubbing-brushes. I thrust a brush into the Britisher's unwilling hand, and said:

"You're altogether wrong. I *do* like Englishmen. They are a brave race, but you disgrace them. And no matter who's master, or who isn't, if you won't fight, you must work, or over the side you go. The water isn't deep, and you can wade ashore and get acquainted with the hatchetmen from whom you ran away. Take this brush!"

He took it, and the novel spectacle of an idle aristocrat performing a useful and salutary service was so engaging and arresting a spectacle that I fain would have stayed; but I had to go and tell the good news of our victory to Hazel—a joy that was tempered by the sad thought of the untoward taking-off of Flamel, whose friendly hand-grip I should never feel again.

CHAPTER XVII.

When, two days after the repulse of the hatchetmen, the surge of the sea outside abated, and the air was clear and calm over the strait, we made the launch ready, stowing aboard enough food, fresh water, blankets, and extra tins of gasoline to last us for the voyage down to Guaymas.

Hazel, Sir Charles, and Yokio took their places in the stout boat, which we had roofed over in a snug fashion with tarpaulin; and MacLaren and I carried Mrs. Thrale aboard and laid her on a couch we had prepared for her of rich, soft blankets and traveling-rugs, well forward under the awning.

The poor woman had drooped and faded steadily from the day of the loss of her husband. She had talked about him continually, consuming the remnant of her energy in this sad, vocal exercise. She had not slept, she had eaten little, but she had talked, talked, talked. Although she seemed to extract a modicum of comfort from Hazel's devoted attention to her, she was so much the worse for nervous wear that we almost despaired of getting her to Guaymas alive. But we thought that once there she might rally under medical treatment. She was much affected by our departure from the *Thetis,* and was uncommonly full of self-reproach.

"There," she said to Hazel, in a thin, tired voice as we carried her aboard the launch and she waved her bony hand toward the yacht. "There's the boat I lost for you. She was yours—all yours—and now look at her. No wrecker would ever think of trying to float her again. They couldn't get to her. She'll go to pieces there in the spring tides, and she'll rot and rust, and the sand will wash over her. That beautiful yacht!"

"Never mind," said Hazel, "I'm only too glad to get away from her now. I'm going home—I'm going to my father. Don't worry about me or the yacht. Just lie down now and rest, and we'll be down to Guaymas and the doctor's to-morrow."

"Doctors?" sighed the sick woman wearily. "Doctors can't do anything for me. I'll never get there, anyway."

"Oh, yes, you will," said the girl cheerily. "You'll get there, and they'll make you all well again."

We were rounding the lower headland and rocking in the swift downward tide. Looking back I saw the *Thetis,* her white deck gleaming in the morning sun, and broad-winged seabirds circling about her.

"That's the last we'll see of her," said MacLaren thoughtfully. "She was a bonny boat. Too bad to let those engines bide there and go to rack on the spit. That's the last we'll see of her."

"Thank God!" said Sir Charles fervently.

Hazel winced as he said the words. I knew that she felt very keenly the loss of the beautiful craft.

We ran down the strait safely enough, keeping a sharp lookout for rocks and bad water. But, though the spray rained down upon the awning at times, we sped out into the open bay below without further misadventure. The bay was smooth, the wind was light, and, southward over the bow, the open gulf looked inviting.

But just as we were rounding the lower coast of Tiburon, we saw, close inshore, the dull outlines of the gunboat. She was lying to, and the smoke was drifting lazily from her funnels. She was a good two miles away, and we devoutly hoped that she had not sighted us.

"What's she doing there?" I asked, turning to MacLaren.

"Oh, just lying aboot at the mouth of the strait on the chance of the yacht coming doon."

"Then she probably ran down there

looking for us immediately after we got out of her clutches up at the Boca Infierno," said I. "Do you suppose she has seen us?"

"No, but she will if we keep on our course, for we'll open out to her. Best thing to do under the circumstances is to make westward a bit."

"Toward that land over there?" said I, pointing to a barren-looking piece of gray-white upland that rose like a frosted cake out of the gulf. "What is the place, anyway?" I had brought along a small chart of the gulf, which I unrolled across my knees. "San Esteban. It's a small island of the Difficult group."

"Another nasty island?" broke out Walden impatiently. "I say, we don't want any more islands."

"You see how that head shuts us off from the gunboat," said MacLaren, as we began to lose sight of the *General Torres*. "If she hasn't picked us up, we can run in over there at San Esteban, and lay low until she gets tired waiting for the yacht that will never come, and then steams away from these parts. It will be a dour wait for all us now, we're sae sair to get into poort, but we must do it. We mayn't have to bide there but a wee bit."

So we ran inshore at San Esteban, and moored the launch by long lines in a shallow cove. We made a shelter for Mrs. Thrale with the tarpaulin, and a bed of chapparal, covered with the few dry blankets we had. We also made another shelter for Hazel close by, and spread the damp blankets out to dry upon the sand.

As we sat around the camp-fire that evening, eating canned pork and beans which Yokio had warmed in the frying-pan, Sir Charles, to whom the rough service was most discomforting, took his tin plate with a sigh.

"These beans are very appetizing," remarked MacLaren, as he helped himself again out of the pan.

"Glad you think so," said Walden. "But I wouldn't mind slipping into a dinner-jacket just about now, and sitting down to a grilled bone at the Lions' Club."

"A grilled bone?" cried Hazel, passing her plate to me, for I was nearest the pan. "Oh, you sybarite!" Though her words were jocular, I detected a strong note of impatience in them. "Yokio," she said to the boy, "will you toast some crackers for Mrs. Thrale? Maybe she would eat one or two. And I'll make some tea. Anybody else have tea? Might as well brew a big pot while I'm about it."

"Tea!" protested MacLaren, glancing at Sir Charles meaningly. "That's althegither too common. Nothing but champagne for me. I always have it on ice when I'm camping on a desert island. But excuse me, I'll have to get back to my watch." He seized a big sandwich, and made off for the look-out station.

"I caught his drift," grumbled Walden. "But fancy a man being satisfied with this sort of dinner, when——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Hazel, her eyes flashing dangerously, "but permit me to remind you that it's the best we have just now. And I don't mind saying, in the presence of Mr. Tevis, that your strictures have become very wearisome."

"I like that," returned the baronet. "I fancy you would make no complaint about Mr. Tevis' strictures."

"He is too considerate to utter any," said Hazel quickly.

"What a paragon of manly virtue, indeed!" sneered Sir Charles.

Mrs. Thrale moaned from her couch and called to Hazel. The girl rose instantly and hastened to her side.

"Well, by Jove!" said Walden. "Everybody seems to take pleasure in having a nasty shy at me. Just fancy!"

"Permit me to suggest a remedy," said I. "Be decent, or half-way decent, till we get to Guaymas. If you're not you can expect anything, even to being marooned on this island."

He shook his head, but was quite civil for an hour or so, during which he sipped brandy-and-water from a tin cup, and then hovered moodily over the camp-fire, for the night air was chill.

Hazel came back from Mrs. Thrale's couch and beckoned me apart to say:

"I don't know what is the matter with her. She doesn't complain of any pain, but she's very low. She mumbles a great deal to herself, and seems to be out of her head. She won't eat or drink. I saw a flask of brandy there where we ate and tried to get her to drink a little, but she wouldn't take a drop. What can we do for her?"

I went with her to the sick woman's couch. The firelight shone through the opening at the end of her little tent, and played mercilessly upon the drawn cheeks and the hollow eyes. The hand which lay upon the blanket twitched and turned constantly.

"Are you cold, Mrs. Thrale?" I asked. "Do you want more blankets over you?"

"I have hot-water bottles at her feet," said the girl nurse thoughtfully, "but maybe——"

"They sha'n't catch me! They sha'n't get my pearls!" cried the woman, starting up with staring eyes. "Let me get hold of that wheel! I'll show them thieving greasers! I'll show 'em a clean pair of heels. And the Chinamen—they—— Oh, Jim! I didn't mean it—I didn't mean to kill you. I was only—trying—to save—my pearls."

"See," said Hazel. "Isn't it terrible? What can we do for her? I have some quinin—shall I give it to her?"

"It won't do any harm," said I, as I laid my hand on the poor woman's forehead. "She's a bit feverish."

"Is that you, Jim?" she cried, her eyes staring again as I touched her brow. "No," she said sadly. "It's only Tevis; but he and Hazel will take good care of me."

"Oh, she isn't so bad," I whispered hopefully to Hazel. "She knows us." And I tried to quiet her, by smoothing her forehead and the back of her hand. She settled down after a while, and I was much relieved to see her close her eyes and begin to breathe regularly.

But the next day, while Walden was on the lookout with Yokio—for I would not trust him there alone—and MacLaren slept, and the sun shone so fiercely down upon the tarpaulin that it had to be shifted to shade Mrs. Thrale, the poor woman began to talk grimly of death.

She was lying with her head propped up so that she could look out over the sea. Her delirium had gone, so that, although I tried to thrust the nearing tragedy away from Hazel, I knew, and she must have known, that the captain's widow would soon join her husband. She was letting go her hold upon life from moment to moment; but though her soul seemed willing to depart, her lips held to their old habit of protesting.

"It's too bad," she said very wearily, looking about the gray waste of the arid island. "I always wanted to be buried in the old South Hill Cemetery, near the Penobscot. There was a hickory-tree there in the corner that I often looked at—a beautiful tree, always full of nuts in the fall; and there was blackberry-vines and lots of green grass—oh, so green! This is dry—it makes your eyes tired. I always wanted to be buried where the hickory-nuts would fall upon my grave." It was the dominant passion, swaying her whole being to the very moment of death—she would be garnering something even in her grave. "And I wanted the captain there by my side. But he's buried out there in the sea—I suppose the tide brought him down this way—and, as long as we can't go back to South Hill, you'll put me in the sea with him, won't you? Maybe we'll drift together around to the old Maine coast. Anyway, we'll be in the same sea."

She smiled a thin, wintry smile. Then she went on, raising her eyes to Hazel:

"And you, my dear girl—you've took such good care of me; and I wrecked your yacht. I didn't mean to do it—you know that—I thought I could run her through all right, but I didn't. I lost her. Feel in my skirt, dear, and you'll find the bag. Bring it out, quick, for I can't stay long."

Hazel brought out the bag of pearls and laid it by her side. The thin fingers closed over it as she went on:

"I lost your yacht, Hazel—these pearls belong to you. Don't say no—they're yours, all except what's Mr.

Tevis' and MacLaren's, and what's coming to Flamel's widow. They know their shares. If any one of the crew's folks makes a claim, Mr. Tevis can settle it for you. Take it, Hazel. Let me see you take it. I ain't got any folks living—not near folks. The pearls must go to you."

Weeping gently, the girl took the bag in her hand.

"Under my pillow is a little Bible. I want you to take that, Mr. Tevis; keep it to remember me by, and when you put me in the sea read over me the fourteenth chapter of Job. That will do for the captain, too—he didn't have any funeral. Now go away, both of you, and let me die here, looking out on the sea alone. He loved the sea, and I love it, and I'm going down into it and find him."

I took Hazel by the arm and led her away. We stood a little apart from the dying couch, and watched the going forth of this singular woman to the man whom she had loved after her own strange fashion. For an hour or more she lay there, looking silently out upon the sea. Then her tired head fell back, and we knew that she was no more of earth.

When Walden came down from the lookout station, leaving Yokio on watch, he showed much concern over the death of Mrs. Thrale, and insisted on knowing what had become of the treasure she had left behind. Hazel told him, and I fancied that his interest in the girl, which always had been that of a European man of title confident of his hold upon an American heiress, visibly increased. He wanted to see the gems. I was not far away when she reluctantly showed them to him, and I overheard him say:

"By Jove! I had no idea there were so many of them, or such big ones! A string of these will look very fetching on the neck of Lady Walden."

Hazel bit her lip, and stood with downcast eyes, while she said something I did not hear.

I turned away.

Lady Walden! Lady Walden! The name rang in my ears all the morning. I hated myself because I had not the hardihood to snatch her away from him before his eyes, and claim her as my own.

When we consigned Mrs. Thrale's body to the sea from the end of a rock that jutted out into deep water, I read the chapter from Job, and Hazel, with faltering voice, said a little prayer. We watched the thin-sheeted form slip into the sea, sinking slowly as it was drawn out by the swift tide.

Then we heard a cry—Yokio yelling from the lookout station:

"Gunboat coming out now—coming zis way, much rapidly!"

We strained our eyes seaward. There she was at last. She steamed directly toward us until she was well out in the wide channel between the two islands, then she headed north, and in half an hour we saw of her only a low smoke-drift, which spun out to nothingness a little later.

"Now for the boat," cried MacLaren, and we got the things together, I bundling them up and the engineer and Yokio wading out to the launch with them.

It was a wonderfully calm morning, and the blue gulf stretched alluringly away from the gray, barren island, affording a broad, clear path back to the civilization so dear to the modern heart. And yet I was not glad to go. It would be the end of my voyaging with Hazel, to whom, in her far English home, I should soon become a mere memory.

I saw Walden preparing to go aboard as the last bundles were taken over by MacLaren and the boy. The baronet, Hazel, and I stood on the beach, he close by her side.

Lady Walden!

Hazel looked about the island for the last time with grave, sweet eyes, and I fancied there was a sorrowful shade on her face when she gazed at the abandoned camp, where the smoke curled from our dying fire.

"Poor Mrs. Thrale!" she sighed, as she glanced at the bag of pearls in her hand. "She gave her life for these."

"Well, they're yours now," said Sir

Charles significantly—"that is, most of them, and I fancy you can make better use of them than ever she could."

Lady Walden!

"She wouldn't have known what to do with a fortune like this," he added. "Her ideas were distinctly vulgar. Come, my dear," he said, putting his arm about her waist. "Let me carry you to the boat."

Lady Walden!

I turned my eyes away and took a few steps up the beach. I could not bear to see him lay hands upon her. But I heard a quick footfall behind me, and, as I turned again, there was the glorious girl flinging herself into my arms!

"No!" she cried back to the scowling Sir Charles. "Here is the man who shall carry me aboard!"

My heart leaped high, my arms closed joyfully about her.

"Between him and you," she cried disdainfully, "I make my choice here and now; and if you have the least ray of discernment left in your self-loving heart, you will know the reason why."

My bosom heaved proudly. I lifted her high in my triumphant arms, and splashed joyously through the water to the boat, the dear girl clinging to me tightly all the way.

From gray little Guaymas, with its grilling heat, its low-roofed adobes, its mantilla-hooded girls, and its bare-legged *niños,* to San Diego, with its orange-groves, its trolley-cars, and its air of fresh modernity was a Pullman car flight of two days; and when Hazel and I arrived in the Californian town, there was with us not one of those who had left the little harbor in the *Thetis* four months before.

At Benson, Sir Charles Walden had taken the Santa Fé train for New York, bound for London and "real life," as he phrased it, which was something one couldn't find anywhere in America, you know. On the journey up through Sonora he had tolerated us, but had consumed most of his time reading some English papers he borrowed from a fellow Briton on the train.

At Colton we lost MacLaren and Yokio, who were bound for San Francisco, each with his share of the treasure.

"God bless ye baith," said the ardent Scotchman at parting, "and I'd like nothing better than to dance at your wedding. The lass was made for you, Tevis. Bonny and gentle she is, with a heart as soft as her cheek; and I know ye'll always be happy thegither. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" said Yokio. "You going live in south California, then I coming back, and maybe you like Japanese boy wait on table. So? Then you be writing when you wanting me come." And he scrawled an address on a scrap of paper.

When they told us at San Diego that neither Mr. Braisted nor Captain Dumble had ever reached port after the "burning" of the *Thetis,* and that the boat in which they had set out from the yacht had drifted ashore bottom up, I was not greatly surprised; but Hazel was full of grief. Her worst fears for her father had proved true. For a time she was not to be comforted. The news which came afterward of the wreck of the Braisted fortune did not trouble her in the least, though it explained many things, and made her sorrow on her father's account the deeper; for she now realized for the first time what he had experienced of harassing care.

We sold the pearls in San Francisco for the handy sum of $140,000, and it was not long after the wedding before we were planning our home and grounds in Pasadena, and the workmen were building for us the dearest house in all the world—a mission cottage with a pretty patio, in which we are now waiting for the orange-trees to grow. And there are other orange-trees, a great grove of them, a few miles from our house—for which we shall not have to wait, for they are large and fruitful. The idea was Hazel's who, looking about for an investment of her pearl treasure, could think of nothing better.

"Besides," she said, laughing, "it's quite fitting that a romance such as ours should finish with plenty of orange-blossoms."

"Finish?" I protested. "It's just begun."

"To be sure," said she, laughing again.

I had a long, hard fight with the underwriters, who were much concerned at first over the strangely mixed stories of the loss of the *Thetis;* but when it was finally established that the vessel was wrecked and not burned, they settled in full our claim of $250,000. Though the amount was paid unwillingly, the claim has always seemed a fair one to me, as the yacht was not lost by intent or through any fault of the owner, who was aboard of her at the time of the disaster. Besides, there was nothing in the policy to release the company, as there was no clause providing for the peculiar manner in which she was lost.

There was no doubt in Hazel's mind nor in mine as to whom the insurance money belonged, as the transfer of the yacht to her had been made by the half-crazed financier under the stress of business excitement, and to provide for her future.

"It shall all go to the creditors," she declared, when she received her draft. "It belongs to them, and we have plenty without it."

Some of the Braisted securities had turned out better than was expected at first, and the addition of the quarter-million insurance money helped to make up the losses in such a way that the creditors received nearly dollar for dollar. But nothing remained to Hazel out of her father's estate. What she now had was wholly the result of her sea adventure; and, as we sat in our cool patio, looking out where the fountain was playing and the leaves were glistening and Yokio flitted about in his white apron, she insisted that the proceeds from the pearls had always been more mine than hers.

"My part in the affair was only passive," she said, "while yours was active."

"But," I protested, "I distinctly remember seeing the figure of a very white-faced young woman behind a barricade, showering buckshot among the invading hatchetmen."

"And shutting her eyes every time she pulled the trigger," she said, laughing. "If any of the poor Chinamen were struck by my shot it was the purest accident. And just when they were getting close to us and I couldn't have failed to shoot one or two, and establish my reputation as some sort of a heroine, you hustled me away and locked me up with Mrs. Thrale. That strange old creature! She was not so hard and grasping, after all. She had a sense of justice."

"Yes—her kind of justice."

"Oh, you need never say a word against Mrs. Thrale," said Hazel. "She was a bit of a match-maker. She was constantly sounding your praises to me. And after you brought my clothes to me that time she said——"

"She said?"

"No," said the dear girl, blushing adorably. "I'll not tell you what she said. Yokio is too near. Poor Mrs. Thrale! I wonder if she sleeps as calmly down there in the gulf as though she rested where the hickory-nuts might fall upon her grave."

Zollenstein

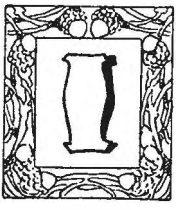
By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "Garrison's Finish," "Strange Cases of a Medical Free-lance," Etc.

To judge from the letters from readers "Garrison's Finish" was one of the best-liked stories ever printed in "The Popular." We gladly admit that it was an excellent story, but the author of "Garrison's Finish" has exceeded his past excellence in "Zollenstein." The central character is a man whose early life is clouded in mystery, but who gets a grip on the memory in the back of his brain when, after a fracas terminating in a tragedy, he is offered a military captaincy in the little firebrand kingdom of Zollenstein—the bone of contention between Germany and France. He is only a pawn on a royal chessboard, but the pawn develops potentialities undreamed of, and a series of the most amazing exploits follows.

CHAPTER I.

THE OPENING OF THE KING'S GAMBIT.



AM a firm believer in the pawn-game," reiterated Lieutenant Von Lindowe, blowing smoke. "There is a delightful potentiality in pawns."

"I am not a master of the game," I replied idly. "I suppose pawns have their uses, but I hold that the knights' game is the best—for me, at least. Push forward your attack and let the pawns go to the devil."

"Or fulfil their potentiality — be crowned queens," finished the lieutenant, flicking the ash from his cigarette. "Being a soldier, of course you lean to the open attack——"

"On the contrary," I cut in, "having been a soldier, I should appreciate the services of the pawn."

"How so?" And the lieutenant's baby-blue eyes widened behind their glasses.

"Because I was a pawn," I said dryly. "I was a trooper—not an officer."

My companion's eyes dropped to the waving smoke of the cigarette.

"Oh," he said, and fell to gazing about the luxuriously appointed smoking-room of the Carlton.

I knew of what he was thinking, but I did not care a jot. He was endeavoring to reconcile my being a member of a fashionable West End club with my having been a trooper in her majesty's service. I could have easily explained that a first-class club is really not a luxury but a necessity, and a cheap one, at that. It gives one a West End address; it furnishes excellent correspondence paper, and it permits one of dining a friend at moderate expense and with first-class appointments. Again, it is the medium through which many pleasant—and profitable—acquaintances can be affected. And when one shaves oneself and pays twenty shillings per week for a room by courtesy called furnished, profitable acquaintances are not to be despised—outwardly.

Meanwhile I was conscious that the lieutenant's glass-covered eyes were inspecting me minutely. I had known him for about two weeks. His chance criticism on the execrable seat of an equestrian in Rotten Row had started our acquaintance. He seemed greatly attracted to me, and when I discovered

that he was a gentleman and well supplied with funds, I reciprocated. I put him up at the club, and already I had succeeded in twice covering my expenses by beating him at the card and billiard-tables. He was the kind of profitable acquaintance I have mentioned. Owing to the law of compensation, as your bank-account diminishes your discrimination in friendship increases commensurately.

I had mentioned that I had served in the army, but in what capacity I had left it to him to infer. If he thought I was a graduate of Sandhurst, that was his error and a tribute to my personality and appearance. That he was leaving in the morning for the Continent was my reason for now disclosing the humble station I had occupied in her majesty's service. For unnecessary deception is very bad form. And, really, I had begun to like Von Lindowe for himself. He had paid his debts of honor promptly and in a gentlemanly manner.

"May I ask if you have seen much active service?" said my vis-à-vis deferentially at length. Evidently he attributed my serving as a "gentleman ranker" to the foible of a very much moneyed and bored aristocrat.

"I served three years with the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police, then on the Indian frontier, and finally with Kelly-Kenny in the Boer war," I said. "It gives a chap experience. One sees the world from the rank and file's standpoint. One gets tired sometimes of the linen collar and fenced-in environment of the officer."

"Exactly," agreed my companion, with a quick, comprehensive nod. "To return to our chess, the pawn is the one to reckon with, after all is said and done. The government may plan, but *he* executes. And when the board is cleared in the fight it is your pawn who rises to great things, eh? Is it not so?" He watched a smoke ring drift down the room.

"The height I rose to was a Mauser bullet in the shoulder, and some kind of a medal," I said ironically.

"And partial snow-blindness contracted, I surmise, among the Canadian frozen wastes," suggested the lieutenant sympathetically, glancing at the smoked glasses I affected occasionally. "Ah, well, such is the price we pay for patriotism," he continued musingly. "And who knows what the future may hold? Who can tell from the start of the race what the finish will be?"

"I'm through with all pawn-games," I laughed. "Come, let us have a game of lansquenet. Either I will take a farewell fall out of you or you will have your sevenfold revenge."

"Suppose," said a voice suddenly at my elbow, "suppose we have a regular American game of draw-poker. Have you any objection to changing it to that and enlarging the number of players?"

I looked up and saw Colonel Gratz and young Greystone. No, I had no objection. Three men's pocketbooks hold more than one man's. And aside from the pecuniary benefit, I would take great pleasure in beating Colonel Gratz, as I had done several times previously.

I had never liked the man ever since his arrival at the club a few days ago. Viscount Greystone was his sponsor. The latter, I suppose, had picked him up at Monte Carlo or some of the other Continental gambling-hells. The viscount possessed a peculiar faculty for losing money and finding undesirable acquaintances. Both generally occurred coincidently. It is true that he had lost his money to me at times, but I had always repaid him by decent companionship.

The colonel and his sponsor made a queer contrast: Greystone long and stringy, with a face that seemed as if a cold wind was eternally playing on it. He invariably looked hungry, and as if at any moment he might burst into violent tears. But there was not a more lascivious reprobate and gourmand in all London than this same Viscount Greystone. But his birth and credit were above par, and so, of course, society received him with open arms.

On the other hand, Colonel Gratz was a very fat volcano with cold, sly eyes that put me in mind of a lizard's.

He was effeminate in dress, even to the degree of wearing an abominable number of rings, and was bescented until he reeked like a polecat. He gave one the impression of a jeweler's window lit up by electricity.

Opposed to this was his manner: offensive to a degree; pugnacious, officious, blustering, and at frequent intervals wonderfully foul-mouthed. His head and face were barren of hair; perfectly smooth, like the extinct dodo's egg, and of about the same dimensions, but with infinitely less meat inside.

He must have been a sufferer from some nervous disorder, for I am quite sure that if possible he would have concealed his mouth with some sort of curtain. As it was, it was a flag-station to the unwary. God, or the devil, had given him only a slit like the penny-slot in a church poor-box. It looked as rapacious and infinitely more insatiable—which seems impossible.

I do not know what country claimed him, but his delivery was of the kind that makes one instinctively clear one's throat in sympathy. His mouth seemed perpetually full of saliva in which his speech floated round promiscuously, and now and then a spray of saliva would be ejected with his guttural vowels.

I could see that Lieutenant Von Lindowe was not charmed with our self-invited friends. However, good breeding seemed the lieutenant's chief moral characteristic, as diminutiveness and effeminacy were his physical ones. He had met the viscount and his fat friend at the club during the past few days, but evidently had not cared to improve the acquaintance.

After some discussion we chose a table where the glow from the electric lights was soft and clear. I was wearing my smoked glasses. I always wore them at night when card-playing was the ultimate issue. It was not because my eyes had become affected by the snows of Canada, as the lieutenant had inferred. Simply, in a card-game for high stakes one's eyes play a very important part. Unconsciously they tell secrets. From my darkened windows I could watch the light in my neighbors' without betraying what lay in my own. It was an invaluable hint I had learned at some cost from a very orthodox New England Methodist minister who played the best game of draw-poker I had ever sat into.

"Gentlemen, the sky's the limit," announced Greystone, shuffling the cards with his long, prehensile fingers. "The sky's the limit." And as he cut and shuffled in his painfully precise manner, he commenced to recite, in a beautiful, sympathetic voice:

"In Chillon's dungeons dark and deep."

Then, for the first time, I was aware that the Viscount Greystone was drunk. That was the only way in which one could tell that he had over-indulged. "The Prisoner of Chillon" was invariably recited from start to finish, and the ceremony concluded by Greystone announcing that the late lamented Byron "was a devil of a chap, sir. A devil of a chap, with an eye for the two most perfect things in God's world—a prettily turned canto and a prettily turned ankle, sir. By gad, yes, sir."

But Greystone's inebriation never affected his play at cards. We waited until the "Prisoner" had concluded his lament; Von Lindowe politely, Gratz indifferently, I stoically. The play commenced. The viscount was on my right, the lieutenant on my left, and the colonel opposite. The table was a small oval one, and I could feel the colonel's fat knees against mine.

As usual, the odds of luck and science were on my side. Not that my adversaries did not play a good, steady game. They did, each in his own way. But while they were playing for the mere stakes on the table which represented an evening's amusement, I was playing for infinitely more—my bread and butter. So I won and won again. And as the pile of chips in front of Colonel Gratz sensibly diminished, the chronic sneer on the vast acreage of his face developed in ratio.

"I never saw such luck," he snapped at last.

"Or skill," I suggested.

He looked at me over his cards, his

dome shining like that of St. Peter's. His eyes were not nice.

"Granted," he said. "Or skill."

I did not choose to interpret the covert meaning in his words. I never let anything interfere with business.

"Mortimer is always very lucky at cards," said Greystone, his melancholy head on one side.

"Skilful, you mean," corrected the colonel, with a smile.

"'Tis all the same. I fancy there is not one in the club who has ever got the upper hand against him. I pity him. For, true to the old adage, his love-affairs must be deplorable."

"Perhaps I am lucky, or skilful, in both," I suggested.

"Wonderful," said Colonel Gratz, his lizard's eye on mine.

"Poker-playing is but an index to character," put in Von Lindowe.

"Very true," agreed the colonel. "It all depends how one plays it."

Old Ben was chiming one o'clock when, the game ended, we repaired to the grill-room for the usual post-midnight supper. It had been a good evening's work for me. In my pocket I had Greystone's check for one hundred pounds and the colonel's and lieutenant's checks for a similar amount. Before seating himself at the table Greystone insisted upon disinterring the "Prisoner of Chillon" again, concluding with the usual eulogy to the poet. For a viscount, he was very conscientious.

Von Lindowe had a preoccupied look and the colonel was as sullen as a bear with a sore ear. It was not until the third bottle of champagne had been opened that the talk held any animation in it. But all the time I felt the colonel's sly eyes measuring me as I had felt them measure ever since my first meeting with him.

Gradually, under his skilful manipulation, the conversation drifted into the channel of cards and card-playing. Finally it turned on cheating, and there it stuck. Each one of us told some anecdote, personal or otherwise, relative to the skill of the professional sharper.

And then the colonel said musingly: "I have been in many card-games, but the crookedest and cleverest I ever encountered was right here in this club."

"That's rather an unpleasant statement," said Greystone, the drink for the first time showing in his eyes. "By gad, sir, most unpleasant. You exceed the courtesy of a guest. You impeach the honor of your host and fellow guests." He started to emphasize his resentment by a blow on the table, but his hand halted midway, and then strayed to the champagne-glass, where it remained. He raised the glass to his lips, and his mind evidently lost track of what it intended voicing, though his lips seemed willing enough.

Von Lindowe, with a very straight back, a cigarette between his fingers, was staring straight at the colonel, who was smiling easily. The pupils of the latter's eyes, however, were like two pin-points.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to embellish your insinuation," I said, breaking the silence. I leaned over the table, laying my smoked glasses on the cloth. I felt a crisis in the air.

Colonel Gratz made a deprecating motion with his bejeweled hand. "Certainly, if you wish," he said, his mouth full of saliva. "I will say that the crookedest game I ever witnessed occurred to-night."

Von Lindowe half-rose from his chair, his effeminate figure tense with anger; then he reseated himself slowly.

"Colonel Gratz," he said quietly, "I speak for the gentlemen present when I demand an explanation of your accusation. Failing of adequate proof, I demand an apology or satisfaction." The boy's baby-blue eyes were cold and hard.

"Ta, ta, ta," said Greystone, from the end of the table, waving a hand vaguely in the air. "The colonel, m'dear, is an old ass. The wine's in his head—there's plenty of room there for it—and he merely airs his whimsies with the fumes. Peace be with you, m'children." And the viscount solemnly waved his hand in benediction.

"Proceed with the embellishment," I said, ignoring Greystone's condition. "Colonel Gratz, you have as good as accused one of us of cheating at cards to-night. Now, you prove it, if you can, or I'll make you apologize."

"Make?" he caught up sarcastically.

"Yes, make," I repeated, crashing my fist on the table.

The colonel smiled slightly as he drew a pack of cards from his pocket. It was the deck we had been playing with.

"I took occasion to appropriate these for my dénouement," he said affably. "Gentlemen, we have been playing with marked cards. You see," he added agreeably, "the closest scrutiny cannot detect any marking on their backs." And he exposed the backs under the glare of the overhanging chandelier. "But, nevertheless, such markings exist, I assure you, gentlemen. It is a very clever if somewhat old trick. The backs are marked with luminous paint, which, of course, is invisible to the ordinary eye in a brilliantly lighted room. But, for instance, if one wears a pair of smoked glasses the signs can be read as easily as—they have been." Before I could move, or utter a word, the colonel had seized my smoked glasses from the table and was holding them over the cards. "You see, gentlemen?" he said simply.

Yes, we saw. A luminous speck of light was plainly visible through the smoked glass. There ensued intense silence as the colonel's watered vowels echoed themselves away. I sat like one in a hideous dream, staring at the damning proof of my supposed guilt. There was no gainsaying it. Everything was against me.

In a flash there came to me that old adage: "Give a dog a bad name." My past life, my present, was all against me. I had lived by gaming, and the hand that fed me had now turned without warning and struck—struck hard; damnably hard. The one thing I had saved from the wreck of my battered life, the one thing I had left—my honor—had been torn from me and spit upon.

How that luminous paint had come to be on the cards I did not know or care. But there it was, and there were my smoked glasses, and, worst of all, there was my record. The combination was one the Pope himself might refute in vain. I might as well blow a whistle to the heavens for vindication as to expect it from my fellow man. And all this while the colonel was staring at me, that smile on his moon face and the damning evidence in his hand.

I felt the lieutenant's eyes regarding me curiously, and I fancied his boyish lip curling in disdain. No doubt he was accounting for my past winnings from him. The grill-room was empty but for us four. For so small a mercy I was thankful, though my disgrace would be all over London in a twinkling. A clock somewhere chimed the hour of two, and the rattle of a solitary predatory cab came from the Strand. A prolonged snore sounded from Greystone's chair. I rose unsteadily from my seat, my head in a swim. Then drawing from my pocket the checks I had won that evening I tore them carefully in pieces and threw them on the table.

"What this man says is a trumped-up lie," I said, carefully choosing my words. To my surprise I felt curiously self-possessed. "I have only my word against his evidence—such as it is. Until I prove him the scoundrel he is, I release you one and all from your obligations to me. Colonel Gratz, you will give me satisfaction for this. If you refuse, I will take it."

The colonel laughed, his eyes dancing merrily. "Bah, I don't usually give satisfaction to blacklegs and card-sharpers. Your breed are kicked out into the gutter. But there, don't look so ferocious. I'm obliging. I'll give you satisfaction, yes." The colonel leaned over the table and struck me full across the mouth.

I have no very clear recollection of what happened next. I only know that with the sting of the blow and the taste of blood on my lips the hell of passion I had been curbing rose up and caught me by the throat. Primitive chastise-

ment had roused in me primitive resentment.

I felt the lieutenant's hand on my arm, but I shook it off. The next moment I was across the table in a bound, dishes scattered right and left. The colonel never flinched. He had risen to his feet. I saw his great barren waste of face before me with the sly, cold eyes of the lizard. I remember noting the beads of moisture on the forehead and likening it to some huge cheese. I was cool enough to judge distance and choose the right spot. It was second nature to me. Then my fist shot out and clacked under the colonel's puffy chin. His head jerked back as if pulled from behind.

Colonel Gratz floundered upon the floor, his forehead striking the sharp leg of the table. He heaved convulsively for a moment, his arms flung high above his head, then lay perfectly still. His face had faded from yellow to a dirty white. A slobber of saliva was on his lips, and a slowly increasing trickle of blood squeezed out from a deep wound over the ear. The table-leg was very sharp indeed. I watched the thread of blood in fascination as it formed an ever-widening pool on the dark oak flooring.

Finally I became conscious that Von Lindowe was bending over the prostrate figure. His deft, womanlike fingers had opened the coat and were feeling for the heart-beat. Then he glanced up with white face as I stood there with clenched hands.

"Get away at once," he whispered tensely. "The stewards are coming. Colonel Gratz is dead."

"Serves the beggar right," I said brutally, and, getting my hat and coat, I walked slowly from the room. My eyes unseeing as they were, my ears deaf to everything, I still noted subconsciously that Greystone, arms on table and head on arms, was snoring atrociously. I remember trying to reason out why the viscount should succumb so completely to drink. It was the first time I had seen him knocked out. I felt a senseless irritation at the snore. That was all.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECT.

Once in my lodgings off Fleet Street, I lit a pipe and sat down to review past events and incidentally to wait for the law to arrest me on the charge of manslaughter, if not actual murder.

No doubt I should have felt differently from what I did, and I was somewhat ashamed that my pulse had not increased or that my knees did not feel weak. I had heard a great deal of talk regarding how a man feels when he has taken a human life, but I had felt worse over shooting down a Pathan on the Indian frontier or exchanging death-warrants with a Boer soldier.

There was no remorse, fear, or even the proverbial "dull despair." Just a vast feeling of hopelessness that crowded out every other emotion. I thought, critically, that manslaughter was about as fitting a termination for my battered career as anything else. But I would have much preferred not to have been dishonored.

Adversity had not made me hard. It had made me supple, and supple things are infinitely more difficult to break. I might bow to present miseries, but I had invariably regained an erect position. Then my mind went back over my past life. What an existence it had been! And so I smoked, expecting every minute to hear the tread of the asthmatic law upon the creaking stairs. And one by one pictures of that past life rose up before me and mingled with the smoke.

The first picture was of her whom I had called "*Mutter*." A preternaturally quiet little woman with white hair and the face of one whose experiences had obliterated all traces of a former spring. I called her "mother," but instinctively I felt that she was not my mother. Then came the picture of a little ivy-covered cottage in the quiet street of a London suburb; of a lonely nursery on the top floor of the little cottage, looking over the myriad twinkling lights of the great city; of a forlorn little boy looking out of the nursery window every evening as the twi-

light fell and imagining every twinkling light some huge castle with its full complement of beautiful princesses and depraved ogres; of how one night in particular as I sat thus busy with my imaginings *Mutter* came into the room and laid her hand upon my head. It was the first time I had experienced a caress, and something rose in my throat.

"Thinking?" she asked me, and her usually hard voice seemed softened.

"Yes," I said, warmed by the interest she had shown. "I was thinking how lovely it will be when I am king of all those castles down there."

"King!" cried *Mutter* harshly, her hand tightening its grip upon my shoulder. "King! Castles!—What do you mean by such nonsense? Answer me, child."

Her manner frightened me, and I drew back. Then a wave of pride which, young as I was, ever slumbered in unnecessary abundance, swept over me. I remember I stood up in my little velveteen dress, my head held high.

"I will be king," I cried. "And when I am big and have trousers, real trousers, I'll own all those castles down there. I'll own you, *Mutter*."

At my words, *Mutter* grew strangely silent. Then she fetched me a box on the ear that made my pride quickly vanish. "Idle, childish vaporings," she said harshly. Then suddenly her voice softened. "You use strange words, child," she said slowly, and in the half-gloom of the twilight I could see that her eyes were strangely troubled. "And suppose you were king and master of all the world, what would you do?" she added, humoring my fancy.

"I would be good and kind," I said, feeling that such virtues could not meet with but entire approbation. "And I would buy all this big city for you, *Mutter*," I added, with a desire of overwhelming this stern, quiet woman with my lavish generosity.

Mutter knelt in the wide window-seat by my side and stared with far-away eyes into the London gloom.

"No, child, not for me, not for me," she whispered half to herself. She seemed to have forgotten me. "Such a place—cold, hard, merciless. Sometimes I think the very sky is paved with its own somber brick."

"But I would make the city any way you wanted it," I suggested, willing to stretch my generosity a point or two. "I would make it like home. Your very own home, *Mutter*. The one you sometimes speak of."

"Would you, child?" she said sadly. She was silent for a long time, and then: "Child, could you give me the soft blue sky of home, the golden sun that kissed a soft caress from birth to death?" she asked harshly. "Give me the quiet town; the red-bricked, squat little houses with their mullioned windows and snowy door-steps? The burgomaster? The old tavern? The broad, clean *Strasse?* The nodding linden? Give me the atmosphere, the smile, the tear of home? Could you give me all these, child?"

I was silent. There was something in the fierce wistfulness of *Mutter's* voice that night that awoke a strange longing in my heart.

"And it's my home, too, *Mutter*," I pleaded eagerly. "It's my home, too."

"Hush, child!" she said. "This is your home."

"But I have a real home somewhere, haven't I, *Mutter?*" I persisted. "Just like I have a real—a real——" I stopped. I was treading on ground I had long since known was dangerous.

"A real what?" said *Mutter* absently.

"A real mother," I said, my courage and desire taking quick advantage of *Mutter's* unguarded moment.

She was silent for a long time, and when at last she turned her face to me, to my surprise, I saw that her eyes were wet.

"Yes, child—as you had a father—somewhere," she said, and, stooping, kissed me. I remember I felt a vague thrill at the caress. To my knowledge, it was my first kiss.

The next picture that mingled with the tobacco smoke was of a bare, cheerless boarding-school in the north of England. I had been packed off to it when I was five years of age. I was always in trouble at that school; always

fighting or being punished for fighting. I have no very pleasant recollection of it. I stayed there ten years.

I was preparing for Oxford—presumably. I might have been there yet if something had not happened, for I was not a brilliant scholar. The study of languages was the only branch I excelled in, and that was owing to a natural predeliction for them; not owing to any over-study on my part.

The something that happened was when one morning the head master called me into his study and informed me that the remittances for my tuition fees and board had ceased abruptly without an explanation of any kind. That night I left the school. I had a small Gladstone bag with a change of underclothing, my Sabbath suit, and the usual collection of nothings so dear to every schoolboy heart.

The head master, a kind enough old gentleman, offered me five pounds, which I refused. Thirteen shillings represented my capital with which to open a stall in the world's great mart.

I did not fly home to the little ivy-covered cottage in the London suburb. There was no one there to receive me. *Mutter* had been in the habit of writing me a curt monthly letter during my first few years at the school which the head master would read to me. But gradually these monthly letters had ceased. The last one had been dated from some little town on the Continent long since forgotten by me. Since my leaving home in my fifth year I had not visited it once. I had never been asked. All my vacations were spent at the school. My tuition fees had been remitted through an obscure London bank.

Other pictures of my life that came before me were far less pleasant than the ones recorded. In fact, some are too sordid to bring before the eyes even though they stick in the memory with the tenacity of all unclean things.

There were lonely, dreary nights on the Indian frontier and on the outposts of three continents; midnight alarms and sudden death. Scenes replete with man's inhumanity to man and faithlessness to God and woman. Then came London and my present life. What had there been in it all? Not one worthy motive, not one uplifting deed. I was corroded with a fierce cynicism and misanthropy rendered the more dangerous by a natural recklessness and buoyancy.

My life had been: "Prey or be preyed upon. Fill your stomach, if you can, and keep the world from seeing how poor you are. Be a member of a fashionable club—again, if you can—and live in a furnished room. Look the gentleman and feel the outcast. Don't mind how you get money, but, for God's sake, get it."

I admit my views of life were wofully distorted, seen through the dark glasses of adversity and moral stagnation. They tinged everything. I had run the whole gamut of society bluff from start to finish, and life was stale upon my lips. I had nothing. Yes, I had one thing—a code of honor. I had never defrauded a man of a farthing, nor called him knave behind his back. But now the last rag that covered my nakedness had been torn from me. I was branded a blackleg, card-sharper, and murderer. Such was the fruit of my twenty-eight years—a royal harvest.

So I smoked as retrospect paraded to the funeral-march. I smoked and waited for the final garnering of this royal harvest—my march to the police-station. And I did not very much care. I had not very long to wait. Even now footsteps sounded upon the stairs, and a sharp rap cracked hollowly on the door.

"Come in," I said cheerfully, rising and knocking out the ashes of my pipe.

CHAPTER III.

THE PAWN ADVANCES.

But it was not the law that had come to claim its toll. Lieutenant Von Lindowe was standing on the threshold.

"I got your address at the club," he said in a matter-of-fact voice, carefully closing the door. "I am glad that you are not gone."

"I'm not a coward, at any rate," I said shortly, motioning him to a chair.

The lieutenant removed his glasses and began to thoughtfully polish them with a pale heliotrope silk handkerchief. "No, you are not a coward, Mr. Mortimer," he agreed, in his effeminate voice that held the suspicion of a lisp. "But I think discretion is also an attribute of the brave, is it not? It is only the fool who has never learned how and when to run."

"If you came here with the intention of badgering me——" I began quietly.

"You do me an injustice, I assure you," cut in my visitor coldly, raising his eyebrows and lowering his voice.

"Why are you here, then?" I asked sarcastically. "You think me a thief—a blackguard. You know me for practically a murderer. Why have you come? To improve the acquaintance? Surely not. I know the world. Yes, look about and see my home. Rather luxurious, is it not? The royal palace of a fashionable club-man. I am sorry that this is Jeams' and Winterbottom's night out." And I laughed. "Why didn't you bring the corner bobby with you? Fulfil your duty to society, my dear lieutenant."

"I came," interrupted the lieutenant calmly, "because I like you. Because I do not believe the charge Colonel Gratz formulated against you. I came to offer my services and advice—if you will but accept them."

That was the first disinterested offer of friendship I had heard in all my life. For a moment I could not find my voice.

"I appreciate your attitude more than I can say, lieutenant," I said at length. "But I cannot compromise you."

"Tut, tut," he interrupted impatiently. "What you call a crime is only an accident," he said coolly. "It wasn't premeditated."

"The law doesn't admit of accidents," I said. "It is manslaughter—and the jail."

"Yes, perhaps, if you sit here until the law finds you," said he.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I'm willing to make all the reparation possible. Willing or not, I must."

"Pooh! a poor philosophy," said the lieutenant. "A soldier does not talk that way. You have taken a life—granted. How many have you not taken while serving your queen? Yes, of course, duty. You were paid for it. Well, in this case, you were not paid for it. It was an accident. But it was your duty to resent a slur upon your honor. It was unfortunate that Colonel Gratz chose to strike his head against the table, but that was his own misfortune. You did not ask him to do so."

"A soothing philosophy," I remarked dryly. "It's a pity the law won't see it in that light."

"Let the law see it in whatever light it chooses. Your duty is to be out of its reach when it commences to see," said Von Lindowe.

"Flight? Why, I am a marked man. I am merely waiting for the sound of the policeman's boots upon the stairs."

The lieutenant carefully selected a cigarette from an elaborate silver case, after proffering me one.

"It will soothe your nerves," he said, with a smile. "Also, it will allay the pangs of hunger. For you will be very hungry if you intend staying here in your room until the law drags you forth."

"What do you mean?" I asked, hope for the first time coming to me.

"Simply that the law will take some time in finding out who is responsible for the—er—demolition of Colonel Gratz. You see, besides you and me, there was no one present during the affair. The waiters and stewards were up-stairs. You had already gone, when, aroused by the disturbance, they appeared."

"You forget Greystone," I said wearily.

"Too drunk to know what happened," said the lieutenant airily, blowing smoke. "Of course the police will question the stewards and the viscount—when he is sober—regarding who was present at the supper. Then they will come on a still hunt after us for information. By that time, however, I will be on the Continent, and I hope I can persuade you to be there likewise."

"It's cowardly," I said. "Anyway, I've nowhere to go."

"No to the first; yes to the second," said my strange friend, his eyes on the ceiling.

Silence ensued. I was smoking nervously, Von Lindowe dreamily. Despite his youth and effeminate appearance, he possessed a sang-froid, in grossly unpleasant atmospheres, I could not help but admire.

Finally he cocked his china-blue eyes at me through his glasses.

"Have you ever been in Zollenstein?" he asked abruptly, his head on one side.

"Zollenstein?" I repeated moodily. "I don't know. Let me see. If I remember correctly it is a small kingdom just over the German boundary, is it not?"

The lieutenant nodded.

"I remember reading in the *Times* a week ago," I continued absently, "a Reuter wire concerning it. I think it mentioned the fact that so long as Zollenstein remained independent it would always be a bone of contention between France and Germany. They called it the firebrand of Europe. I know the *Times* advocated its acquisition by either country—France preferably."

"Good memory," said Von Lindowe half-ironically. "Do you remember anything else concerning it?"

I fancied there was a subdued anxiety in his voice.

"No, I think not," I returned, with impatient indifference. "I have never been in Zollenstein."

"I am a Zollenese," said Von Lindowe proudly. "It will never be acquired by any foreign power." There was great sincerity and feeling in his voice.

"I assure you it doesn't affect me one way or the other," I said, with a laugh. "But I hope you will deserve better of your country than I have of mine."

"Why not change your country—temporarily?" suggested the lieutenant lightly, looking carefully at his cigarette. "Zollenstein can offer you many inducements."

"In what way?" I asked as lightly.

My friend delicately flicked some cigarette ash from the sleeve of his dinner-jacket.

"I hold a commission in the Blues," he said, eyes on the toes of his patent-leathers. "It is considered the crack cavalry troop in my native town."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed vaguely.

Von Lindowe searched me with his glass-protected eyes, tapping his teeth with a slim forefinger. "There happens to be a vacancy for its captaincy, so I understand," he added.

"You mean——" I began.

"Yes," finished the lieutenant simply. We looked at each other steadily. "Of course," added my friend, still looking at me, "I can merely recommend you for the captaincy. Our chancellor, the Herr Count Von Moltke-Hertz, has the bestowal of the commissions."

I continued to search my companion's baby-blue eyes, endeavoring to fathom the motive that lay back of this kindly and most unexpected offer. I had not knocked about the world as long as I had not to suspect the ingenuousness of mankind in general. That which you get for nothing you generally pay for ten times over before you are through. If you don't, it's not worth the having. This honor did seem of worth, and I wondered what price I was expected to pay. I could pay nothing.

"We are men of the world, lieutenant," I said slowly, "so before I thank you or discuss my acceptance, will you kindly tell me the reasons why you selected me?"

"It is not so much selection as—preference," he said somewhat testily, and, I may say, paradoxically.

"Preference!" I laughed. "You have known me for but a few weeks. I will frankly say my past has been nothing to boast of. I have lived by my wits, by the gaming-table. I have no means. I am an adventurer. To finish, my dear lieutenant, I am a criminal in the eyes of the law. And yet you talk of preference."

"Precisely," said he calmly.

"Come, lieutenant," I said irritably, "I am neither a child nor a fool, whatever else I may be. I am not a believer in quixotic David-and-Jonathanlike friend-

ships. You must have some tangible reason for offering to stand sponsor for my actions. What are your real motives, and—what is the price?"

"Tut, tut, so commercial," said my friend, waving his hand. "I am not a child nor a fool, either, Mr. Mortimer. Isn't it enough that I think you a fitting candidate? Must we use a microscope even in friendships?"

Again I searched his baby eyes, but they told me nothing. Then the gambler in me awoke. I no longer tried to fathom his motives. If I had I would have no doubt realized the absurdity of my supposing he had offered his influence out of pure liking for me. And if I had known what lay before me what would have been my answer? The same, just the same. "Yes," by all means. As it was, I had nothing to lose, everything to gain. Better a fling at anything than ruin and probably the inside of a prison. If my sponsor did not balk at my past and present, why should I? I had warned him fairly. I had concealed nothing. And then, though Zollenstein was but a toy kingdom, I might stumble across a real drama to play upon its miniature stage. It would be something to do and offered association with the highest type of one's fellow man. In my new atmosphere and action I might forget the canker of a wasted life. I might, perchance, rebuild a portion of my ruined life structure. If I did not, the fault would not be laid to the material. My environments and associations, so I hoped, would help me in my building; not drag me down, as they had done in the past.

Meanwhile the lieutenant's half-closed eyes had been regarding me fixedly. "I may as well tell you, Mr. Mortimer," he said at length slowly, "that a man of caliber is required to fill the vacancy. Frankly, it will not prove a sinecure. It contains a certain element of danger."

I have since wondered if Von Lindowe's remark was merely idly put forth or if it was the carefully executed move of a genius. Certainly it was the determining factor that influenced my decision. Danger, action, was what I hungered after.

"What danger is there?" I asked quickly. "Zollenstein is at peace with her neighbors."

The lieutenant avoided my eyes. "There is danger in every calling," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Sometimes from within as well as from without. But about the captaincy—is it yes or no?"

"Yes," I said, casting the die.

"Good," he said, a strange light in his eyes. "You may rest assured that I will exert to the utmost whatever influence I possess. I think we may have little fear of the outcome. By the way, of course you speak French?"

"Yes, but not 'of course.'"

"It has been my observation that Englishmen who speak German generally speak the sister language," said Von Lindowe.

I caught myself wondering what other deductions this strange little man, Dresden china doll stuffed with a giant's spirit, had deduced from life. The night's happenings seemed a dream to me; the action had been so swift, fraught with such terrific significance. In a moment revolution had struck my life and had sent habit a-begging. Chance had claimed me for her own. But, strangest of all, I felt no wonder, amazement, fear.

After the first momentary surprise, I saw nothing incongruous in a comparative stranger offering me a captain's billet in the cavalry of a toy kingdom. After all, the explanation that he liked me and thought me fitted for the commission was quite understandable. What was Zollenstein compared to Great Britain? What experience could she offer compared to what I had experienced in her majesty's service? I was a war-worn veteran despite my twenty-eight years.

No doubt there was some petty, factional quarrel in Zollenstein, and the lieutenant deemed me the man capable of meeting it. It would be easier for an outsider. Yes, that was it, and I was the man. No doubt I underrated myself. I did not judge my capabilities as

did these chocolate-cream soldiers of Continental toy kingdoms. And no doubt the lieutenant's view of my unhappy encounter with Colonel Gratz was the correct one. God knows, when I struck him I had no murder in my heart, though it had been in my hand. Yes, for very conscience's sake, I must take the lieutenant's view of it. My thoughts unconsciously brought me back to the evening's terrible events, and I voiced them.

"If I secure this captaincy," I said, looking steadily at Von Lindowe, "you will serve directly under me?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because that is proof positive that you do not think me a blackleg and card-sharper. You do not believe the evidence against me——"

"I believe you have already given me your word to that effect," said Von Lindowe calmly.

"Of course," I said, mortified. "But—hang it! can't you see how the life I've led has ruined me? I gamed for a living. Gamed without trickery, but I——"

"I see what you mean. You are afraid your word might have lost its value? Nonsense. It is unnecessary to say that to me your word is your bond. Otherwise I would not be here to-night."

"Then why should this Colonel Gratz try to ruin me?" I persisted. "If you accept my word you must accept his villainy. I never met the man until a few days ago. Why should he foist this scurrilous thing upon me? There was nothing to gain."

"Perhaps in revenge for his losses." The lieutenant was looking closely at the frayed blue ribbon from his cigarette.

"Absurd!" I exclaimed. "The sum of his losses wouldn't pay for a fortnight at the Carlton. Besides, his position was above such a thing. No, the first night I met the colonel I knew instinctively that he did not wish me well. I always felt his eyes on me. Why, I can't imagine. It is seldom one unwittingly makes such an enemy on sight."

"We all have our enemies," said Von Lindowe, his eyes on vacancy. "Only we all do not meet them."

I did not study out this paradox. "Was the—the colonel dead when you left?" I asked at length.

"Oh, quite, I assure you. Beastly smash that was. Of course I left before the—bobbies, you call them?—ah, yes, before the bobbies arrived. I fancy there will be quite a commotion over the incident."

The first gray mist of dawn was showing through the blinds. The scattered noises of the awakening city that presently would merge into a continuous roar, herald of another day, came to us faintly.

Von Lindowe jumped to his feet, eager, alert, as from a sound, twelve-hours' sleep.

"I think you had better be getting together whatever baggage you intend taking," he said crisply. "I would advise traveling in light marching order. We cannot afford to play too long with the law. We take the morning boat-express to Folkestone for Boulogne. Once on the Continent—*voilà*, a new life." And he held out a frank hand. I wrung it heartily. Unknown to me, the pawn had advanced.

CHAPTER IV.

ZOLLENSTEIN.

The capital and chief city of the kingdom of Zollenstein is Zollenstein. Gaged by the neighboring towns and even by the capital of its sister kingdom, Saxonia, its population of sixty odd thousand is considered vast. Owing to the kingdom's peculiar situation on the map of Europe, it being sandwiched in between the French and German boundary-lines, the influence of these two great nations upon it is plainly discernible. But perhaps the capital shows its environment most plainly of all. It is the focusing-point. Its setting is distinctly German with a French background. It is a clean little city in a clean little kingdom, owning to a refined taste in wine and the arts; out of the beaten track of the rabid Con-

tinental tourist; poked off in a forgotten pocket of Europe. But it offers many inducements to the visitor who chances to stray within its gates.

As at eleven o'clock of the morning following my flight from England Lieutenant Von Lindowe and I stood at the summit of a gently sloping hill, its base fringed with ragged fir-trees, Zollenstein lay at our feet like a small, white snail with its feelers out crawling along a bed of greenest moss.

So this was my future home, I thought! Certainly it made a brave picture. I had seen similar ones fired-in on many a Heidelberg stein—coloring and all. Backed by towering hills, the faintly discernible purple line of the French boundary off to the southwest, a sky of palest Gobelin flecked with fat, fleecy little clouds, it in truth looked a dear little city; the city of one's dreams.

"Beautiful, is it not?" said Von Lindowe, with a gleam of teeth. "A country to die for, eh?"

"I would rather live for it," I returned. "It looks too human a town to know anything of death. Death hasn't a pleasant taste in my mouth just now."

A shadow passed over my companion's face. "Death generally comes with a smile," he said, half to himself. "Yes, a very peaceful-looking kingdom," he added, sweeping his eyes from east to west.

He paused, giving me one of his sharp looks. When he looked at me in that manner from behind his glasses he put me in mind of a needle with two very sharp eyes.

"You know not to ask questions," he said bluntly at length. "Though you said nothing, no doubt you wondered why I should have been at such pains to enter Zollenstein secretly. We could have saved two hours by taking the wheezy little narrow-gage train to the Zollenstein depot. Instead, as you know, we have come by the highroad over the mountains after leaving the Prostadt Junction, five miles back."

I nodded. "No doubt you had your reasons, though I don't profess to know them."

"To keep your connection with me secret—from certain parties," explained the lieutenant, loking at me sideways.

"My Continental prominence is improving," I said dryly.

Von Lindowe cut at a furze bush with his silver-mounted rattan.

"Verily," he said as dryly, his hand at his mustache. "I may say if your intentions were known your life would not be worth a curse."

He might have been commenting on the weather for all the emotion in his voice. I began to think him a cold-blooded little specimen.

"Quite dramatic," I laughed. "What primeval instincts! It seems I've merely exchanged the frying-pan for the fire. I see no smoke."

"Smoke is not the Hohenstauffen way," said my companion enigmatically.

"Hohenstauffen? And who owns the multitudinous name?"

Von Lindowe stiffened. "As I am under orders from a higher power, I cannot acquaint you with conditions."

"I don't ask them," I returned curtly.

"Remember, I said there would be an element of danger connected with the captaincy," continued the lieutenant half-resentfully.

"Oh, I'm not going to flunk," I replied, turning away. "You have my word. Only one is naturally curious about one's rival. For I suppose this Hohenstauffen is my rival for the commission."

"A natural curiosity, and one easily satisfied when circumstances permit," said Von Lindowe, putting his hand on my arm. "Pardon if I have appeared discourteous. I am but a soldier, and have to obey. And now, if you please, we will continue on our journey. You remember my instructions?"

"I do," I said stiffly, for I resented his tone of authority. "On your leaving me I am to ask my way to the König Strasse, follow it north until it is bisected by Strasburgh Avenue, follow the latter west until I meet the Rue Garde running north and south. I turn to my left, and four houses down on the west side is the inn of the Toison d'Or.

I register there under my own name and remain until I hear from you."

"So!" nodded Von Lindowe. "And please remember my final advice: Do not go out if you can help it; at all events, never at night. Make no friends and keep your own counsel. Remember you are merely an English tourist traveling for pleasure. I will let you know as soon as possible regarding the vacancy in the Blues. And now, here is where I leave you. I make a détour and enter from the east. Au revoir, and the best of luck." And he held out a frank hand.

Portmanteau in hand, I was left a solitary figure tramping down the white, well-bedded road that opened into the outskirts of Zollenstein.

I dare say I looked more like some commercial traveler peddling collar-buttons than a prospective captain of cavalry. Certainly, this promised to be the strangest adventure I had encountered thus far in my checkered career. The more I thought the less I liked it.

Why all this secrecy? I had a vague impression that I was in a fair way of becoming a pawn in some carefully obscured political game of great moment. Lieutenant Von Lindowe's remarks at the Carlton that night concerning the potentiality of pawns came to me in rather unpleasant retrospect.

With all his charm, I could not say that I greatly liked the lieutenant. I liked him at moments when he seemed himself, but there were times when he appeared as but an automaton—the puppet of some vast controlling power that directed his movements.

Frankly, I distrusted his professions of friendship and sincerity. With all his professed "preference," he was not the kind to extend his hand in the dark. No, I thought, I had yet to learn the price of the captaincy. That I would eventually have to pay a price I was certain.

Then second thoughts came, and reason bade me dismiss my suspicions as preposterous. Who was I that I should be made use of? A nobody. I was alone in the world, without even a dog to call friend. Pawns for political intrigue, and ones of high caliber, can be procured in professional markets. English outcasts, outlaws, have no market value, as I well knew. No, chance had given me a stranger's friendship, and he very kindly was going to use his influence to procure me a position of standing.

I would not play the fool. As I had before determined, I would unquestioningly accept the gifts of fortune. I would not permit nameless suspicions to sour the sweets of acceptance. And the precautions the lieutenant had taken could be explained away. Of course, jealousy would be aroused if my bid for the vacancy became public, and the lieutenant, not desiring any unnecessary difficulties, had decided upon the present sub-rosa maneuvers.

Thus I reasoned satisfactorily with my misgivings. Egoism is the curtain that conceals the future from our eyes. Few of us have the courage to tear it away.

It was with little difficulty that I located the König Strasse, for, indeed, it was one of the principal thoroughfares in Zollenstein. My appearance roused not the slightest curiosity in the few passers-by I met, though I fancied one or two scanned my face with a half-puzzled expression; quickly, however, replaced by one of indifference. In fact, I might have been traversing the Strand or Fleet Street for all the interest I aroused.

After being nerved up to expect hidden dangers, as Von Lindowe's mysterious hints had bidden me, I felt curiously foolish and a little resentful at the universal humdrumness around me The city was as quiet as a Sabbath noon in Scotland. Few people were about, and these carried themselves like a visitor in a sick-room. An unnatural peace was in the atmosphere. I noticed that the majority of the Zollenese spoke French rather than German. It appeared as if the upper classes alone affected the more musical sister language. There was a sprinkling of fair women and well-groomed men.

Taken all in all, the tout ensemble was a pocket edition of any capital of

modern Europe, set in old-fashioned covers and with a hint of sad reading between the lines. Here and there I could see the blue and silver trappings of a hussar trooper, and instinctively I felt that it was the uniform of the crack light cavalry, the Blues, for whose captaincy I had entered the lists.

I scanned these soldiers with interest, and my experience acknowledged them good material. Broad-shouldered, lean-hipped, intelligent-looking men they were; far different from the general average of one-horse-power kingdoms. With my experience and training at their back they would shame no country. Already I busied myself with the innovations I would put in practise when installed as their captain. Enthusiasm for a loved profession caught me. I would be in harness again. I would make the Blues not only the crack cavalry squadron of Zollenstein, but of Europe. I could do it. My rotted life would be wiped out in triumphant achievement.

I reached my destination, the inn of the "Toison d'Or," in the Rue Garde, with nothing more exciting than a full portmanteau and an empty stomach. I was mercilessly hungry, and, after registering in the little back parlor, with its green chintz curtains and mullioned windows, which served the double purpose of grill-room and office and was presided over by the landlord's fat wife, I sat down to a well-served and well-earned dinner.

That finished, I repaired to my room, one flight up, and, after a thorough wash, seated myself, pipe in mouth, at the little window that opened on the Rue Garde. I had nothing more exciting on hand than to wait for word from Von Lindowe. I sincerely hoped that it would not be long, for it is not my forte to sit twiddling my thumbs.

I spent an hour in criticizing the architecture of the various houses, old and new, on the opposite side of the street, and speculating on the probable lives of their past and present inmates.

Then, strive as I would against it, retrospection came in speculation's train and brought up in all its horrible detail that affair at the Carlton. It seemed to have happened years ago instead of so many hours.

What a little thing had turned the current of my life—had ended another's! But was it little? What had induced Colonel Gratz to become mine enemy? What lay back of his plan for my ruin? Speculation led me nowhere. My thoughts were poor companions, so, jumping from my chair, I decided to go for a walk. I would make a closer inspection of my future fellow subjects.

The fat landlord was standing at the door when I descended the stairs. A large white apron enveloped him from head to foot, its string a mute testimony to the ample circumference of his stomach. He looked a good-natured, garrulous fellow with a wholesome fear of his tight-laced little wife. He bowed obsequiously and stepped aside as I walked to the door.

There was a great deference in his manner, and a curious something which I could not fathom. I had noticed it on my arrival. I cannot define it, but it was as if I was a schoolboy caught out of bounds and the gatekeeper was smuggling me in, winking at my secret.

"You have a pretty little city," I said in German, nodding toward the view of the Rue Garde framed in the doorway.

"*Ja, mein Herr,*" said the landlord, his round little eyes disappearing in the folds of his smile. "But *mein Herr* should know."

"I am a stranger," I said curtly.

"Of course, *mein Herr,*" returned mine host, his finger at the side of his nose. "Stranger—*ja.*"

I eyed him suspiciously. "I don't know what you mean. I repeat that I am a stranger."

The landlord gently stroked his stomach, nodding his grizzled head.

"Ah, *mein Herr,* old Johann has eyes—eyes for all his sixty years. I served for twenty years as *valet de chambre* to his majesty."

"Indeed," I commented indifferently.

"Aye, twenty years it was. And old Johann has eyes. Old Johann Lesser

has eyes and a silent tongue, a silent tongue and a stout heart, a stout heart and a loyal one. God bless the Von Bülow! God save the king!"

Certainly this man was a fool of fools. "You don't seem to be very fond of gaiety," I observed, changing the subject. "The city strikes me as being very quiet; almost melancholy, in fact."

The landlord looked at me for a moment, a puzzled expression in his little eyes. Then he smiled.

"*Ach!* of course, being a stranger, *mein Herr* does not know that we have cause to be sad."

"Naturally," I said curtly. His manner irritated me. Was this garrulous tavern-keeper in the secret of the vacancy in the Blues? If so, how had he learned of it? His manner plainly conveyed that he was sharing something I wished to keep secret, and that he considered it a high honor.

"And, being a stranger," continued old Johann, "*mein Herr* doesn't know that our good king—God save him!—has been lying at death's door for one long week? Aye, the latest news from the castle is that he cannot last much longer. A good king and a better man—God rest his soul!" he concluded, with unlooked-for solemnity. "God send us such another!"

"Then his majesty's illness is considered serious?" I said. I had not heard of the reigning king's malady.

Again old Johann gave me one of his knowing looks, immediately replaced by one of studied blankness.

"*Ach!* a bullet in the groin is generally serious. 'Tis the wonder his majesty has lived so long."

"How came the king to meet with such a terrible accident?" I asked.

"A terrible accident, as *mein Herr* says," said old Johann, his eyes on his stomach. "It was very sad. His majesty accepted an invitation from his cousin, the Grand Duke Boris, to shoot over his preserves at Heimruh, the duke's castle on our southern frontier, and our beloved king was mistaken for a deer, and his own cousin, or one of his men, as report has it, shot him."

"Terrible!" I exclaimed. "The Grand Duke must almost suffer as much as his majesty."

The landlord put a hand quickly to his mouth.

"You seem amused," I said coldly.

"Pardon, *mein Herr,* I forgot you were a stranger. You see, old Johann has eyes——"

"Damn your eyes!" I said irritably.

"Yes, *mein Herr,*" and the old man bowed elaborately. "I forgot that *mein Herr* does not know our Grand Duke Boris von Hohenstauffen." And, hastily excusing himself on the plea that his wife was summoning him, he backed through the doorway. I thought he had gone, but in a moment he had stuck his head round the lintel. "Old Johann has eyes," he mumbled again; "eyes and a loyal heart. God save the Von Bülow, say I!" And the old head disappeared.

My natural speculations as to what the man meant by his strange words were lost in profound amazement at the mention of the name Hohenstauffen. Hohenstauffen! My rival for the commission! He whose way was the fire without smoke, as Von Lindowe had intimated. Why, then, I was but a sorry fool, indeed, and come on a wild-goose chase! What chance had I, could I possibly have, against so royal a rival? For this Hohenstauffen was the king's own cousin.

As I walked aimlessly down the Rue Garde, my thoughts were busy with this new development. The king had been accidentally shot by his cousin. Lieutenant Von Lindowe was a devoted subject of the king. His dislike for the Hohenstauffen could thus be explained. But what had I to do with the matter, if anything? And why should this Grand Duke Boris consider me a rival, and therefore an enemy? And what the devil did that old fool of a landlord mean by his grins and his "eyes"?

It was a very muddy puddle that needed clearing. My game of putting two and two together brought me unwillingly to an unpleasant conclusion. Intrigue seemed to be awake and stalking in this peaceful little kingdom. Again there came that vague, uncom-

fortable premonition that I was being played as a pawn on some royal chessboard; that I was in a fair way of becoming a catspaw to pull some one's chestnuts from the fire.

If I could but get a glimpse of the hidden board and ascertain where I stood in the game, and what the odds were, I would not be afraid to take them. But one hates to move in the dark, or, rather, be moved by an invisible hand. My being a nonentity could not explain away my present misgivings, and so, immersed by them, I traversed the streets of Zollenstein without either heed of time or direction. Thus, with the bit in my teeth, I walked blindly into trouble.

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE NEST-BUILDERS OF THE DEEP

MODERN investigation has shown that there are many curious resemblances between the creatures of the land and sea. The ocean contains forms so closely resembling those on land that the only point of difference seems to be a modification of structure to conform with their surroundings. Thus we have gardens abounding in lavish growth, and containing brightly colored trees, shrubs, and waving vines; but strangest of all we find many fishes so closely resembling birds that they build nests to contain their offspring.

For instance, there is a South American fish called the Perai, whose nest, built of aquatic plants, is fastened to a pendant creeper, and, thus anchored, drifts about safely in the tide.

Another nest-builder is the Black Goby, which makes its home in the Mediterranean Sea. It collects fine bits of weeds, which are bound and interwoven into an irregular globular form, in which are placed the eggs. It is the male which builds the nest, and, after the eggs have been placed within, it mounts guard, remaining on watch long after the young ones are apparently large enough to take care of themselves.

Among other nest-builders may be mentioned the various species of sticklebacks, the lamprey-eel, the sunfish, the common perch, and the dace.

One fish, at least, is known to make a burrow. This is the curious lung-fish (*Protopterus*), which is found in the rivers of tropical Africa. The swamps which the fish frequents periodically dry up, and during this time the fish bury themselves in the earth to a depth of about eighteen inches, where they form a kind of cocoon of slime and mud. An aperture is left, through which they breathe, using their lungs for the purpose.

Tales of the Lost Legion

By Francis Whitlock

Mr. Whitlock is new to the pages of "The Popular," but he has written a number of short stories and essays for other periodicals and his work has been of such a high standing that we made an arrangement with him for a series of stories dealing with a unique organization which he declared existed in New York. The organization, styled here the "Lost Legion," is composed of conscienceless adventurers—deep-dyed sinners to be sure, but sinners against international law, rather than against society or individuals. The tales are unquestionably interesting, and Mr. Whitlock avers that each is founded on an actual happening and that the series is no extravagant flight of the imagination.

I.—AN ECHO OF THE INQUISITION

(*A Complete Story*)

"THIS," remarked Mr. Albert Jenkins to himself as he looked at the bare stone walls, the heavy iron door, and the small, barred window high above his head, "is what I might call, without stretching my powers of imagination or description, being in a darned tight place." There was no reason why he should not have made the remark aloud; for the thick walls of the old fortress prison, built by slaves under the lash of the Spanish Conquistadores, were impervious to sound, but Jenkins' experience in life had taught him the value of keeping his thoughts to himself. It was not the first tight place he had found himself in, for a naturally adventurous disposition and the necessity of depending upon his wits for a living had led him into many strange situations, and as he looked about his narrow cell he consoled himself by the thought that he had never yet died in prison.

"It is a habit which one might easily acquire, however," he thought, "so it behoves me to wriggle out of here before I get to taming spiders for amusement, or tearing up my shirt to write my autobiography on." From which it might be judged that Mr. Jenkins had read "Monte Cristo" and kindred romances, and this judgment would have been correct, for it was due to the stimulation of this class of literature that he had indulged his love of adventure, rather than accept a commonplace but remunerative position in his father's factory.

"Gee whiz! it makes me sick to hear people talk about there not being any romance left in the world," he had remarked to a crowd of fellow adventurers which had foregathered in an obscure New York restaurant a few weeks previously. "Here am I, 'way on the easy side of forty; but I'll bet that I've seen more real scrimmaging than any blooming knight that ever went erranting with a tin pot on his head and a miscellaneous assortment of hardware hung about his person. There's plenty of it if a man goes hunting for it, and any one of you Johnnies could rattle off a true tale which would

make any cheerful liar at the Round Table look like thirty cents after he got through working his imagination on the dragons and enchanted castles which he'd been up against."

The remark was quite justified by facts, for in that assemblage of soldiers of fortune were many kindred spirits—men who had been rolling stones without disproving the remainder of the proverb, but who had lived the lives which suited them, and had been where much history was making, although their own names would never be inscribed on its pages.

"The Lost Legion" they called themselves, and this quiet little restaurant, kept by old Madame Hortense on an obscure side street, was the rendezvous of such members as wandered back to New York after going through adventures which would have seemed incredible in fiction, but which, in fact, they accepted as naturally falling in the day's work.

Many of them had gone from that little restaurant never to return, for adventure brings its perils, as Mr. Jenkins had discovered, but the ranks of the legion were constantly recruited, and their employers knew that a quiet word sent to Madame Hortense would meet with quick response. These same employers were men of note in the community, many of them good church members, and all of them rated high by the commercial agencies, but they were willing to risk their money and to pay other men liberally to endanger their lives or liberty when a speculation promised large returns if successful.

Neither employers nor employees were dishonest; their ventures were risky, but they sinned only against international law, not against society or individuals. There is nothing immoral in getting a cargo of provisions or ammunition into a blockaded port, rescuing a political prisoner from exile, running a filibustering expedition to the aid of a distressed people, or many other of the things which these men had been called upon to do, but such ventures are only profitable when complete success attends them, and the employers were not paying for failures. Each member of the Lost Legion understood this perfectly, and never wasted time in explaining nor trying to excuse failures if he met with them.

The employers pocketed loss or profit uncomplainingly, but they had no leisure to listen to hard-luck stories, and the adventurers knew that they must depend upon their own unaided efforts, after their instructions were received, and extricate themselves from difficulties, for the very nature of their expeditions made it inexpedient to extend a helping hand to them if they fell into trouble.

Mr. Jenkins accepted this code of ethics philosophically when he had completed a careful investigation of his prison, and found that it offered small hope of escape.

"This is no time to depend upon the North Atlantic Squadron, nor the screaming eagle with the Star-spangled Banner in its claws," he acknowledged to himself as he rolled and lighted a cigarette. "The American consul might realize that I am in a bad fix, but he would have to be pretty drunk to figure out a reason for helping me, and I reckon that it's up to me to help myself. The presidente is a slick proposition, and I reckon it'll take considerable of a palaver to convince him that those Winchesters and Maxims were meant to collect humming-birds with."

In explanation, it may be said that for the past two months Mr. Jenkins had been engaged in making an entomological and ornithological collection in the republic of La Gloria, which is situated so near the equator that its jungles are specially rich in birds and bugs. A new university, founded by Jabez Cooper, Esquire, in his native Indiana town, possessed several hundred yards of empty shelving in its spick-and-span new museum, and La Gloria was a favorite hunting-ground for collectors. Incidentally, Mr. Cooper was largely interested in a concession for gathering rubber in La Gloria—a privilege which had become absolutely worthless, because the govern-

ment which for the moment controlled the destinies of that alleged republic, had enacted so many vexatious regulations, each carrying a tax, and restrictions which required excessive bribery to evade, that profits had reached the vanishing point.

As was usually the case in La Gloria, there was a strong anti-administration party; its leaders, for the good of their health and preservation of liberty, leading an out-of-doors life in the woods, calling themselves generals, and each commanding a corporal's guard of tatterdemalions armed with obsolete rifles and machetes. It was possible to increase their respective armies by the easy and well-known methods of recruiting employed in La Gloria, but arming the "volunteers" was a more difficult matter. Representations had been made to Mr. Jabez Cooper by the exiled Junta in New York, that if the "antis," at present subsisting on yams and fruit in the jungle, should succeed in securing possession of the flesh-pots of Coranado, the capital, there would be a sudden change in the administration, and the trials of the rubber concessionaires would be over.

Possibly Mr. Cooper listened to the voices of the charmers, perhaps it was his zeal for the higher education of the youth of his native town, but whatever the reason, he held a long interview with Mr. Albert Jenkins, soldier of fortune and a prominent member of the Lost Legion, whose services he had invoked in previous scientific and other matters.

Jenkins was neither an entomologist nor an ornithologist, but he was adaptable and willing, and three weeks later he was installed at Coranado, a full-fledged and duly accredited collector of winged and sprawling specimens for Cooper University. That prosperous capital was his headquarters, but the nature of his business necessitated long trips on mule-back into the interior, and the employment of many natives to aid him in collecting.

Peons with gaily colored butterfly nets could be seen chasing equally gaudy butterflies through all parts of the jungle, but, as even tropical birds are too sophisticated to be captured by applying salt to their tail-feathers, it became necessary to arm his agents with lethal weapons, and by a judicious use of gold, with which he was liberally supplied by that patron of education, Mr. Cooper, he had succeeded in bribing the customs officers to allow several cases of "collectors' guns," with fitting ammunition, to pass the boundaries.

It was not the treachery of the men he had bribed, but the idiosyncrasy of a pack-mule, which had led to his being in his present uncomfortable predicament. That animal, sent by one of his country agents for a supply of collectors' materials, was, unfortunately, not city broken, but, after being carefully loaded, it was led, under the very noses of an unsuspecting police, along the Prado.

By an unlucky chance, the presidente had selected that very hour to experiment with his latest toy, a racing automobile, and the mule could hardly be blamed for scattering the crowd of idle spectators, bolting into the avenue of trees, and smashing its burden against them in its efforts to escape from the evil-smelling, loud-honking, dust-raising devil-wagon.

Ordinarily the presidente would have paid slight attention to such a small matter, for he made his own speed regulations, and a mule or so was not of importance, but when he caught sight of the glittering array of Winchesters, packages of cartridges, and other contraband articles which the fleeing beast rattled out of the broken boxes, he uttered a very explosive "Caramba!" and applied the emergency-brake so hard that it disarranged the machinery.

The peon, from whom the mule had escaped, had promptly faded away, and lost himself in the crowd, but it was not difficult to locate the place where the mule had been loaded, and Mr. Jenkins' siesta was rudely disturbed by the prompt arrival of a few files of barefooted, ragged soldiers, with condemned French infantry shakos on

their heads. Their uniforms offered a picturesque variety, and their manual of arms was ragged, but there was a very businesslike appearance about the bayoneted Remingtons which they carried, and he unquestioningly accepted the invitation of the lieutenant in command to accompany them to the citadel, where without ceremony he was shoved along a narrow stone passage and thrust into his present quarters.

The citadel was an anicent edifice, a relic of the times when the Spaniards depended upon the wealth of the New World to support their splendor in the Old, and had been erected to protect the treasures which they squeezed from the natives from seizure by the buccaneers, who had a way of dropping in about the time enough had been gathered to load the plate fleet.

Against modern artillery it would have afforded small security, but its deep moat, high, thick walls of solid masonry, and its position on a towering hill commanding the capital, made it practically impregnable to assault, and even Sir Francis Drake, that terror of the Spanish Main, had left five hundred of his bravest men dead on that hillside when he led the defeated remnant back to his ships.

It had been used as a fortress, prison, and treasure-house by the Spaniards, and one series of casemates had been given to Mother Church as a prison for the Holy Inquisition; but now it was a barracks, arsenal, and state prison, and it had become a tradition in La Gloria that "he who would be the presidente must take the citadel."

The present dictator had captured it by concealing himself and several desperate followers in loads of hay; and his predecessor, who was on the eve of following the large fortune which he had already transmitted to Paris, offered but slight resistance. Taught by experience, he had since that time quartered the horses outside, and any package larger than a can of condensed milk was carefully examined at the barbican before the drawbridge was lowered.

Jenkins knew a good deal about the citadel. For a peaceful collector he had taken an unusual interest in it, and had even expended a few gold pieces to buy a detailed scale drawing of it from a trusted officer, and, being on the thinnest of tracing-paper, it was now carefully concealed in a convenient receptacle in his hat-band. He had a retentive memory, a good sense of direction, and knew to a quarter of an inch the length of his stride—little details which he had cultivated in his leisure moments against need in possible future emergencies. With the plan spread out before him he was able to trace his journey from the echoing archway of the entrance, across the grass-covered courtyard, and through several winding passages.

"Which locates me in cell number four on the first floor of the Twelve Apostles Tower," he said, after carefully going over his calculations. "The floor, of three feet of solid masonry, separates this cell from the dungeons below; there is two feet of solid wall between me and the cells on either side, and above it a storeroom for small arms. That is all shown on this plan, but I don't see that it's encouraging. That small window looks toward the open country, where my friends the bug-hunters are pursuing their prey, and on the other side of that three-inch, chilled steel door is a narrow corridor, where a monkey-faced soldier with a most effective Remington, with twelve inches of bayonet on its business-end, is doing sentry-go."

Jenkins knew that his calculations were exact, and in his retentive memory were stored up several other bits of information about the citadel which did not lighten the gloom of his present situation. Many prisoners were received across the old drawbridge, and there was a tragic inference to be drawn from the fact that but few emerged and the plan showed that the cells and dungeons were not numerous enough to hold all who were admitted.

"I suppose they—make vacancies," he reflected, and the memory of the shrug of the shoulders which had answered his question about a volley of

rifle-shots from the citadel, when he and one of his native friends were passing, came back to him vividly.

"To retain the position of presidente, one must not tolerate rivals nor forgive treachery, Señor Jenkins," his friend had remarked quietly, "and you tell me that there are more than five hundred species of birds found in La Gloria! Remarkable, is it not?" That memory set him to making a very careful calculation of his chances, and he rapidly ticked off the items on his fingers.

"First, I'm here—that's a certainty. Second, before I arrived here I forwarded forty cases of Winchesters, two dozen to the case, total, nine hundred and sixty, with two hundred thousand rounds of ammunition; two Maxims, with one hundred thousand rounds, and five hundred pounds of dynamite. That's just twenty per cent. of the minimum which the Junta required, so my chances of any relief from them are about twenty per cent. of—nothing. Third, my respected employer, even if he knew of my troubles, would cuss me out for being jugged at a critical time, and not turn over his hand to get me out of here—that's fair and according to agreement. Fourth, that leaves only my own wits to depend upon, and, as they've always been sufficient before, I'll continue my interrupted siesta to brighten 'em."

Mr. Jenkins was a light sleeper, and he was roused by the insertion of a key in the padlock of his cell. The place was in darkness, but the light of a lantern held by the jailer who opened the door showed a squad of soldiers in the corridor, and he rapidly smoothed his disordered clothing, and prepared to accompany them.

They marched him across the courtyard, and two of them accompanied him into one of the casemates which was furnished with a table, on which were a lamp and a number of papers. Behind it sat the presidente, a handsome, bearded man of the pure Spanish type, and he showed a remarkably even and white set of teeth when his thin, cruel lips parted in a smile of welcome.

"Ah, Mr. Jenkins," he said, in perfect English, "it is not the idle compliment, characteristic of my own language, when I say that I am delighted to have you as my guest in this interesting old place, which is quite at your disposition. I trust that you have no fault to find with your accommodations—you may speak quite freely; your attendants do not understand English." The latter part of the remark was significant, and Jenkins looked at him sharply.

"No, Señor Presidente," he answered coolly. "I am philosophical, and small details do not annoy me; and, in any case, I suppose I shall not be here long."

"That depends largely—I might say entirely—upon yourself, my dear sir," answered the presidente suavely. "We have many sorts of apartments here—the place is really most ingeniously arranged, and I shall take great pleasure in showing you about presently—but there is only one class from which delivery is impossible."

"The six-feet-by-two kind?" said Jenkins interrogatively.

"Precisely—with walls of earth, not masonry." And the presidente smiled. "I sincerely trust that you will not prove so unreasonable that it will be necessary to place you in one of them."

"I can assure you that I am open to reason," said Jenkins grimly, and the presidente bowed and turned over the documents in front of him.

"Let me see," he continued, examining one of them. "It is now two months that you have been employed in collecting, and during that time several consignments of materials have been passed through the custom-house by the five following officers." He read the names of the men whom Jenkins had bribed. "These are the officials who have—er—facilitated the prompt arrival of your goods, I believe."

"I have a very bad memory for names, your excellency," answered Jenkins, and the presidente smiled as he recognized the ring of determination in his voice.

"It is unfortunate, but in this in-

stance unimportant," he replied. "I think that I can rely upon the information I have here—but you will find that there are excellent opportunities for strengthening and refreshing the memory in the citadel." Jenkins started so violently that his guards menaced him with their bayonets, for a scream of agony resounded through the casemate from an adjoining apartment. "Close the door!" commanded the presidente, and the heavy, clamped door swung noiselessly, and deadened the horrible sound.

"As I was saying, this is an excellent place for refreshing the memory, señor," he continued, with a significant glance at Jenkins. "Of course I should deeply regret—but of that later. Now, in these two months, may I ask how many cases of 'collecting materials' you have forwarded to the interior?"

"Unfortunately, I have also a very bad memory for figures," answered Jenkins obstinately.

"Ah, that is again unfortunate; but again, luckily, I think I may get that information from—other sources." He paused and listened attentively, and a shriek, muffled but still plainly audible, came through the thick wall. "Memory is a strange thing, señor; but, as I said, there are ways of refreshing it," he continued, shrugging his shoulders. "I suppose that you are laboring under no delusion about government interference on your behalf, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Not a trace of one, your excellency," said Jenkins placidly. "It might get out the big stick if it thought that one of its citizens was being tortured, but you can imprison or execute me with perfect impunity, I suppose."

"Ah, torture is a revolting word, señor," said the presidente, raising his slim white hands. "Of course it has been employed in this fortress in the olden times, but the secrets never leaked out. They—er—buried them, I believe. There are some very interesting relics of the Inquisition in the adjoining apartments which I shall be pleased to show you later; I think the rooms are in use for the moment."

"If in the immediately adjoining apartment, I should judge so," answered Jenkins, shuddering as the shrieking was renewed.

The presidente smiled. "Your observation is better than your memory—at present, señor. I suppose the latter would fail you, if I were to ask you now about other details of your business here."

"It *is* very defective." Jenkins spoke as cheerfully as he could. He knew that the cruel devil before him was playing with him as would a cat with a mouse, and that a merciful and speedy death was the least thing which menaced him; but it was one of his maxims to keep a stiff upper lip.

"Ah, señor, it is pitiful to be so afflicted, but, at least, your infirmity permits me to be perfectly frank with you; for, if you do not agree with my views, you will not remember what I have confided to you," said the presidente, smiling. "You probably know that it is now five years that I have been presidente, dictator, liberator—call it what you will—of La Gloria. A very strenuous five years it has been, señor; but not altogether without compensations. Many men have tried to overthrow me, and a few of the failures have become permanent residents of the citadel which they tried to capture. Several are still at large; issuing manifestoes, and—er—chasing butterflies in the jungle, I believe. And yet, it is not altogether an enviable position which they wish to take from me; I have longings and ambitions for a simpler and more peaceful life, señor."

"Is it not possible to resign?" asked Jenkins, grinning; and the presidente smiled in turn.

"Yes, quite possible; but not until I have restored peace to my distressed country, and—received my price. Did it ever occur to you, señor, that the two words, 'one million,' had a very pleasant sound?"

"You are referring to dollars?" asked Jenkins.

"Naturally—gold dollars. I have calculated very closely; it is precisely the sum which I require to enable me to live the simple life of an ex-dictator

in Paris. Through the generosity of my country I have already accumulated nine-tenths of that sum, and it is safely deposited in the Crédit Lyonnaise. Only a pitiful hundred thousand is wanting to complete it, and—then your friends, who are now collecting butterflies, are quite welcome to become liberators, dictators, or presidentes, in turn."

"Sorry I can't help you out, your excellency, but I don't happen to have that little trifle about my clothes," answered Jenkins regretfully. "In fact, I don't believe that I could shake out more than sixty dollars."

The presidente smiled approvingly. "Ah, but you see the point, my dear sir. Now, owing to the depression in the rubber-gathering industry, and a few other sources of revenue, it will take me more than a year to complete my million. I confess that I am most anxious to relinquish my responsibilities. The life of a presidente is uncertain and apt to end suddenly, and—there is also a lady in the case. A certain ballerina of the opéra is waiting for me; perhaps I am indiscreet to mention this, but I am *quite sure* that you will never betray my confidence."

Jenkins saw the point, and nodded affirmatively.

"You apprehend my position—and yours—I see," continued the presidente ingratiatingly. "Now, it has occurred to me that your employer, the estimable Señor Jabez Cooper, I believe, would be loath to lose your valuable services to his institution of learning, and that something in the way of—let us say, a license fee to continue your collecting——"

"Excuse me, your excellency, you're wasting your time," interrupted Jenkins. "Mr. Cooper is deaf in one ear, and that's the one he would listen to your proposition with. He wouldn't stand a touch for a hundred thousand to rescue me from perdition, for he can buy failures cheaper than that by the dozen."

"Ah, you express yourself so lucidly that it almost makes me regret your failure," said the presidente, looking over his joined finger-tips with narrowing eyes. "It is always regrettable to have to proceed to extremities."

There was a knock on the door, and one of the soldiers opened it, admitting a captain of infantry. He handed a memorandum to the presidente, and, while he was making a verbal report in a low voice, Jenkins observed him carefully, and decided that his face was sufficient evidence on which to hang him, for never had he seen a countenance which expressed more cruelty and malignancy. The presidente smiled approvingly as he listened, and when the officer finished, he looked amiably at Jenkins.

"Señor, the adjoining apartments are now vacant, and—I am in possession of certain information which you were unable to supply. Señor Capitan, you will call the Señor Jenkins at six; I believe the sun rises at six-thirty. You will find him in the oubliette apartment, and I am desirous that he should see the early musketry-practise."

The officer saluted, and smiled malignantly at Jenkins as he passed him.

"And now, señor," continued the presidente, consulting the memorandum he had just received, "I notice that your friends in the custom-house have confessed to passing several cases of guns for you. These guns would work sad havoc with out little birds, señor, but there are not enough to enable your friends to take this bird-cage. There are several questions which I wish to ask you about their exact destination, but I fear that your memory will need the refreshment of a night's sleep. I desire to prove to you in the morning that your guns are quite unsuited for ornithological collecting. And now, señor, I am at your disposition to show you the things of which I spoke."

He led the way, and Jenkins, closely guarded by the two soldiers, followed him into the next room. It was larger than the one they had left, and was divided by a heavy railing through the middle. On one side was a long table, well supplied with writing materials and with three luxuriously upholstered

easy chairs behind it, while on the other side stood a piece of machinery about ten feet long, the like of which he had never seen.

"This was formerly the examination-room of the Holy Inquisition," said the presidente, who acted as cicerone. "It is preserved exactly as they left it—of course purely as a matter of historic interest. You can see that they consulted their own comfort. I can assure you that those chairs are quite as easy as they appear, and they were used by the Inquisitors. This ingenious piece of mechanism is a rack, upon which they are said to have stretched recalcitrant witnesses. You observe, the victim was laid upon that wooden bed, his or her ankles and wrists were confined in those straps, and then—whir-r-r!" He rapidly turned a crank at the end, and a series of well-oiled cogs revolved, separating the wrist and ankle manacles very slowly. "It is really a most ingenious appliance."

Jenkins was half-sick with apprehension. The edges of the straps, which had evidently been recently renewed, were stained with blood, and he had no doubt of the cause of the shrieks which he had heard. He bent over the rack, ostensibly to examine it closely, in reality to hide the pallor which he knew had come to his face.

"It is certainly kept in most excellent repair, almost ready for use, I should say," he remarked, as he straightened up.

The presidente smiled. "It would be a pity not to preserve carefully such a unique relic of their ingenuity. I can almost imagine the scenes which formerly took place here, when I look at it; but this is but one of many such appliances."

He led the way into the adjoining cell, a room about fifteen feet square, and Jenkins nearly fell over something on the floor. One glance, even in the dim light, showed him that it was the body of a man, and that life had departed from it in no easy manner, for the face was distorted, the eyeballs fairly protruding from their sockets, and the blackened lips covered with a half-dried, bloody froth. He gave an involuntary cry when the presidente held the lamp close to it, and he recognized one of the customs officers.

"*Gastados?*—Used up?" asked the presidente of a man who was mopping up some ominous stains on the floor.

"*Si*, Señor Presidente," he answered, looking significantly at a rope which ran through a block in the high ceiling.

The presidente gave a little exclamation of annoyance. "Really, el capitan is a trifle too—zealous! One could almost imagine that we were back in the last century, Señor Jenkins, and that this poor wretch had died under the torture. I believe that such accidents did happen in this room. Those four rings in the corners of the ceiling with the ropes hanging from them afforded a very simple but effectual method for persuading obdurate heretics. The idea was adopted from the buccaneers. The victim was suspended by the arms and legs, so that his or her body just cleared the floor. It was then raised to the ceiling by that rope which runs through the pulley-block, and suddenly released. The ropes from the corners prevented the body from striking the floor, but I believe it is said that the shock was so severe that no man or woman ever survived the third application. Curious, is it not, that the wrists of that poor devil seem to be bruised?—I suppose that he was manacled too tightly."

Jenkins' knees were knocking together, and he felt that the presidente saw and was enjoying his fear, so he made no further effort to conceal it.

"It's not necessary to go any farther, your excellency," he said. "I quite understand. I don't know how great a power of resistance I possess, but I suppose torture will make any man say what his tormentors wish him to say. If you use these devilish means——"

"Oh, Señor Jenkins!" interrupted the presidente, with a horrified expression on his face. "I beg of you, do not mention such a thing. If you choose to illustrate a point, assume, at least, that certain circumstances might have placed you in the power of the

Inquisitors, but do not imply that anything so barbarous is possible in this enlightened age."

"All right," answered Jenkins grimly. "I was about to remark that if those devils had stretched, jolted, and thumb-screwed me, they might have extorted any sort of an accusation out of me, but it couldn't have been relied upon as truthful."

"Yes, I doubt if accusations extorted in that way were ever reliable; but they served their purpose—in the olden days, of course," said the presidente thoughtfully. "It is wonderful to know what close observers of human nature the Inquisitors were, señor. I believe that when an Anglo-Saxon heretic fell into their hands they adopted quite different methods from those which they employed with the more emotional Latin races. They worked slowly upon them, with minor tortures, until their stubbornness was gradually broken down. They let them see their friends suffer and witness several autos da fé before they delivered them over to the secular authorities; while with such men as that"—he pointed disdainfully to the corpse on the floor—"they proceeded at once to the severer, and sometimes fatal, questioning to gain information. Their methods were always effectual, I understand. There are many other ingenious contrivances here, but perhaps we have seen enough for to-night. Another day, Señor Jenkins, I shall make you acquainted with them. If you will have the kindness to follow me, I shall introduce you to your apartment."

Jenkins breathed a sigh of relief as he followed the presidente from the room and through a corridor which he knew, from his memory of the plan, led to the old prison of the Inquisition. His joints ached sympathetically from the mere thought of the tortures which he knew had been inflicted that night, and for a moment he was tempted to gain his release from a probable personal application by jumping on the cold-blooded devil who walked carelessly ahead of him, and provoking a volley or a bayonet-thrust from his guards. But the innate hopefulness of disposition which is characteristic of the members of the Lost Legion restrained him, and the presidente, as if reading his thoughts, turned smilingly, and took his arm.

"It is an unusual thing for me to give my personal escort to my guests," said the presidente courteously, "but I have had such a striking illustration to-night of the mistakes which my subordinates make that I wish to assure myself personally of your comfort." He stopped before a heavy iron door, which one of the soldiers unlocked, and the lantern which he carried dimly illuminated a windowless cell about ten feet square.

Jenkins was about to step inside, when the presidente laid his hand warningly on his arm.

"Be careful, my dear señor!" he exclaimed. "I should be inconsolable if you should meet with an accident. You will observe that there is quite an aperture in the floor."

Jenkins drew back quickly as he saw that a yawning pit of blackness replaced the flooring of the center of the cell. Around it was a ledge about two feet wide, the stones which formed it slippery with moisture.

"You will really be quite comfortable, so long as you remain on the ledge," said the presidente calmly. "The pit is of quite unknown depth. Several occupants have, I believe, solved the problem, but no one has ever returned to tell of his discoveries. The idea was adopted from a room in the Mother House of the Order in Seville. The walls of that one were movable, and could be pushed in to obliterate the ledge, but the masonry construction precluded an exact copy here."

Again the temptation came to Jenkins to grapple with the presidente, and take him to solve that question together, but his tormentor stepped quickly to one side, and imperatively motioned to him to enter.

"*Buenos noches, señor,*" he said ironically. "Let me beg of you again to be careful, for I should be quite dis-

consolate if you should meet with a mishap."

Jenkins entered gingerly, and when the heavy door was slammed behind him, found himself in total darkness.

II.

Mr. Jenkins' first act was to carefully remove his shoes, for he had but a slippery footing on the narrow ledge. His quick eyes had noted all the details in the momentary glance by lamplight afforded him, and he had impressed every stone upon his memory. He first assured himself, by a careful journey about the ledge, that the walls were really solid and immovable; then, lying flat, he explored as much of the wall lining the central cavity as his long arms could reach. It was perfectly smooth and slimy from dampness, and when he grudgingly sacrificed one of his few remaining matches he caught a glimpse of it for, perhaps, ten feet down, and saw that it offered no possible foot-hold. He gave an exclamation of relief as the match was extinguished by a cool draft of air from below.

"That means an opening," he concluded. "A draft does not come from a closed well." He drew a coin from his pocket and dropped it carefully over the edge, and the faint splash which came back to him convinced him that there was water at the bottom. This exhausted his present means of investigation, and, as was his wont when in difficult situations, he sat down as comfortably as he could, and proceeded to take stock of his position.

"First, the presidente has me absolutely in his power, and the only reason he does not settle me out of hand is that he believes I have certain information which he wants. Second, he isn't at all particular about the means he uses to obtain information, so I will probably be the next delegate to investigate the torture-chamber, and this is but a preliminary canter. Third, this is a most uncomfortable apartment, but, unlike most cells, it offers a ready means of exit—if I knew what was at the bottom beside water. An opening there must be above that water, but I'd likely break my neck if I tried to get to it. This little detail was omitted from the plan, so I suppose that my friend Juan Gomez, who drew it, was ignorant of its existence."

Jenkins wasted no time or sympathy on his confederates, the customs officers who had been tortured. They were players in the same game with himself; they were paid their price, as he was, and they must accept the fortunes of war as uncomplainingly as did he and his companions of the Lost Legion.

"I rather wish that Mr. Jabez Cooper could have seen that poor devil's dead face, or have to hang onto this slippery ledge for a half-hour in the dark, though," he reflected. "It might make him loosen up a bit when he has another job on hand—which I am afraid some one else will have to do, from the present outlook, or, rather, lack of it."

Mr. Jenkins' reflections were not pleasing, and he had almost reached the point of regretting that he had not accepted the opening in his father's boot-factory in Kankakee, when he was roused from them by a faint "Hist!" which came from the central cavity, and when he poked his head over the edge he heard it repeated more distinctly.

"Hello, central! yes, it's me," he said, with a cheerful disregard for grammar.

"The estimable Señor Jenkins?" echoed a voice from the pit.

"The same," answered Jenkins. "Who are you?"

"Juan Gomez, señor, and I come to rescue you, if it is possible."

"My boy, you can't be too quick about it, if you hurry," cried Jenkins. "I am entirely at your disposition, but I hope that you know more about it than you do about drawing plans."

"Ah, señor, the presidente and myself are the only ones who know the secret of this oubliette. If I put it in a plan and that is found, he knows at once that I made it, and——"

"That's sufficient, Juan; I accept your apology, for I know what hap-

pens to his men when he is displeased," interrupted Jenkins. "But now about this escape proposition?"

"Señor, it is only a question of payment. If your patron, the estimable Señor Cooper, will guarantee——"

"Ring off right now, Juan," interrupted Jenkins again. "The estimable Señor Jenkins is the man you're doing business with, and his employer is no philanthropist. Muddling fools are too cheap for him to bother about, and his bid for me wouldn't tempt you."

"But, señor, you do not know what is in store for you, and it would be worth much to——"

"Juan, Spanish is a beautiful, liquid language, and is said to contain the greatest vocabulary of any modern tongue, but I haven't time to listen to it all now. I know all about what I'm up against, and you can take it from me that Cooper won't move a finger to save me from it. I've got a thousand in gold cached for emergencies. You get me out of here and into the woods and it's yours; if you don't, at the first turn of the rack I give up that plan, and tell who made it and all about this conversation. That's as close as I can translate United States into your lingo, and it's up to you to get busy."

"But, señor, that is very little," whined the voice. "Just think—the rack is the least of the —tortures!"

"I can imagine the whole box of tricks without your descriptions, *hombre,* so don't try that game on me. The thousand's all I've got, but if I get to the woods this will be a personally conducted revolution, with 'yours truly' doing the conducting. After I've settled with the presidente, I'll make you cartographer in chief, at short hours and a liberal salary, under the new administration. Now, not for publication, but as an evidence of good faith, strike a match and let me see your handsome mug."

A dim light showed below, and, looking down, he saw the head of Gomez protruding through a hole in the wall, just above the surface of the water, which he judged was about forty feet down.

"How deep is that water?" asked Jenkins, and when Gomez replied that it was less than two feet, he gave up his half-formed idea of jumping into it. "I'm no Coney Island tank-diver," he grumbled to himself. "Say, Juan, what's the game?"

"Listen, señor. This passage runs for about two hundred yards, and comes out in the cellar of a church at the foot of the hill. You can make your way through it, and then escape in the darkness to the woods."

"I'll make my way through it, all right, if I can make my way to it without breaking my neck. How are you going to get me down there?" asked Jenkins, and Gomez promptly gave up the proposition as beyond him.

"Juan, for a man that's engineering a thousand-dollar-an-hour job, you're 'way out of your class!" exclaimed Jenkins, in disgust. "Calling 'Cash!' behind the ribbon-counter, or slicing sausage in a delicatessen-shop at three-fifty per, is about your size. Now, see here, *hombre.* You know those dinky little bows and arrows that the Indians use for shooting monkeys?"

"*Si, señor, perfectamenté,*" admitted Gomez hopefully.

"Good! Well, you hustle out and get a set and fasten a stout string to one of the arrows. Then you bring a rope with an iron hook on the end of it, and I'll earn that thousand for you."

"*Si señor,* to-morrow night all will be——"

"To-morrow night!" exploded Jenkins. "Do you think I'm going to roost around here all day? Good Lord! By that time the presidente will have stretched me out so that I can hang onto this ledge with my fingers and wiggle my little pink toes in that pool, and then I won't need your help. This isn't a *mañana* proposition, *hombre!*"

"Ah, señor, you gringoes are so impetuous! It is four o'clock now, and what you command is impossible."

"Four o'clock—phew! How time does fly when you're not bored!" exclaimed Jenkins. "Perhaps that *would* be a bit sudden for La Gloria, so we will change the program a little. See

here, Juan. You're short on invention, but how's your memory?"

"Perfect—when it is worth while," answered Gomez significantly.

"Then listen to me, *hombre*. I'll make it worth while. You know the Pulperia del Cramen?"

"*Si, señor*, very well. It was there that I made the acquaintance of the estimable señor."

"Right you are, Juan; I haven't forgotten what they called a cocktail that I drank there that day. Well, you go there and you'll find a muleteer named Manuel Gonzalez. He'll be very drunk, but if you whisper 'E pluribus unum' in his ear, he'll get sober—got that down?"

"I will remember—I have seen it on the dollars of your so glorious country."

"Yes, that's why I selected it for a password—knowing the purity of motives of your so glorious country's patriots," said Jenkins dryly. "Well, having restored Manuel to sobriety, tell him that the Señor Americano, who chases bugs, orders him to go at once to the chief collector of butterflies in the woods and to tell him that he is to tie his volunteers together and to bring 'em to the place he knows of; to be there sharp at midnight. Am I straining your intellect?"

"I understand, señor; the muleteer Manuel, at the password of the estimable Señor Jenkins, will proceed to the illustrious patriot, General Ric——"

"Ring off, Juan! I'm not mentioning any names, and don't you overwork your imagination, but carry out instructions as I give them."

"*Bueno*, señor. I will emulate the parrot, who repeats only what he is taught."

"That's the idea," said Jenkins approvingly. "I leave it to you to get me out of here to keep that date, even if they change my cell; but I reckon you'll find me doing business at the old stand. Remember that this is a C. O. D. proposition; you've got to deliver me from here to get that thousand, and now toddle along and get busy. I'll expect you about eleven to-morrow night. *Hasta, mañana!*"

"Ah, señor, you can trust me to do my utmost, but implore also the protection of the saints. There are worse places than the oubliette in the prison; there is the 'bed of roses,' the 'frying-pan,' the——"

"Juan, I've got *real* troubles of my own, and it isn't necessary for you to invoke your imagination. You'll be getting malaria down there, and I can't spare you the time to have a chill, so you vamose!" said Jenkins in a determined voice, and the light disappeared.

Jenkins immediately became so absorbed in his thoughts that the arrival of the captain with a squad of soldiers surprised him, but he quickly slipped on his shoes and took his place between two guards.

The captain smiled at his alacrity in leaving his cell. "You have rested well, Señor Gringo?" he asked insolently.

"Excellently, *muchas gracias*, Señor Capitan—Diablo!" answered Jenkins cheerfully.

The captain shrugged his shoulders. "I conduct to more comfortable quarters than his excellency, señor," he said. "There are no bad dreams where I put my guests. I am to give the señor a demonstration with his so excellent bird-guns—at sunrise."

Jenkins noticed that his guards were armed with the confiscated Winchesters as they marched along, but in spite of the captain's insinuations he had no fear of immediate execution, as he was convinced that the presidente reserved him until he should have obtained the details of the proposed revolution. This conviction was a bit shaken, however, when the cool air of the courtyard struck his face, and he saw a dozen soldiers drawn up in line, each armed with a new Winchester.

"This is our rifle-range, señor; a trifle restricted in length, but that saves ammunition, as it is so much easier to hit the—targets," remarked the captain, with a smile which was not reassuring.

A couple of men were throwing the earth from a fair-sized pit, and the edge of the grass-plot gave evidence that it

was frequently disturbed, while several small mounds were plainly visible in that corner of the courtyard.

"El presidente's private burying-ground, I reckon," thought Jenkins, smiling grimly. The captain beckoned to him to follow him to the wall. "You will observe, señor, that we adopt all precautions to make our target-practise safe." He pointed to the wall. "Deflected bullets from masonry might be dangerous, but we have covered the stones with thick adobe bricks for several feet, and the—targets are placed against it."

Jenkins noticed that the adobe was plentifully pitted with bulletholes, and the captain cast a quick glance around to assure himself that they were out of ear-shot of the soldiers.

"Listen, señor," he said in a low tone. "I have to carry out the orders of my superiors, but it is possible to arrange things so that a man can appear to be shot and still be saved and quietly removed unharmed. If you can assure me that your friend, the estimable Señor Cooper, would be sufficiently grateful—well, a word to the wise, señor!"

"Now, I wonder how the deuce old Cooper ever got the reputation of being an easy mark!" thought Jenkins. "It's apparent that they don't know the old man, and I reckon I've got to convince this population that he won't stand quietly to have his leg pulled."

"Time presses, señor," remarked the captain significantly. "In ten minutes the sun rises, and there will be no further opportunity for consideration."

"All right, *hombre,*" said Jenkins coolly. "If you have your orders, I reckon they go. There's nothing doing in the bribery line so early in the morning. Cooper never gets up before eight, and it wouldn't do the least good to ring him up on my account."

"*Bueno,* señor, you have had your chance," said the captain, with a trace of disappointment in his voice, and he turned and gave a sharp command to his sergeant.

A moment later the heavy doors of the small fortress chapel swung open, and a priest, walking backward and holding a crucifix above his head, came from inside. Following him were the four customs officers, their faces ghastly in the gray light, their arms pinioned, and each supported by a soldier on either side. The procession marched very slowly, for each step of the condemned men was accompanied by groans of agony. They glanced at Jenkins apathetically; and the captain, who had apparently been well trained in his duties, quickly ranged them against the adobe-covered portion of the wall, while soldiers deftly bound handkerchiefs over their eyes.

"And now, Señor Gringo, you will notice that there is room for one more," said the captain, drawing his handkerchief from his pocket. A couple of soldiers seized Jenkins from behind and pinioned his arms. "There should have been five of these for our demonstration, but one possessed a pitifully small amount of resistance. Permit me." He stepped forward, and Jenkins was about to protest, when he caught sight of the presidente, a smile of amusement on his face, looking from a window of the prison.

"I reckon the jig's up, but I won't give that cruel devil the satisfaction of seeing that I'm in a blue funk," he thought, and remained perfectly quiet while the captain blindfolded him.

"It is not too late," the captain whispered eagerly as he tied the knot, but Jenkins simply shook his head, and the captain thrust him roughly against the wall.

"Now it is!" he hissed angrily. "It is already growing light, and in five minutes you will be—*gastados!*"

"And I might have been a peaceful bootmaker in Kankakee!" thought Jenkins, as he leaned against the wall.

A few sharp words of command, a rattling of guns, a cry for mercy from the man beside him, and then a crashing volley of musketry! Jenkins heard a grunt, followed by a sound that resembled the throwing of sacks of meal on the ground, but felt no pain.

"I have always heard that execution by shooting was painless, and now I be-

lieve it," he thought. "But that fool who figured out the respective velocities of a bullet and sound made a mistake. He claimed that the man who was shot never heard the report, because the bullet traveled the faster. I must be dead; even those red-headed monkeys couldn't miss at ten yards, but I distinctly heard——" His reflections were interrupted by an exclamation of anger, and the bandage was slipped from his eyes. Before him stood the presidente, and four lifeless forms were stretched on the grass. The captain coolly drew his revolver and put a bullet in the head of each, and when he had finished saluted the presidente.

"Señor Capitan, your zeal quite carries you away," said the presidente sternly. "But for the poor marksmanship of your men, I should have been robbed of the company of Señor Jenkins."

"The order said five, your excellency," answered the captain apologetically, but Jenkins knew that he was watching a prearranged comedy, and congratulated himself that he had shown no sign of weakness.

"Yes, but that was signed before the unfortunate accident of last night, and I must beg of you to be more careful in the future. Now, Señor Jenkins, I shall be honored if you will give me the pleasure of your company at coffee."

Jenkins glanced significantly at his bonds, and the captain signed to a soldier to untie them.

"You can see that I was right, señor," continued the presidente, pointing to the bodies which were already being thrown into the pit. "Your guns were quite unsuited for making a collection of our feathered songsters, but they seem perfectly adapted for this purpose, and I trust that we shall soon have them all in our possession—and several of your employees to try them on." The presidente was a cordial host, and the steaming coffee, hot rolls, and fresh butter were grateful to Jenkins after his long fast and his trying experiences. The presidente talked cheerfully of his plans for the future, the apartment he had already engaged in Paris, and kindred topics during the meal, but when the orderly had cleared away the dishes he leaned back in his chair, joined his finger-tips, and looked at Jenkins with narrowing eyes.

"I am charmed to see that the air of the citadel does not take away your appetite, señor," he said. "You are a trifle pale, but I trust that your night's sleep has improved your memory."

"I shall not forget last night, nor this morning, in a hurry, your excellency," answered Jenkins; and the presidente smiled incredulously.

"May you be spared long to remember them, señor, but—*quien sabe?* Life is a very uncertain thing."

"For gringoes—and presidentes—in La Gloria, yes," assented Jenkins; and his excellency laughed.

"You Americanos are incorrigible, señor," he said. "But now to business. Three of my former friends—Ricardo Vasquez, Cleto Morales, and Enrico Salazar—are said to be living in the jungle at present. May I ask which of them is employed by you in—er—collecting?"

"Vasquez, Morales, Salazar—these names all seem vaguely familiar to me," answered Jenkins thoughtfully. "I have employed so many men that they may possibly be on the pay-roll, but, for the life of me, I can't remember."

"It may be more than your life," answered the presidente dryly. "In the end it will be the same, but that information would save much useless annoyance. I am pressed for time, señor; I will give you two minutes to reconsider, and then I must leave you until to-morrow. I should regret the necessity to—refresh your memory, but you leave me no alternative."

Jenkins did some rapid thinking, but he was true to his code, and when the presidente returned his watch to his pocket and rose from the table, he looked at him defiantly.

"I am afraid that you'll have to excuse me, your excellency," he said firmly. "My memory's gone clean back on me."

The presidente shrugged his shoulders. "As you will," he answered indifferently. "A few hours more or less makes little difference—to me." He spoke to the orderly, who left the room, and a moment later the captain entered. "Señor Jenkins is suffering from loss of memory," continued the presidente to him. "I will leave him to you until to-morow, capitan. No violence, if you please, but perhaps the water-cure will be effectual. Let us say until sunset; unless the cure is complete before then."

The captain smiled and saluted. "And for the night?" he asked.

"Let us see," said the presidente reflectively. "We must economize, and fuel is expensive, so I fear the frying-pan is out of the question. The bed of roses is said to have been——"

"Anything but that blamed oubliette!" pleaded Jenkins. "I'll pay for the fuel, I'll do anything in reason, but don't keep me hanging like a fly for another night."

Jenkins' face looked distressed, but he was inwardly relieved when the presidente fell into the trap and answered: "I fear that is the only available apartment, señor. To-morrow, perhaps—if there is a to-morrow—we may make a change. A speedy recovery to you, señor."

Five minutes later Jenkins was securely bound in a stout chair in the room where he had seen the body the night before. A broad leather strap about his forehead and an iron collar about his neck fixed his head immovably to the back of his chair; and a couple of soldiers, under the direction of the captain, filled a large filter of porous stone, such as is used in the tropics to cool drinking-water, and raised it, by means of the block and tackle, to the ceiling above his head. The captain hung a cheap, loud-ticking clock of American manufacture on the wall in front of him, and, in spite of his uncomfortable position, Jenkins smiled as he thought how out of place this evidence of modern Yankee ingenuity seemed in the grim surroundings of a medieval torture-chamber.

"*Bueno!* I believe that everything is now complete," said the captain, looking at him complacently. "The sun sets at six-twenty, señor. Should you feel the cure complete before that time, you have only to call—this clock keeps accurate time. *Hasta luego,* señor. Much as I should like to remain with you, I have other duties which claim my attention."

His grin disclosed fanglike teeth, discolored with nicotin, and it was a distinct relief to Jenkins when he left the room. Nothing in his situation seemed very appealing to him, and the minute-hand of the clock had made a full revolution before he appreciated the full horror of it.

The water in the jar above him filtered very slowly through the porous stone, and collected in a drop at the oval bottom and fell with rhythmic regularity, each one striking him in exactly the same spot on the top of his head. His auburn hair was thick and curly, and at first only the trickling of the water over his face annoyed him. At the end of the first hour that little spot on the top of his head commenced to feel as if an icicle were pressed against it, and each drop caused a sharp, stinging pain as it splashed upon him. He watched the clock anxiously, and by the end of the second hour it needed all the evidences of his senses to convince him that it had not stopped. He had counted the drops; they fell at intervals of twelve seconds, five to the minute, and as each succeeding drop became more painful, the second-hand, by which he anticipated each coming splash, seemed to revolve with increased speed, while the minute-hand, whose progress indicated the passage of time until sunset, appeared to be stationary. Another hour, and each drop seemed a blow from a hammer, jarring his entire frame and causing the most intense agony.

He tried to shrink away each time the racing second-hand indicated an impending drop, but the strap and collar were ingeniously devised, and their cutting edges against his skin but made his efforts to escape painful.

Jenkins never knew how he managed to survive that day. To his credit be it said, it never occurred to him to gain release from his torture by betraying the revolutionists. He knew that the presidente could crush them if he was sure of which camp to attack, but until he was in possession of definite information he would not dare to lead a force from Coranado for fear that he should make a mistake, and while proceeding against a weak antagonist, leave the capital exposed to the attack of a strong one.

The captain visited him several times, his eyes gloating over his victim's agony, while his cruel lips inquired with exaggerated mock courtesy as to his comfort.

Jenkins summoned all of his resolution during these visits and answered the mocking questions defiantly, but when at last six o'clock came and the brute seated himself comfortably and lighted a cigarette while he watched, Jenkins could hardly repress his screams of agony.

"Twenty minutes more; still one hundred blows from that sledge-hammer! My God! how can I endure them!" he groaned, as he watched the clock, but although the captain's small, keen eyes were fixed on him maliciously, they detected no sign of weakening. The slowly dragging minute-hand finally reached the twenty minutes past, and he rose from his chair and yawned.

"I wonder if this American timepiece is quite reliable," he said, grinning at his sergeant. "José, his excellency has reprimanded me twice, and I fear to make a mistake. So go you to the top of the west tower and look carefully that the sun has quite disappeared below the horizon."

That extra ten minutes, until the sergeant reappeared, seemed longer to Jenkins than any two hours of that day —the longest he had ever spent in his life. And when the captain leisurely unfastened him, he fell a senseless heap upon the wet floor.

"Pig of a gringo!" exclaimed the captain contemptuously, stirring the prostrate form with his boot. "José, behold the effect of imagination and the superiority of our modern inventions! For two hours, now, the jar has been empty, and yet, with the clock before him, he has felt the drop which did not fall each time the second-hand moved its twelve spaces. Carry the swine's carcass to the oubliette—if he slips from the ledge it will be but small loss and save us work with the rack to-morrow."

A couple of soldiers lifted Jenkins' limp form from the floor, and their rough handling recalled him to consciousness. It seemed to him that his head must be a mass of pulp, and he was surprised when he ran his fingers tenderly through his thick, wet hair, to find that there was only the slightest palpable evidence of the torture he had endured.

"It was no dream, though," he muttered, as the soldiers dropped him on the floor in front of the door of the oubliette. "If ever I get el capitan in my grip, he'll pay me for that extra dose."

He staggered to his feet as the door swung open, and even his ignorant and brutal guards looked pityingly at his haggard face as he tottered to the narrow ledge about the pit. After they had left him in darkness, he lay perfectly still, trying to collect his scattered wits. His head, which seemed now to have grown to a tremendous size, was buzzing like a disturbed beehive, and every nerve in his body tingled with pain. He had lost all track of time, and hardly remembered that he had any definite plans, when a whistle from the pit aroused him.

"Señor Jenkins!" called a low voice, and he answered eagerly.

"That you, Jenkins, old pal?" came a cheery question in English.

Jenkins nearly rolled off the ledge in his excitement. "Yes, all that's left of me. Who are you?"

"Halliday, of course," answered the voice. "The crew of the tramp steamer that had the last consignment tried to welch when they found out that the cargo was arms for La Gloria, and old Cooper sent me down to insure delivery

to you. I ran across this greaser, and he told me what you were up against, so I chipped in on the game with him."

"Good boy, Halliday! Juan, did you deliver my message?"

"*Absolutamente,* señor; the brave volunteers will await your coming," answered Gomez pompously.

"They'll wait a long time, then; it's a case of the mountain coming to Mahomet, this time, for I'm 'fatty gay,' as our friend Madame Hortense would say. Halliday, can you speak Spanish?"

"Sure thing; I wasn't a Texas ranger five years for nothing."

"*Bueno*—bully boy! Now, listen! You hike back with Juan to the Obispo ford of the Chiriqui. You'll find about a thousand patriots thirsting for glory and the customs receipts there, under command of General Ricardo Vasquez. You bring about two hundred of 'em here—you'll find the best way to lead 'em is with a club from behind. Send Juan back ahead of you with a good, heavy petard and enough scaling-ladders to reach this ledge. Are you on?"

"So far, yes. Fire ahead!"

"Gee whiz! it's a comfort to strike a ray of intelligence again!" exclaimed Jenkins. "Compare your watches and arrange with Vasquez to herd the rest of the bunch into town a half-hour after you leave. Will that passage hold two hundred men?"

"If they don't mind crowding, I reckon it will," answered Halliday.

Jenkins laughed. "The tighter you pack 'em in, the better. Now, as soon as you get your bunch here, you pack 'em in, and when I pass back the word you shove all you know how. If you're good and vigorous at the rear, it'll make it easier for me to lead 'em at the front, and if you hurry, you'll be in time to see doings in the citadel. Tell Vasquez to throw his men against the main gate; I'll see that it's open, and now hustle Juan back with the petard and those ladders."

The excitement dulled the sharp edge of his physical pain, but the time seemed interminable until a dim light at the bottom of the pit announced Juan's return. Two peons carrying the ladders accompanied him, and while they were lashing them together Gomez managed to land an arrow on the ledge. Jenkins quickly pulled up the string, and, with the rope which followed it, the petard. His pain, hunger, and fatigue were forgotten as he rapidly affixed it to the iron door, and, after assuring himself that the scaling-ladders were secure, he lighted the short fuse and slid easily to the bottom of the pit. He saw that the narrow passageway was crammed with men, and had hardly time to shove Gomez in and flatten himself against him when there was a deafening crash in the dungeon above.

The next ten minutes were always a confused but glorious recollection to Jenkins. He remembered climbing a seemingly interminable ladder, choking and coughing in the acrid fumes of powder smoke, and yelling encouragement to the men, who were stumbling out of the passage into the pit from Halliday's vigorous shoving. The door was blown from its fastenings, and as he tripped over it, he fell on the body of the corridor sentry, who had been killed by the explosion of the petard.

Halliday drove the soldiers before him like a flock of sheep, and when Jenkins at last heard his fluent profanity above the hubbub in the corridor, he gave a whoop and started for the courtyard.

The battle there was of short duration. The soldiers of the garrison had been called to arms to repel an assault at the main entrance, but when they found themselves attacked from the rear by a force led by a shrieking, red-headed gringo, and driven by another whose mastery of forcible invective and heavy fist discouraged laggards, the drawbridge was quickly lowered, and the few officers who resisted were shot by their own men.

The two armies immediately fraternized, and loud shouts of "Viva, Vasquez! Viva el liberator!" proclaimed that the presidente was an ex-dictator.

"I wish I didn't remember that

blamed clock," grumbled Jenkins, an hour later, when the captain and the presidente were brought before the drum-head courtmartial. "I'd like to see just how that rack works. Your ex-excellency, are there any messages I can take to Paris for you? It was Paris you intended visiting, was it not?"

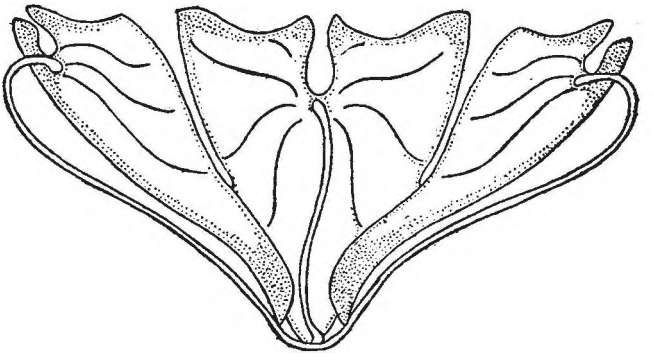
"Ah, your memory is restored; truly a wonderful recovery!" exclaimed the presidente, shrugging his shoulders in spite of his bound arms. "We have, in Spanish, a very pertinent proverb, señor: 'To-day to thee—to-morrow to me.' *Adios.*"

"Yes—if there be a to-morrow, but *—quien sabe?"* answered Jenkins, and the presidente was marched out.

Three weeks later Mr. Jabez Cooper wrote a check in his New York office and handed it to Jenkins.

"You haven't got much in the way of a collection to show for my money," he grumbled.

"No," assented Jenkins as he stowed the paper carefully away. "I thought of sending up a stuffed presidente, but when Vasquez, who is a mighty poor collector, got through with him, his skin was too full of holes to be worth preserving."



SUCH A GOOD STORY

A NEW YORKER who has recently returned from England tells this story as indicative of the average Englishman's notorious inability to see the point of a joke.

"On one occasion," he says, "I was propounding the time-honored conundrum about the difference in the manner of death between the barber and the sculptor—the answer being that while the barber curls up and dyes, the sculptor makes faces and busts.

"One of the party to whom I was relating this seemed to be particularly impressed by it, and a few days after I heard him trying to tell it, with the following results.

"'I heard an awfully good story the other day about the difference between a barber and a sculptor. It makes me laugh even now to think of it. You see, the barber curls up and busts, while the sculptor makes faces and dies. Pretty good, isn't it, bah Jove?'

"And," continued the New Yorker, "I really believe that he is still wondering why the story didn't make a hit, and attributing its failure to the stupidity of his audience."

His Need of Money

By H. R. Durant

The dramatic narrative of an athlete who engaged in two struggles—one with his rivals of the running track, the other with as subtle a temptation as ever came to a man whose most pressing need was that of money

SHE arose from her seat on the wide veranda steps with a preoccupied air, and walked slowly under the Gothic arch of swaying elms toward the highway, meanwhile listlessly swinging a spear of timothy to and fro. She paused when she reached the macadamized road, and indifferently glanced along its flawless, adamantine surface northward to a point where it was lost to view in a pall of yellow dust, which marked the rapid passing of an auto-car in its mad, whirling rush for the distant Berkshires. Farther north, beyond the brown mist overhanging Holyoke, the mountain ridge split the delicate, violet haze in an undulating line of purple, ending abruptly where Mount Tom's rounded, aggressive form projected above the valley in bold defiance, a silent, ever-watching sentinel. Before her, and separated by flat, spreading meadows, lay the broad, placid Connecticut, moving through the fertile valley in calm majesty, its tranquil surface reflecting the morning sun in dazzling radiance.

From the west came the late September breeze, with its faint, fragrant message from the autumn woods and Jack Frost's chilling breath in its wake. The cool wind tingled her cheeks to a crimson glow and whipped her dark, wavy hair about in charming confusion. She gazed absent-mindedly across the expanding, richly productive acres of tobacco-land ("two hundred of 'em," she had often heard her father say, "and a thousand dollars an acre wouldn't buy 'em") to the fringe of orderly arranged tobacco-sheds beyond. Near the road to the left a cluster of silver-stemmed birches were nodding their rustling plumes of cardinal and amber.

A day of all days for blissful reveries, she mused dreamily, a day when nature arose to the summit of alluring power, extinguishing all desire for keen introspection or contradictory self-analysis. If the weather-god would only be kind, she thought, and award the same beautiful weather for the fair next week nothing more could be asked. And *what* a fair it promised to be!

The manufacturers' and agricultural exhibits; the horse, cattle, dog, and chicken shows, the midway, the fakers, the trotting-races, the vaudeville acts, including the diving-horses, which were to make their leap in front of the mammoth grand stand, the balloon ascension, etc., but all paling to insignificance before the *one* event—the quarter-mile foot-race for the New England championship, which was to take place on Governor's Day, Thursday.

It was not that her father had wagered a large sum of money on the result, or because this usually thrilling event had been talked of for weeks, which had aroused her interest and sent her heart beating faster whenever it came to mind. It was her personal interest which held and swayed her. Of this there could be no further doubt.

At first unbelieving, then reluctantly, and finally she had accepted the knowledge that she wanted Harry Andrews to win the race just because he was going to run.

It was a year ago, she reflected, when he had appeared one day and asked for a position. Her father had been pleasantly impressed with the applicant's well-built figure, his clean-cut features, and his steadfast blue eyes, with a glint of steel in their hidden depths.

So he had been engaged to work in the tobacco-fields, and for six months he had rubbed elbows and eaten his meals beside the Italian and Polish farm-hands without complaint. His apparent education, his intelligence, faithfulness, and peculiar adaptability to his new employment had swiftly won him promotion, and now he was foreman of the large plantation.

It was remarkable that he could have won her father's confidence in such a short time. Perhaps it was his effervescent good nature which helped to advance him so rapidly, for there seemed to be perpetual summer in his soul. All problems sat lightly upon him, and he wrestled cheerfully with every intricate proposition which arose.

That his right name was Harry Andrews she did not believe. Neither did she believe that his past life had been without events of considerable importance, but who and what he had been he had never disclosed. His speech and manners had shown a previous acquaintance with conventional veneer, but he had been accepted solely for his present worth.

Small wonder, then, that he had grown invaluable. Her father's sanguine dependence and stanch trust in him had become iron-bound in its unshaken strength, and it was, therefore, perfectly natural that John Steele, wealthy tobacco-grower, with a keen fondness for all outdoor sports, should grow much interested in the foot-racing ability of his foreman, since this had been the favorite sport of the county for a generation, and doubly interested when he learned that Andrews was a wonderfully fast runner.

He became further convinced when he saw his employee reel off the yards in astonishing figures in practise. There could be no denying this, because he held the watch himself.

It was her father who had suggested that Andrews prepare himself for an attempt to wrest the New England running championship from the unbeaten Farrell. For five years the Fair Association had annually given a purse of one thousand dollars to be contested for by foot-runners of New England, and each event had been easily won by the mighty Farrell. Then, one day when Andrews had purchased an option on the Treadwill farm across the river, and a few days later had disposed of his option to the Tobacco Trust at a profit of five thousand dollars, he had gone to her father with the money and offered to back himself against Farrell for the full amount, an offer which had so impressed her father that he had wagered twice as much more on Andrews' ability to defeat the champion.

The race was but one week away, and already the State was fairly seething with intense interest over the probable outcome. Excursion-trains were to be run from all sections of the commonwealth. Tight-fisted, cautious tobacco-growers were seized with an unquenchable desire to wager on the result, and consequently when two new tobacco-agents appeared at the Colonial Inn and expressed a desire to bet on Champion Farrell, the tobacco-growers, with their sporting blood at a white heat, grasped at the opportunity to wager their money on Andrews.

Besides, these local betting financiers *knew* something. They had been shown! Had not Harry Andrews convinced them a week before, in the dusk of one still, early morn, what a real runner was? Had he not eaten up the four hundred and forty yards with the speed of a frightened antelope, and crossed the finish only one second away from a world's record, and two seconds faster than Farrell had ever covered the distance? Of course, the two strange tobacco-buyers did not know this, which probably accounted for their calm demeanor and implicit assurance in wagering their money on Farrell with the serene certainty of men buying government gold bonds.

Dorothy Steele wondered where the foreman was. Could she have gazed through the low-lying tobacco-sheds and beyond to the clump of thick alders fringing the river, she would have seen a small gasoline-launch with its nose ashore, and the foreman and the two strange tobacco-drummers conversing in subdued tones.

"Well, it looks to me," one of the buyers was saying, "like the wisest trick I ever pulled off. The only chance for us to lose is for you to drop dead, Harry, before you break the tape. Why, I never seen so many suckers in my life who are so crazy to get separated from their coin, and you goin' out that morning and showing them you could cover ground some made it awful strong. We won't have another chance to see you before the race, but the next day after we'll all meet in Billy's, on Sixth Avenue."

Andrews had been gazing with a far-away look in his eyes at the unruffled surface of the tranquil, gliding river, and now he asked indifferently:

"How much money have you bet?"

"Altogether about twenty-five thousand dollars. That was a good idea of mine in framing up that fake purchase of the Treadwill farm so you could come to the front with five thousand to bet on yourself," and he laughed.

"How much more do you expect to get down?" Andrews asked.

"Probably five thousand. We've near bet 'em to a standstill. Say!" he suddenly demanded, slapping Andrews on the back, "this ain't goin' to be no funeral. You don't seem 'specially pleased over makin' fifteen thousand for yourself out of this. You know you get half of everything. Me an' Jimmy splits the balance. Are you scared that we won't show up the next day at Billy's?"

"No, no, it isn't that, but I don't like this crooked business," he replied gloomily. "It's my first attempt, and it will be my last. If I wasn't crazy to get money to learn a profession, you never could have tempted me. How did you come to hunt me up, away out there in Stanford University?"

"Oh, that was easy," answered the taller one. "We saw how you was runnin' close to record time in the quarter-mile, and as this State Fair game looked good, we made you the proposition. We concluded you was the best man in the country, and had to have you, even if we was obliged to go to California for you."

"Yes, I understand that; but why did you not use the man who acted for you in your other affairs?"

"Oh, we had to put him out of business," he said carelessly, and then, in answer to Andrews' quick look of inquiry, added: "He gave us the double-cross. It was two years ago, out in Kansas. Tom Snowdin was our man, and we had about twenty thousand up on the State champion out there. Snowdin was to stumble and fall down about fifty yards from home, just as you are to do, and the home man was to win, just as Farrell will do in this frame-up here, but Snowdin goes out and beats the other feller and gives us the double-cross. We goes broke on it, but Snowdin was a fool when he slowed up and stopped after he win, 'cause Jimmy here pulls his gun and puts an ounce of lead between Snowdin's ribs. Oh, yes, Snowdin got our money, but he'll never run again."

"How much of this has Mr. Steele bet?" asked Andrews.

"About half of it, I should say."

"H'm! Then when I throw this race to Farrell Mr. Steele loses fifteen thousand dollars, eh? Is that it?"

"That's right. Holy smoke! don't be a hog. Ain't that enough?"

"Yes, it is quite enough," said Andrews, with calm decision.

"Well, we'd better be goin'." The man stood up. "Now, don't get nervous. All you've got to do is to fall down, and Farrell wins. Of course there'll be a holler, but you skip as soon as you can, and get to Billy's, on Sixth Avenue, without stoppin'. Wait for us there. We'll come with the coin."

They watched Andrews glide through the alders and disappear around the warehouse. Then they faced each other and chuckled in glee.

"Yes, sonny," said the one who had done the talking, "be there and wait for us in Billy's, and—you'll have a mighty long wait."

"You can bet he'll die there of old age, if he waits in Billy's till we come," laughed the other; and then, as they started in the launch up-stream, he added, as though more to himself:

"I guess we wouldn't be pretty soft if we give that guy a piece of this money?"

Andrews walked slowly up the gradual incline toward the house. Lost in his own moody reflections, he did not see the slight, girlish figure outlined against the background of emerald lawn. Just now the paramount thought running through his brain was that his life was utterly useless. A gnawing shame was filling him with abject loathing toward himself for being a party to the contemptible fraud. Alternately he was torn with longing to escape from the nefarious business and his crying need for money.

Already he could appreciate the situation when once it was over, and well he realized that then remorse would shake his very soul, and that none would despise and detest him for his despicable deed more than himself. However, he had put his hand to the plow—there must be no turning back—and he threw up his head with a quick movement of decision to see—the daughter of his employer gazing at him over the highway.

He crossed the road. Her quick eye had detected the vague melancholy of his expression, and also the reckless, half-defiant look which replaced it and showed through his smiling greeting.

He had long since become unconscious of the usual relation supposedly existing between an employer's daughter and a farm-overseer, and of late she, too, had apparently been unaware of their relative social positions. Yet there were times when she bristled at the remembrance of present conditions and his ready assurance in accepting her sympathetic demeanor, her gracious comradery, as if it were a matter of course. Moreover, she had lately discerned a careful drawing in, an undercurrent of reserve, in his manner which had baffled her and served only to enhance her desire to break through the veil of mystery which surrounded him. Just now the steady, questioning glance of her dark-blue eyes—they were always questioning him—disconcerted him. He gazed back without speaking. A crimson wave flooded his face and stung his cheeks. She marveled at the red glow beneath his coat of outdoor bronze.

"I can see you have been doing something you ought not," she said, with a laugh. Was there a little malice in her tone?

"Quite true," he answered; "your heaven-born perception frightens me sometimes. I certainly have done something I ought not."

"Yes?" she questioned, with a flash of roguery in her eye. "You know confession is good for the soul?"

"But you have not the power of giving absolution." There was a tinge of sarcasm in his badinage. He was not smiling now.

"No? Try me, and see." The rising inflection of her voice, with its subtle note of daring, and with the hinted sweetness of a challenge, fired him responsively.

"I have been," he said, after which he paused and repeated: "I have been—thinking too much lately—of you!"

"I admire your presumption," she said easily, though her eyes darkened to velvet, "and decree that a commission be appointed to examine you and to report as to your sanity." She paused, awaiting his reply, but he remained silent, with his steady gaze searching her perplexed face. Suddenly she realized it was all too daring, too impersonal to pass for coquetry. When she spoke she strove to mask the chilling hauteur of her voice. Nevertheless, it had a formidable ring.

"It is time for frankness, is it not?" she asked, with some spirit, and he nodded. "Then let us be honest and fair," she continued. "Things have passed very fast for us, too swiftly—too intimately, in fact, considering the

existing conditions. Please do not misconstrue my meaning," she hurriedly interposed, as a deep, painful red covered his face. "I am not thinking of your employment—it is the mystery which surrounds you that hurts. I know very well what you are doing."

"What do you know?" he demanded.

"I know that your name is assumed, that you are not what you seem, and that you have some ulterior purpose in it all. What it is I do not care to know, because I believe there is no dishonorable motive in your foolish masquerading, but I mention it in passing to show I am not unaware of the concealment, and also of the mockery in you. Am I making myself clear?" she asked. There was a trailing sting in her words, and it stirred him.

"I think you are wandering far afield," he answered coolly, and then the beautiful eyes which swept over him were decidedly hostile.

"You have assumed too much," she said with judicious calm. "You have taken my intended harmless banter as warrant for an intimacy unauthorized."

"How do you know that?" he asked, so impassively that she flushed with angry resentment.

"By what you have just said," she retorted.

"My thinking of you was simply along the line of gratitude—lasting gratitude," he explained quietly. "I sincerely appreciate your kindness and consideration to me since I came—it was of that I would have spoken."

"Ah, then please forgive me," she begged, in quick penitence. "I hope I never have by word or look—"

"You never have," he said, with a faint smile.

"I am very glad. I would not offend or wound for worlds. Then it seems it is I who am presumptuous," and her face reddened hotly.

"Please don't," he said, and the tone of his voice drove her rosy glow back.

"I know this is not your life," she continued. "There are higher things for you. I suppose you will leave soon, but I do hope some day you will tell us the purpose of it all. We ought to be worthy of your confidence, because, you see, we are your friends, are we not?" They were walking up the wide gravel-path now, and he eyed her attractive, excited face with a penetrating, unfathomable gaze.

"It is pleasant and comfortable to know you are my friend and—always will be—no matter what happens?" Her face paled a little at the hidden interrogation.

"Why—why, of course, unless," she paused, "unless there arises a question of your—honor, but how absurd! You say you are grateful, when it is we who should appreciate your work here. Personally, I have found you very nice, at times alluringly indifferent and again interesting beyond measure. Therefore, why should I not be your friend?" she asked amiably. "Now that we understand each other perfectly, we shall be better friends than ever."

"How about your friendship, if I lose the race?" he asked smilingly, but there was no laughter in his eyes.

"What nonsense!" she declared, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "Why, it would be impossible for you to lose! Father says you are a faster runner than Farrell, and that you will surely win, unless you throw it. By the way —what did he mean by 'throw it'?"

"Why—why not try to win the race, I suppose."

"Well—upon—my—word! Who ever heard of such a preposterous thing?" she cried, and her voice rang in a peal of delicious laughter. She turned to him brightly with absolute faith mirrored in her eyes and a winning grace of manner. It made him sick at heart.

"You see," she added, with eyes shining, and leaning nearer with a charming gesture of confiding, trusting intimacy, "father hardly knows you as well as I do." Nodding a smiling good-by, she ran lightly up the veranda steps and disappeared through the wide doorway.

He walked toward the great barn with his head in a whirl, and paused as one stunned when once within the huge, silent structure. The sudden knowledge of her sublime dependence upon

his integrity—her perfect belief in his unstained conscience and incorruptible honor, was a dull, overwhelming shock to his intellect. In the rushing unreality of it all the bursting bins of hay seemed spinning with frightful velocity, the stalks of corn danced madly to and fro, the heavily laden sacks of rye rolled end over end, and the soft, dulcet twittering of the swallows on the beams overhead seemed like fiendish shrieks of derisive laughter. It was derision everywhere—all derision—and though he closed his eyes, there came to his shut-in vision myriad dancing fingers of scorn and hideous, scoffing faces which groaned and hissed at him. He strove mightily to throw off the stifling, benumbing sensation. Once he cursed aloud, and the echoing rafters mocked him. Then came the reaction, leaving him still with senses swimming and trembling like a wind-shaken leaf.

Steadily he paced back and forth over the smooth, shining floor, his jaw set, with eyes that had the glitter of newly polished steel, and with every fiber in his tall, splendid body drawn to its utmost tension. And so he fought it out, first fiercely wrestling with his craving need for money, and how very vitally money would concern his whole future, and then his honor, and how much keeping his honor inviolate meant to his future. An easy matter to decide, you will claim, but it is not a question to be decided by those who have never been tempted.

When he finally came into the open air, where the west wind beat against his throbbing brain and cooled his raging desire to give voice to his pent-up fury, he gradually mastered himself, and then—knew his mind was made up. Irrevocably, immutably, he had decided which road lay open to him.

Andrews spent the days intervening at the club-house in the fair-grounds, where he completed his training and made final preparations for the race. Mr. Steele he saw daily, but he did not get a glimpse of *her* until an hour before the race where, from his seat on the club-house porch, he saw an automobile sweep through the entrance-gate and recognized the familiar poise of her graceful body, as she dexterously drove the big car to a position below the judges' stand.

For a moment he surveyed the mammoth throng circulating in the half-mile oval. Fifty thousand people gathered to see him run! Not a nerve tingled at the thought. Beyond the finish-wire he saw her brown veil whipping in the breeze, and—the blood coursed through his veins like molten metal. In the center of the grand stand the glistening gold braid and waving plumes marked the governor and his staff. In the pavilion beneath, the band played martial music to fill in the wait while the track was being rolled to the hardness and smoothness of a billiard-table. Then the black mass of people with one accord began to move toward the rails, lining the track many deep from the quarter-mile pole clear around to the judges' box. From the grand stand came the ceaseless hum of ten thousand excited people.

Suddenly a figure in a dressing-gown cleared the fence near the grand stand at a bound and moved up the track. A loud yell arose from the crowd, and those in the stand stood as one man to view the champion.

At the other turn a white form came into view. The officers drove back the pressing crowd which swirled about Andrews, and opened a passage to the track. Unconcerned, he walked along, unmindful of the frantic cheers and critical eyes, unnoticing the coarse taunts from the Farrell backers. Serenely his steady gaze swept across the dense horde of people in the grand stand and down to the fence, where stood the two strange tobacco-buyers. Their position was at a point some fifty yards beyond the finish, and directly opposite the automobile enclosure. Andrews' fleeting vision passed over them without the flicker of an eyelid. They must have occupied the same relative position, he reflected, when they shot Snowdin in Kansas.

In the automobile sat a girl with hands tightly clasped and her eyes taking in every detail of the man walk-

ing before her. She noted his loose running-clothes, the sun playing on his brown curls, the glove-tight spiked shoes, the symmetrical, muscular legs in which the whiplike cords stirred visibly beneath his snow-white skin and sprang into vibrating life at every pliant movement.

If he was conscious of her scrutiny he gave no outward sign, but passed on to the starting-point. By standing on the seat she could look over the heads of the people and obtain an unobstructed view of the starting-place, where a crowd of people were now struggling for a vantage-point.

The band had stopped playing, and the enormous crowd was hushed—silently, breathlessly expectant. The stillness was deadly in its appalling intensity, and it seemed as if one could hear a pin drop in the grand stand. She watched with straining eyes the spot where she knew he was waiting for the signal. Suddenly into view shot a puff of white smoke, and there came to her ears a report like the distant explosion of a firecracker. Simultaneously with this report the air was rent with the ear-splitting roar of wild, uncontrolled voices and the resounding crash of many feet in the stand, like the heavy cannonade of rolling thunder. The next instant two white figures appeared in sight, running side by side as one man, and as they turned into the home-stretch and drew nearer she could distinguish Andrews next to the rail.

What followed came back to her afterward, her brain reeling always between the unexpected reality and the glaring vividness of the thrilling scene. The infernal, maniacal shrieking of the half-crazed spectators; the shrill screaming of the women in a hundred automobiles; the human sea of people beating in mad waves against the rail on both sides of the track; the precise, regular conducting of the bandmaster, as his musicians strove, with cheeks puffed to bursting, in a fruitless effort to be heard; the unswerving, dazzling speed of the runner ahead who bore down to the white tape stretched above the finish-line with wonderful, mighty leaps; the striking grace and studied precision of his stride, like the working of a beautifully grooved, automatic machine; Farrell, yards behind, straining madly to reach that flying figure so easily drawing away from him; two men climbing over the fence across from where she stood—and so they finished, Farrell falling in a dead faint when within a few feet of the end. Some one cried:

"He broke the world's record!"

All this came back to her later in a daze, but now her first sane realization was that Andrews had won, but that he had not stopped! In another second he was passing where she had nervously collapsed in her seat, still running with the same unchecked, blinding speed.

Crack!—crack!—crack!

Three sharp revolver reports split the air in quick succession. Andrews laughed and turned his head toward whence came the sounds, stumbled, and fell—and then was up and off again with undiminished gait. Had the lamp near her hand exploded? There was broken glass at her feet and also a mushroom-shaped lump of metal which looked like a crumpled piece of tin-foil. Directly in front of her were the two men she had seen climbing over the fence. One of them held a revolver in his hand and in another instant both men were struggling with the police. Then her frightened gaze sought the fleeing man, and there he was at the turn—still running! Fascinated, she watched him as he cleared the five-foot picket fence with the ease and grace of a greyhound. On and on, without let-up, he ran, straight to the high board enclosure surrounding the fair-grounds. In another moment he stood balanced on the top rail, his thinly clad, white figure silhouetted against an azure background, waved his hand to the transfixed, stupefied assemblage, and—was gone!

An hour later a girl driving a powerful auto-car in a frightfully reckless manner tore through the gathering dusk along the highway toward Marl-

borough. Once she branched to the east, bounded for half a mile over a miserable cross-road, then on again over the main line to Welton. Once more she turned eastward until a line of trolley poles could be seen. The car slowed then and came to a full stop beside the road where the trolley track crossed. Silently she waited with staring eyes fixed on the empty road. Two trolley-cars passed with a whizzing, clattering roar and still she waited. Finally, her quick ear detected a steady tap, tap, tap. The sound seemed to come from down the road. With senses alert she listened again, heard the continuous tap, tap, tap, repeatedly growing louder, and then noiselessly slipped from her seat to the ground. In the thickening gloom of evening a white, ghostly figure appeared, running evenly in the cushionlike dust of the road.

"Harry!" she called, and the figure came to a full stop. "Harry," she repeated, "haven't you run enough for one day?"

Slowly he moved toward her. He was breathing hard from exertion, and there was dark unbelief in his eyes. The next instant she was crushed to his breast, clinging to him and sobbing without restraint.

"How in the world—did you know?" he began huskily. A cool little hand found his mouth.

"Hush!" she said softly, "tell me first what made you run away."

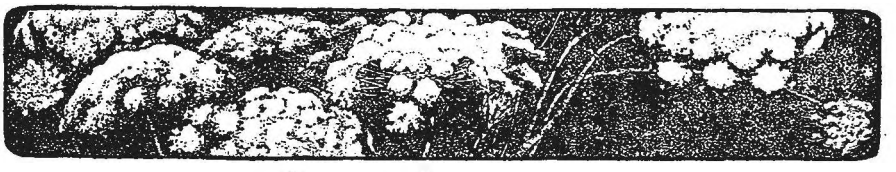
"I was ashamed—to face you. You see——"

"There—that is a perfect reason," she said quickly. "Father has told me the whole thing. I know what you had agreed to do, and—what you didn't do. It seems that the man who tried to shoot you informed father all about it. He raved awfully after he was arrested, but we'll put all that behind us—forever. I suppose you want to know how I came here? Well, I learned at the club-house that one of our hands, Angelo Sirica, had taken your clothes. I found Angelo with the bundle, and he told me where he was going to meet you. I came instead. That's all there is to it. The bundle is in the car. I should think you would freeze as you are." Hastily he drew on his clothes over his running-suit, she meanwhile standing by and aiding him as best she could.

"Well?" she questioned, when he had finished and stood before her. Gently he raised her face and saw her lashes were wet. When he spoke, his voice was tense and low.

"I am going away—I hear the car now—but I shall come back. It may be to-morrow—it may not be for a year, but the person you have known as Harry Andrews will never return. The man I want you to wait for is one you have never known, and yet to him you are already known as the only one in this great world. The man you do not know has found himself—he has had his lesson. When he comes to you he will ring the front bell, like a man—not skulk around like a thief in the night. He will be unworthy of you—no man is worthy of you—but he will look you straight in the face and hope for forgiveness. There, here is the car; good-by!"

"And, Harry," she said brokenly, as her hand stayed him, "when you see that man I have never known you might tell him that if there is anything in our house he wants—it is his for the asking—it will always be there—waiting for him. Good-by!"



Plantagenet Hock: Hero

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Adventurers Extraordinary," "Norroy, Diplomatic Agent," Etc.

We have been frequently asked for more stories like the "Norroy" series which appeared in "The Popular" last year. These stories of "Plantagenet Hock," by the author of "Norroy," are the best work that he has ever done. In them he presents the same excitement and interest as in the "Norroy" tales and introduces our readers to an entirely new character who is well worth knowing.

IV.—JONAH NUMBER TWO

(A Complete Story)

I GUESS all of you remember that when last you heard of me I had embarked aboard a prao that was to take me from Dagorro's Island to Bacolod, where I could again hear good, sound American spoken. Also you must recall that I posed as a leper on that island in order to get out of marrying little Señorita Ana; and spotched white paint on my face to make me look the part. Likewise that by so deceiving, Dagorro got Ana to marry him; and kept his promise to me by putting me aboard one of his copra praos and sending me back to places where men comb their hair.

(If you don't remember it, you ought to, and I'm not going to go into details just for your edification. It hasn't got anything to do with this yarn, anyhow.)

Perhaps some of you don't know who's speaking. Look, then, upon the lineaments of one P. Hock, special correspondent for the New York *Clarion*, sent for his sins to answer a question about the Philippines. The mise en scène having relation to this affair is the channel which separates the island of Cebu from that of Negros, both of the Visayan group.

Here's one of those second-sight crystals. Look into it and you'll see a picture. But don't try the scheme of seeing pictures on your own account, because I am the original black-magicker of this shooting-match, and you're to see exactly what I tell you to see. If you see something different, it's all wrong. Listen first and see it afterward. Don't try to see it before I speak.

If you'll look earnestly you'll get a line on a boat floating on a miscellaneous assortment of little green wavelets. You won't see any land, because the crystal isn't big enough to show you how far off land was. The boat, you will notice, is high in the stern and low in the bows, has a dinky little outrigger, and a leg-of-mutton sail made out of bamboo-matting. It is loaded up with bales. That is copra. Three tan gentlemen neatly and not superfluously clad in breech-clouts are sunning themselves amidships, and smoking cigarettes that smell like burning tan-bark. Another

male caricature is looking after the sail; and a fifth stands on the stern platform working a long sweep backward and forward, which aids the locomotion, and keeps the prao's head straight.

And now if you will throw your lamps toward the stern platform, you will observe an abject bundle of misery in the shape of a small man with tow-colored hair, attired in pajamas that had been white 'way back in the neolithic period, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, a dilapidated grass-straw hat, and a very, very sorrowful look. This, gentle reader, is the presentment of Mr. Plantagenet Hock. In other words—sadly and ungrammatically—I must admit it was *me*.

All comes of getting too fresh with my strong right arm in behalf of a maiden that I ought to have let alone. I rescued this Señorita Ana I've spoken about, and then she expected me to marry her—and if I hadn't pretended to be a leper, I'd have been the merry little benedick, all right, all right. But the worst of it was that to make her believe I was a leper, I had to make everybody else believe I was, too; and those five fellows in the boat were under the same impression.

Now, I don't blame 'em for being scared. I'd have been some bit frapped along the spinal column myself if I'd have found myself in a boat with only about five feet separating me from anybody with that ailment. But, still, that consolation didn't make my position any the more comfortable. It was Dagorro's boat, and Dagorro had made them take me on their voyage to Bacolod; but it hadn't produced any enthusiastic cheering or curtain-calls when he outlined the proposition to them.

They'd kept me up there in the bows; and had very suggestively intimated that if I didn't stay there, my frisky young career would end quick in a hurry. So I kept to my little place in the bows, even though the planking got so hot that the tar ran; and I had to shift my position at the rate of sixty revolutions a minute. There were also a few flies and mosquitoes to keep me from wholly enjoying myself.

When meal-times came the black-and-tans flung me some lizard-meat, that had been all right two days before, but which wasn't a cinch to masticate, if a man had a nose in good working order. So I dined sparingly on dried rice and a few bananas, and tightened up my cartridge-belt around my waist. I had a gun in that belt—a ten-chambered Luger pistol, given to me by a gentleman named Ashburton, whom I've mentioned before. But it wasn't loaded, and there was a plentiful lack of cartridges in the belt for that purpose. Now you can see why I sat like a good little boy and hoped we'd get to Bacolod before I got so hungry that I'd start to eat leather.

We had started Wednesday afternoon at two o'clock, and expected to take about two days to get to our destination. It was now Thursday round about the same time; and I had been very much gratified to see the sun hide itself behind some clouds. My lemon-tinted companions did not appear to share in my pleasaunce, but looked up at the sky, as though it had done them personal insult. By and by I began to get onto the fact that a storm was letting itself loose, and my comprehension of the fact was aided by some boom-booming of thunder and a few electric discharges of forked flame. A wave flew up and hit me in the face, and if I hadn't grabbed a rope, I'd have been unable to refuse its pressing invitation to come out and play. The lemon men began to chatter like monkeys and tear down their matting sail. The man with the sweep lashed it with a rope.

Then the storm hit us.

It is not my purpose to describe that storm in detail. It was like any other storm you read about, only it came a trifle nearer home to me, as I was in an open boat.

The thunder boomed at me, and the lightning tried to ruin my eyesight, and the waves playfully slapped me on the shoulders and back, banged me against the deck and chucked handfuls of salt

in my eyes. As I had declined to mingle with them, they decided that what I wanted was not a boat, but a hobby-horse, so they started to throw the prao away up in the air, and let her come down with a bump.

Meanwhile the lemon-colored gentlemen were pitching their copra overboard, just as though it were boxes of bricks sent by express, collect.

Well, sir, I lay there and hung on, feeling as though I were an overcoat that had been turned inside out, and all my tenderest portions exposed. The ship heeled so much it threw me clean over on my back, and I didn't dare move, but just hung onto the rope like a fish sprawling in a tenth of an inch of water.

This position, while extremely uncomfortable, enabled me to get a line on my lemon-colored men again; and I noted that they were waving their hands about and shrieking.

As the word "leper" in Visayan appeared frequently in their speech, and as their eyes were turned toward me, I got a hunch that something personal was intended.

It didn't take me long to realize what it was. One of the men crept up with a knife in his hand—in the next second some few things happened. First, he cut the rope that I was holding; second, the ship heeled, and I broke all my finger-nails trying to grab hold of something; third, a big wave washed up, picked me up in its arms, and took me back with it.

It was easy enough to understand. Those lemon-colored men regarded me in much the same light that the sailors from Tarshish regarded Mr. Jonah of Nineveh, of late and lamented fame. By cutting me loose they expected the storm to blow over. I hope it blew them over to Jericho!

But the most important thing to remember is that young Planty Hock was struggling with the wild and woolly waves. The only thing that saved me from a nice little plaything for the fishes was the sweep that I had grabbed when I went overboard. The sweeps that they use on these praos are big hunks of wood, with a blade as wide as a snow-shovel.

I had one hand on the sweep when I went overboard, and consequently took it with me. I had water in my mouth, my eyes, and my nose. Every time a wave hit me I went under, and my back felt as though I were chained to a post with a mule kicking me every time the clock struck.

I don't remember much of what happened after that. I just remember that I felt mighty sick and weak, and as though I never wanted to taste salt again in all my life. My next recollection was (as they say in the autobiographies) a feeling as though I'd been out the night before and had tried to drink everything in sight.

I reached up languidly, curious to know whether it was a balloon or a head on my shoulders, and feeling quite sure that if I did more than touch it, it would come to pieces. To my astonishment it was of normal size; and didn't show any signs of fragility. I sat up and saw I was on one of those white-sanded beaches that I have grown to detest.

The storm had pretty much faded away, the sun was doing its level best to shine, and it was growing late in the day. Near me was my good friend the sweep, that had evidently brought me ashore. There wasn't any sign of a boat in sight.

I suppose I should have been very grateful because I wasn't drowned, but it didn't occur to me to play that rôle. On the other hand, I was distinctly aggrieved because a storm had come up. I thought it was playing it rough on a peace-loving, quiet-minded chap with an affection for Schopenhauer, Nietsche, and French bonbons to be working the trouble-racket on him all the time. I was beginning to yearn for a little rest. It is just as easy to bore a man with too much excitement as with too little; and to excite even a passive interest in me I felt that nature would have to work overtime.

But, at any rate, you'll all grant that it was about time for the Romance-wraith to give me a little vacation. I

was entitled to it. I wanted to be picked up by some innocent trading-vessel and taken to Bacolod, or Cebu, or Iloilo, or somewhere that held a club and American periodicals and Scotch whisky and nice clean beds with mosquito-screens. I am a civilized man. I like civilized things. And I'd been living like a savage for so long, that the call of the primordial no longer resounded in clarion notes in my ears. There wasn't any bloodthirsty ancestral blood in me to arise and make a thorough barbarian out of me. My atavism was all of the other sort. I wanted solid comfort. When knights were fighting and searching for Holy Grails, and maintaining their ladies' fair names, my ancestors were respectable burghers, who wove cloth and sold it to those same knights and their men-at-arms. So there wasn't any call within young Planty Hock, except a call for a quiet, intellectual life.

"But, oh, no! That doesn't suit Mr. Romance-wraith. Not content with having had me buffeted about by waves and flung on a deserted beach, he had to lie in wait for me around the corner, and get me into another fine young scrape. You know the way he always works his devilish schemes out on me. He has some female get herself in a peck of trouble; and then he puts me in close proximity, so that when she calls for help, I have to do the regular out-swords-and-at-'em, draw-and-defend-yourself-caitiff act.

Said I not that Mr. Romance-wraith was waiting for me just around the corner? I say correctly: he *was*. He had doped up another of his pretty little stage plots, and it was me-me cast for the light-haired male lead. "Around the corner" means around the curve of the island. I had picked myself up, wrung the briny out of my clothes, and started to walk around the bluff. The moment I came to the far side of the curve, I saw two people on the sands, with their backs to me. Not knowing what was up, I stepped back and worked myself closer to them, the palm-trees farther up keeping them from getting a line on me.

Then I noted a steam-launch rocking to and fro just a little way out—some closer I saw that the people were white, and that one of them was a woman. At that last dread revelation I almost shuddered. All my misfortunes had come through butting into situations just like this one.

Still, they were white, and they had a steam-launch. They might take me to Bacolod or Iloilo or Cebu. I worked my way nearer to them, still keeping in the shelter of the palms. It was quite evident that they were indulging in an animated debate. Pretty soon I could hear the nature of the conversation.

"You little hussy!" yelled the man.

That sounded uncouth. I was glad I hadn't made a break at them too suddenlike. I took a look at the gentleman. He was about my size, he had light curly hair, and he wore nose-glasses, with a chain around his ear. His uniform was the constabulary species, and he had a big Colt strapped to his waist. The girl was one of those big, strapping, blond ladies, and she wore a white blouse and skirt—both stained with sea-water.

"You——" something-or-other. I didn't catch what she called him. It wasn't anything that called for a polite R. S. V. P.

"We'll stay right in these woods for the next week," he said. "There's a creek up the way. I'll beach the boat up there, and it'll be hidden. After a week or so we'll try to get to Singapore."

"We'll go right away! This minute!" She stamped her foot so hard she upset the coffee-pot that stood by. I could see they'd been having some sort of meal.

"Well, we *won't*," said the man.

"I'll show you what we'll do." She started out toward the launch. "I'll run the boat by myself."

She was ankle-deep in the water before he grabbed her and pulled her back. She was as big as he was; but he had the better of the game in strength. He got her and dragged her half-way up the beach.

"You coward! Oh, you coward!

Let me loose, let me go, let me g-o-o-o!"

He did it. "Now will you behave?" he asked.

She started right back for the boat. Again he got her and pulled her back. This time he twisted her wrists around and laughed at her, while she shrieked:

"Help! Help!"

She had a fine young stage-megaphone of a voice.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"Stop your fool shouting," grinned the man. "There's nobody to help you——"

And me standing there! I could see that infernal Romance-wraith grinning like a hyena.

II.

I didn't like this man's looks—he slightly resembled me! So there wasn't anything for me to do but give him a taste of his own medicine. He had a gun in his belt, therefore the best thing to do was to jump him from the back. There's nothing treacherous in an unarmed man attacking an armed one from behind. That's not treachery—it's prudence.

But don't imagine that I did this because the girl was carrying a few trumps in the way of good looks. The man had given me my cue. It was my next move. Why you can almost see the prompt-book. Look here:

Heroine: Help! Help! Help!
Villain: Stop that shouting! There's nobody to help you.
(Enter *Plantagenet Hock*, left upper entrance, unobserved.)

Could I be so utterly false to the histrionic traditions as to refuse to take my cue? I could not. Therefore I gave a flying leap forward, and twisted my arms lovingly around the gentleman's neck while I took a stranglehold.

Long ago, when I found the Romance-wraith was determined to pursue me, I took a course in a gymnasium. I did not go about it other than sorrowfully; but I wanted my money's worth, and so developed a set of longshoreman's muscles. These stood me very well in this tussle, for the gentleman was no ringer himself. He writhed, squirmed, tripped me up, made a strong play for the half-Nelson and hammerlock, fell over backward on me, twisted his legs around mine, and tried to gouge my eyes out.

He had a method of fighting singularly free from any old-fashioned ideas of honor. Every low-down trick known to Muggsy Mike of Cherry Hill he attempted on me. He even affixed his teeth in my ear, and stuck his thumbs in the soft places under my jaws. He kicked me on the shins, and tried to get his knee into the pit of my stomach.

But P. Hock, Esq., had not practised wrestling with amateurs—a couple of refined gentlemen named Hackenschmidt and "The Terrible Turk" had been retained at the gymnasium where I maltreated myself at various times.

I had not got strained muscles from contact with them without learning something about the Græco-Roman as well as the catch-as-catch-can method. I didn't mind learning new ones, if the constabulary officer had them to show, and so I waited to find out, and meanwhile let Mr. Man try all of his cute little tricks, and waste his muscle and his breath. The last he did by staining the air a deep indigo for yards around with various descriptive passages of rhetoric that would have delighted the soul of Chuck Connors, even though they made him acknowledge he had met his master.

Then, finally, when I'd let him do about everything he could think of, I turned a few cards over myself. I didn't like to embarrass him by having the proceedings halt. He had been working so nicely, and doing such good work, that if I hadn't provided a climax, it would have been distinctly inartistic. So I got one hand in close proximity to his chin, and pushed it backward, aiding my action with a knee on his chest and my right hand twisting his left under his back. If there is a man who can stand that position without yielding to pressure, he'd better go bill himself as "The Painless

Wonder," and draw down a large lump of money each week with the biggest show on earth.

The man I was handling will not apply. His head hit the sand, and he became limp.

"'Nuff," he yells. "'Nuff —— ——" What he added described his feelings so well, that, out of sheer professional jealousy, I shall omit it.

I drew up my other leg and took a nice, comfortable seat on his chest. Then I put both feet on the flats of his arms. After which I sat there for a while, and got back my breath. I was trying to think of something to say that would show me to be at once a master of repartee as I was of the manly art. I love to do things neatly and gracefully. But I took it all out in thinking. Nothing suitable seemed to come my way, and before I could say anything at all, the girl in the duck skirt flung herself down on her knees and caught one of my hands.

"Oh, you brave thing!" she gushed. "My, but you are strong! Why, he's miles bigger'n you are! You're a perfectly dandy scrapper!"

I looked around, expecting to see her chewing pepsin-gum. The properties should always fit the dialogue. That's my rule for a perfectly consistent drama.

"Where'd you 'tend store?" I asked. "Ribbon counter at Macy's, or just-as-good-as-gold ornaments at Siegel-Cooper's. If it wasn't you, it was your sister. Cash!"

"Sir!" said she, with that kind of hauteur they use in "No Mother To Guide Her." "I guess you don't know how to speak to a lady."

My human seat laughed hoarsely. "Haw, haw!" he remarked, very long and loud. "Haw, haw!"

"What's eating you?" I inquired of him. I was beginning to lose my temper. Here I had butted into this gentleman's game without the slightest provocation only to be called down by the kind of female that goes to "Big Tim Sullivan's" soirées.

"Haw, haw!" remarks the human seat again.

I took a good long, fixed glance at him, and, while I looked, I saw out of the tail of my eye that he was reaching down with his long fingers for something in his belt. I got wise, stamped on his fingers, took a six-shooter out of his belt, and trained it on him.

"Now, Mr. Man," said I, "you can get up and go on about your business. My interest in you was merely passive from the first. It has now died away entirely. You cease to amuse or even divert me. In other words, I find your presence superfluous. Vamose, get out, hit the pike—beat it!"

He started along the sand, scowling but not saying much.

"Here!" I addressed him. "Where d'you think you're going, anyhow?"

"To the boat," he answers, very shortly.

"Come again, Rollo," says I. "Shift the nose of your vessel due east by northeast—which means in the opposite direction. When I speak of 'your vessel,' I mean in a Beaumont-and-Fletcher sense. As you perhaps do not grasp the idea, I will explain that they were dramatists of the Elizabethan period, and they looked upon the human body as a vessel. That other vessel—the one out there which looks like half of a canteloupe—has no further interest for you. I claim it by right of conquest; and just to show you what I'll do if you don't get busy with a disappearing specialty——"

I let off the gun and spattered up some sand just about a quarter of an inch from his left boot. He backed, and I could see by the light in his eye that I had him faded.

"Look here!" said he. "What's your game, anyhow?"

"My game, my dearly beloved hearer," I replied, with great courtesy, "is to possess myself of yonder chug-chug boat, and take a little spin to Iloilo or Bacolod or Cebu—whichever happens to be nearest. That's my game. Now that I've furnished you with the information, kindly efface your personality from my mental vision, or I may have to blot you out. Sabe?"

The man came down a little nearer to me. "Look here!" he said. "Let me explain——"

I sent a bullet whistling over the top of his head. It clipped away the standing-up hairs so neatly that I almost felt like charging him barber's prices for trimming his hair. He jumped back.

"You little fiend!" he gasped out at me.

"I've told you to get out before," I said. "Now I'm going to *make* you. When you fought me you fought foul. You were using violence toward a woman, who had nobody to take her part. You're an imitation of a man, a regular Opper caricature. . . . I'm going to count ten slowly. If by the time I've reached ten, you haven't disappeared in those woods over there, you'll get a pellet of lead right at the top of your spinal column, and fall into the Styx with such a splash that you'll swamp Charon's boat. That classical allusion is evidently lost on you, you caribao. Take a sneak! Be gone, avaunt, and do it damn' quick!"

He moved off, but not quickly enough to suit. If I'd given him half a chance he'd have rushed me. I sent another bullet in his direction, and seared the side of his right arm. Then I began to count in a loud, clear tone:

"One, two, three, four, five——"

Ever see any rabbit-coursing? Well, then, you've seen a long-eared jack tuck his legs under his body and go over the ground like a rubber ball bouncing on the pavement. That's the way this man went. Before I'd counted six he wasn't to be seen.

I turned to the girl from the shopping district.

"Now, Sadie," said I, "get into that boat or stay here on shore. I'll take you wherever you want to go. Or you can stay here and keep little Rollo company——"

"I—I——" She seemed to hesitate.

"Suit yourself," said I, and I started toward the boat.

"Aren't you going to carry me out?" she asked, looking at me sideways. "You're so strong, and I don't want to wet my feet——"

When it comes to women, I always was a prize easy-mark. I picked her up and waded out into the water with her. The water was only up to my waist, and I was wet clean through, anyway. I held her and the Colt revolver well up above; and put both of them over the side.

Before I climbed in I noted that the launch was named *Ariel,* that she had three stripes on her gunwales, and was marked "P. C. S." I knew what that meant; but I deferred remarking on the subject until I had started the engines going, because I had no particular wish for little Rollo in the woods to come down and catch me unawares.

She was a regular steam-launch of modern pattern, and needed two people to work her. So I told the girl she'd have to take the wheel while I watched the engine. She didn't seem to mind, and before long the little boat started to chug-chug away from the shore. I could hear very uncomplimentary language emanating from somewhere up there in the jungle; but Rollo had the wisdom not to show his carcass so that I could get a pot-shot at him.

I took a squint at the compass, and saw we were heading south. Now I knew the lemon men on Dagorro's prao had gone south along the whole coastline of Negros; and by the time the storm came up they had been heading north for Bacolod.

"Shift your course north," said I to the girl. "We're going to Iloilo."

"We're going to Singapore," she retorted.

I let out a holler. "Singapore!"

"Yes, Singapore," said she, sticking up her nose at me.

"Singapore, in this little two-by-four launch!" I shouted, entirely overcome. "You've got flies in your sunbonnet. Singapore! You're clean dippy, that's what's the matter with you, Sadie. Shift your course north."

"I won't," she said. "And I guess you ain't in the habit of associating with ladies, you fresh thing!"

I didn't say anything. I just got up,

took the wheel away from her, brought the launch around, and headed it north.

"Now you keep it that way," I said, going back to my engine. "Or I'll have to lock you in that little cabin down there below"—I referred to a one-by-two space about big enough for a chicken-coop—"and run the boat all by myself. Singapore! In the first place, this launch doesn't carry enough coal to get us to Singapore. In the second place, I've got too much respect for my life to try to cross the South China Sea in a cockle-shell like this. So behave, Miss Maguire, and remember that a young man with spectacles is running this boat, and he's not going to stand for mutiny."

Then she began to cry. "You stop calling me out of my name!" she said. "I am Miss Hyacinth Cloverdale——"

"Poor child!" I said.

"—— and I want you to know that you've got to respect me—and—why, back in the States——"

Now she was pretty, all right; but I can't stand for the chewing-gum species. They are a tribe apart; and they give me the blues. So I had to call her down.

"Now look here, Hyacinth," said I, gently but firmly, "don't spring that old one about your social connections. I've listened to it too often over the manicure table. I know your mother was a lady, and that you don't have to work unless you want to. We'll take that for granted——"

"If we was back on Broadway you wouldn't dare use no such words to me," says she. "When I send in my card to the managers I can get in any time at all. I tell you you don't know who you're talking to, you——"

"Back up!" said I. "When I'm back in the United States I'm a dramatic critic. And I know every face that's made a Broadway appearance, except the chorus. And your face isn't among the ones I remember, Annabelle dear. . . . So having a clear understanding with one another, let's start afresh."

"I think you're the——" Then she paused, and began to look me over. Heavens and earth! do you know what I'd done? I'd made a hit with her. That's what! I could tell it from the way she eyed me. It's not often that brand of Rialto eighteen-per-on-the-road strikes a man who gives them a good strong rake-over, and when they find they can't bluff him, they generally start to make those lovey-dovey optics at him!

"Say, you're all right," she said. And I was glad to note she'd dropped the imitation society manner. "I guess you're a wise one, all right, all right. . . . Well, I won't give you no con game. I came out to Hongkong with the Hanway-Ravenshaw Company, playing rep-er-to-ry. They played Manila and Iloilo, and then was going to Australia. I got sick in Iloilo, and had to stay there—had the dengue fever. But you look here! I'm going to put you next! Ain't any use in my telling you the whole story; but I will if I want me to. There's about twenty-five thousand dollars in gold right down there in that cabin. Good gold money, see! Now, you're all right. You made a hit with me when you done up that smart guy of a Henry Somers. What's the matter with you and me going back to the States together with that money? You see"—she looked at me sideways again—"you made a hit with me—and—well, me and that Henry Somers was going to get married at Singapore—and——"

"If," said I sternly, "you are hinting that I be Henry's understudy, you're playing the wrong horse. There is nothing doing on the matrimonal stakes, Carlotta."

She sat there and gasped at me. Maybe it was brutal; but I wasn't going to have any more misunderstandings. That leper business decided me. Besides, I'd just as soon have tied up with little Señorita Ana as this original member of the "Floradora" sextette. If there's anything I hate it's the bird-and-bottle girl, the kind that makes a hit with just-out-of-the-egg college boys and fat men with fur coats.

Jumping Jerusalem! but she was mad. If there'd been anything conveniently within reach, and she hadn't

needed me to run that engine, there would have been one Hock less in the world.

"Look here!" said I. "Cut out the personal affiliation line of language and get down to facts. This is a customs' cutter—it's got 'P. C. S.' on the bows—you say there's twenty-five thousand in gold aboard. Now, that looks a little off-color to me, and I want you to put me on——"

But by this time the anger had gone out of her eyes, and she was staring away in front of her. She reached down and grabbed a pair of marine-glasses and put them to her eyes. Then she turned to me.

"Reverse! Reverse your engines!" she screamed. "There's a coast-guard boat coming right after us. Quick! Reverse! They mustn't catch us!"

"Pooh-pooh!" I said. "That's just what I want 'em to do. If you think——"

But she had picked up the revolver and had it pointed straight at me. I looked, and saw she had bad eyes.

"Now, you little cotton-haired end of nothing," she hisses at me. "You reverse those engines quick, and keep 'em that way, or I'll do worse than you did to Henry Somers——"

I made a jump up to grab her, and she blazed away at me full. The bullet tore along the side of my face; and the scar of it's there yet.

"Get down and reverse those engines!"

And you bet I did it, too! Two can play at that game of holding a gun at another person's head. I'd done it to Somers, and she did it to me

I reversed.

"Full speed ahead!" shouted Miss Hyacinth Cloverdale.

She got it; and off we went, plowing the waves at a fifteen-knot-an-hour clip, with the white-and-gold coast-guard boat steaming after us as fast as she could.

Oh, there was something crooked, all right! But I didn't pause to ask what it was.

I know when I'm licked; and the gum-chewer from Longacre Square had given me mine, all right!

III.

Sometimes when I set down these happenings of mine, I wish I wasn't afflicted with a conscience.

How grand it would be if I only had lack of conscience and sufficient literary skill to make out of Simpering Sadie the Saleslady a dear, quivering, pink-cheeked, blushing ingénue; having her clinging to me and bidding me save her from the enemy! Then wouldn't it be great if I could transform the pursuing coast-guard boat into the villain's private yacht, with a gang of unprincipled ruffians on board, and——

You know what would happen. After a long chase, when it looked as though we were quite lost, I would come across some narrow inlet into which the big boat couldn't go, and thus elude them.

Oh, sorrow! It was not so.

Within ten minutes after the chase began, we'd burrowed so deep into the water, and thrown so much of it hastily out of the way, that the launch itself was pretty well choked up with the briny. I hoped it would get down into the engine, and stop its business; but the engine in question was so blamed hot that it dried up all the water that came near it.

The Broadway tripper had the wheel; and, though she was three-quarters of everything I don't like in a woman, I will say that she was gritty clean through. She stood up there, gripping that wheel with one hand, and the revolver with the other, keeping the launch's head straight, and every now and then turning toward me with the gun, so that I wouldn't play any monkey-tricks with her. I admired her nerve so much that, although I had several opportunities to jump her unawares, I didn't take 'em. Didn't think of 'em, I suppose.

Her hair had all blown loose, and was hanging around her shoulders—her face was flushed and her eyes were shining. She made a pretty good pic-

ture standing there with the wind tossing her skirts all about her. Now I'll tell you the truth. She had me going there for a minute; and even if I'd had the chance of pulling the boat straight up, I'm dashed if I don't believe I'd have stuck by the soubrette. A woman that's got nerve enough to do what she did is not the kind you like to hand a sour one to, even though the whole thing's a pickle.

While it lasted, it was like playing a poker-game with your week's salary in advance in the jack-pot; and your last white one to call the fellow who's been steadily raising you. If we hadn't been hauled up, the boiler would have burst. I know that. I could see some of the machinery in a white heat, as it was.

As the coast-guard boat drew up close on us, we could almost see the men on her forward decks. The girl stuck the pistol close to my ear again.

"Put on more steam, you little runt!" she yelled at me. "Put on more steam! This boat can go faster'n what you're giving her."

"Look here!" I shouted. "It's got every inch of pressure it'll stand, and I'm not going to give it any more; and that's all there is to it."

"If you don't, I'll——"

But we didn't have any test case. A megaphone boomed out from the yacht:

"Ahoy, *Ariel*! Heave to, there!"

No answer; we plunged on. The megaphone-man shouted something more I didn't catch; then:

"Pull her around. We'll sink you if you don't——"

"Look here!" said I to the girl. She flourished the gun at me, eying me like a bad dog.

And then we heard the kind of noise a giant firecracker makes when it goes off, and something came humming around us like a big Japanese top, and splashed into the sea right in front of us. The next boom meant something. It hummed and buzzed, and then—crash!

Something pitched me back, and I fell into the scuppers. Did you ever see a man trip up when he's running—how he spins around and clutches air before he falls? Well, that's the way the launch acted when that shot hit her. I remember that the Great Bear, the Southern Cross, the Milky Way, Sagittarius, and several other constellations, gleamed brightly close to my eyes; and the back of my head felt as if I'd bumped into Saturn. Something urged me to fall asleep; and I did so.

IV.

When I came to, I found myself in a very decent cabin, with a man in a white drill uniform sitting by my side. I could tell from the insignia on the collar of his tunic that he belonged to the coast-guard service, which to the uninitiated I may explain tries to be pretty much the same to the Philippines what the revenue cutter service is to this country. The man had dark hair and mustache, and seemed to be a pretty decent sort of chap.

"Well, now!" said I, sitting up. "I hope your're satisfied." There was a lump at the back of my head as big as a young coconut. "Think you might find a better job, you C. G. people, than shooting at a defenseless launch with one man and one girl in it."

"Can't see how you had the nerve to keep on going when we had your range," was the C. G. man's remark. "There wasn't any other way to settle your hash. We did the best we could to disable you without hurting you. We didn't want to see that twenty-five thousand dollars in gold go to the bottom of the sea."

"Oh, so-ho!" says I, sarcasticlike. "It was the gold, was it? Didn't make much difference 'bout me and the girl, did it?"

"Well," said he, slow and with some meditation, "no, it didn't make much difference. It would have saved the government all the trouble and expense of hanging *you*. . . . And as for the girl—why, she's—well, from all I've heard, you were pretty straight, Captain Somers; pretty straight, until you fell in with her. . . . So, well, I don't know that we thought much

of what would happen to either of you——"

"Thanks, I'm much obliged," said I. "But it strikes me that you're making a big mistake. My name's not Somers, and the government hasn't got any reason for hanging me—unless freedom of the press is barred out here."

"Ha!" he remarked, in some amusement. "So you're going to deny you're Somers, paymaster for constabulary headquarters of the Visayas, who got away with the gold, are you?"

"I am," says I. The thing struck me as being rather ludicrous, and I wanted him to have the benefit of the joke. So I told him how I had fallen in with the two, and driven Somers off to the woods.

"Oh!" said he. "And how did you happen to be on the spot?"

I told him about Dagorro's Island and the leper's game.

"Ha!" said he again. "Then why did you run away from our boat?"

I informed him about the pistol held at my head. Once more he said "Ha!"

"Look here!" I was getting mad now. "Is there anything in what I've told you that's so particularly damn' funny?"

He said there was.

"Well——" I looked him over. "You mean to tell me you don't believe me?"

"That's putting it mildly," said he. "It's a cause of great grief to me to see a man accomplished in as many ways as you go to the scaffold. Brave man, good soldier, excellent paymaster—and now the equal of Benito Legardo in personal fiction——"

(Benito Legardo was a civil commissioner. He was also—and is—the king-bug liar of the universe.)

I jumped out of bed, and the C. G. man immediately pulled a gun. "No use in resistance," said he.

"I'm not going to try," I answered. "I'm going to dress. Then you can have that girl come down and tell you whether or not I'm Captain Somers. She'll tell you."

"She *has* told us," replied the C. G. man. "We left her at Iloilo three hours ago. We are now on our way to Manila, where I'm to turn you over to General Allen to be court-martialed. After the court martial gets through with you, you'll be tried by the civil government for killing two customs inspectors, and—— Well, barratry, piracy, theft of government funds, kidnaping, and murder are the charges."

"That sounds interesting," I remarked. "Why don't you add arson and mayhem, and you'll have me up for all the penal offenses. It will be great training for the government attorneys if they can prove all those charges against me. . . . But you say the girl's told you about me—so it's off——"

"Well, she told us the truth. She said you were Henry Somers!"

Heavens and Hades! Lightning-flashes and thunderbolts! Sun, moon, and stars! The earth and the waters under the earth!

I don't think all that's exactly what I said. If anything, it was a great deal more descriptive. I'm sure I taught that C. G. man a lot of new ones he'd never heard before, because he listened intently so as not to miss anything.

Well, that was score two for Hyacinth, the End-row Girl. I'd been told lots of things about how brown some of those make-believe musical Totties had toasted various Broadway wine-openers; and had reserved for the toastees only the cold, unsympathetic ha-ha! for allowing peroxid pets to separate them from their common sense. But this one had it on me, all right. She was even with me for the talk about the glove-counter, and manicure table, and unknown-to-fame, and turning down the offer of her lily-white hand.

"So she told you I was Henry Somers?" I gasped.

"I guess you won't deny it now," he remarked, grinning at me.

"I won't," said I. "What's the use? You've got me cinched, all right."

There was some clean underclothing and drill clothes near-by, and I started to dress. The C. G. man got sympathetic.

"We'd have liked to held on to her, Captain Somers," said he. "Because, privately, I think she put you up to it. But she spun us a yarn about being kidnaped by you, and taken away against her will—and, well, we didn't have anything against her, so we let her go at Iloilo. She said she wanted to catch the steamer for Singapore, and make connections with that theatrical troupe in Bombay. So we had to let her go. We didn't stop very long at Iloilo. Only to take on coal. Now we're taking you to Manila."

It was a pickle, all right. It happened this way:

This C. G. boat the *Panay*, commanded by the man who was talking to me (not a bad chap at all; name of Murphy) was stationed at Iloilo. Nobody in Iloilo had ever seen Somers; nobody on the *Panay* had been favored, either. Somers was from Cebu. Three nights before he lit out with the constabulary funds, the girl, and the harbor-master's launch. The thing was telegraphed to all the Visayan ports, and the *Panay* went on the hunt. They had only Somers' description, which tallied with mine; I had been caught trying to get away from the C. G. people in the stolen launch and with the girl and the money aboard. The girl said I was Somers.

So you can see that the circumstantial evidence fitted me for a neat little necktie-party in which I would play the principal part, suspended from a halter and singing that beautiful ballad "Swinging from the Old Oak Beam."

They treated me very decently on the *Panay,* however. Murphy was not a bad sort, and he did all he conveniently could for me. I wasn't allowed out of the cabin, but he gave me some books and magazines to read, and occasionally he came down to save my soul. He was religious, Murphy was.

Three days later we reached Manila. I was turned over to a constabulary patrol, and escorted with great pomp and ceremony to Bilobid Prison, where I was given a two-by-four, double-barred cell in Murderers' Row.

It was just my blamed luck that Somers wasn't known in Manila, either. He had come to Cebu straight from Singapore, had got his commission there, and had been on that one island all the time. Most of the time he had been up-country, and hadn't had a chance to meet the visitors to Cebu City.

That was the reason I spent another three days in a cell waiting for the constabulary and custom officers from the latter pueblo to show up so that they could begin the court martial.

It was a very pleasant time, I don't think. It's bad enough to be in those sweltering islands, anyhow, but to be there—and in prison—is unmitigated hell on earth. As a prisoner awaiting trial, I wasn't given any work to do along with the convicts, and consequently I spent most of my time twiddling my thumbs in a stuffy cell, where mosquitoes and large black beetles foregathered in great numbers and large green lizards hung out on the wall and croaked me to sleep.

Of course, I might have sent for newspaper men in the city who knew me by sight, or for government officials I had given letters of introduction to when I first landed in the Philippines; but, truth to tell, I wasn't overfond of the idea of advertising the fact that the well-known correspondent, P. Hock, had been made such a silly ass. The New York *Clarion* had made so much of my mishaps heretofore that I was a tolerably well-known figure, and wasn't keen for giving them any further information for Sunday spreads about their special (copyrighted) hero.

Release came in the shape of the senior inspector of constabulary for Cebu, who showed up on a quartermaster's boat three days after I was landed. When he came to see the renegade and read him a sorrowful riot-act, he was surprised and grieved to find me. A long explanation followed; to which he listened, gnawing his mustache; and half an hour later I was in civilian's clothes and sitting in the anteroom of General Allen's office, while the senior inspector went in to tell my sad story.

In about the length of time it took me to light a cigarette and get composed, the general's door flew open, and out rushes a man in pongee riding-clothes, a silk polo-skirt, and a real, sure-enough London collar and necktie. After him comes the senior inspector and the general.

"Where," said the London clothes man—"where is the man—where is the man they took for Somers? Heavens! what a story." His eyes fell upon me. "Hello, Planty Hock!" says me, but with some disappointment—"are you next to this story, too——"

Jumping Jerusalem! Do you know who that polo-shirted man was? Oh, no, you don't know! Well, I'll just tell you he was the last man in Manila I wanted to know about my trouble.

It wasn't anybody at all! Only Percival, the correspondent for the Amalgamated Press, whose despatches go into every newspaper of enough importance to buy them. Conservatively speaking, the things written by Percival reach the eyes of about one hundred million people—oh, yes! that's all.

Thus was I advertised to the whole civilized globe. Thus!

Just you wait until Hyacinth Cloverdale gets hold of a Willie with enough money to hire a Broadway theater, "paper" the house, and put a dress-shirted press-agent in front to advertise the fact that she's going to star in a musical comedy. Just wait, that's all.

All the dramatic critics in New York are my particular personal friends—and—well, you watch what they do to Miss Hyacinth Cloverdale's butt into stardom.

THE REPRISAL OF SARAH JANE

SARAH JANE was a model of everything that a domestic servant should be, save for this one fault, a fault which, alas! human flesh is heir to—she was very jealous of a certain Mrs. Scraggs, a former fellow-servant, who never tired of writing to tell her of the glories of her new home.

"To think of 'er sauce and airs and graces, ma'am!" she said to her mistress. "Eliza Scraggs writes sayin' she has a conservatory now. Rats! I'll lay all the conservatory she's got, or is ever likely to git, is a couple of cracked flower-pots, with geraniums in 'em, on the kitchen window-sill. I'll git even with 'er!"

"You shouldn't let such trifles trouble you, Sarah," said her mistress.

"Well, ma'am, whether or not I'm a-goin' to ask you a favor."

"What is that, Sarah?"

"I was thinkin' that if I 'ired a motor-car, and got the photographer to come up, p'raps you wouldn't mind me and the master being taken together in the car. That would be a settler for Liza Scraggs when I sent her the photo!"

Kallico Dick and His Cactus Bat

By Martin A. Flavin

Author of "Slinky Bill," "The Little White Box," Etc.

You look for some surprises in every baseball game, but there surely never was a game so crammed with surprises as the one Mr. Flavin tells of. It is a very funny story and will amuse you even if you don't happen to be a baseball enthusiast

IT'S jest possible, stranger, that you ain't never heard tell of the Sage Brush League; and such being the case, the chances are about a thousand to one that you don't know nothing of Kallico Dick and his cactus bat. But, all the same, there was a Sage Brush League, and there is a Kallico Dick who once had a cactus bat; and the mixing up of these three things like to plunged the whole west end of Squgee County into a long and bloody civil war.

The Sage Brush League consisted of the Desert Stars (which was us) and the Little Divides (which was our natural enemies since about 2000 B. C.).

At the time I'm telling about we had 'em tied for the champeenship of the world, and were getting ready to play our ace of trumps.

There wasn't nothing to it, we thought, seeing as how we had the most wonderful pitchers, catchers, and batters on earth.

Take, for instance, Shovelfoot Jones, our catcher. Why, Shovel had often been known to reach right out in front of the batter and grab the ball before the feller ever got a chance to swipe at it.

On first we had an old, bald-headed cyclone named Doc Mellins that had been in Cuby with the Rough Riders, and could catch cannon-balls in a china plate.

Our pitcher, Stack Smith, could plug a quarter with an ordinary baseball at five hundred yards; and our sprinter, Spider Tom Gallagher, was so blame' fast he had to put asbestos on the soles of his feet to keep from burning up his socks.

Spider didn't think nothing of running around the bases three times while the Gulch Dams were fielding in the ball; and as, according to our rules, this counted for three scores, you kin see he wasn't no slouch.

But the real war-whooping, all-round star of the gang was Soakem Slade, right field and the champeen heavy hitter of Squgee County.

Soakem could swat the ball a mile without half-trying, and the time he made his record of a mile and seven-eights and thirty-four feet he scored ninety-seven runs, and would have made a hundred if he hadn't got off the baseline in the dark and run into a post.

I might go on and name over the rest of the nine, because every one of 'em was remarkable in one way or another, but there ain't no use in anticipating events, so I'll jest wind up the catalogue with Kallico Dick.

Kallico was general-utility man, and first and only substitute. He hadn't never played a game of baseball in his life, and didn't know a foul-tip from a home run, but Sliver Murphy, our manager, kept him on the list because of his inventive genius.

You see, Kallico had a natural bent for inventing things, and, whereas he

had formerly wasted his bloom on air-ships and divining-rods, when he joined the Desert Stars he broke out in several new places at once.

He was always a-fixing up patent bases a feller couldn't stand on, and masks as couldn't be seen through; and once he made a chest-protector and tried it on Shovelfoot, but something went wrong with what Kallico called the resilient quality, and for three weeks we didn't have no catcher.

After that the boys got kind of leary of his inventions, and when he would come around with a gutta-percha mitt or a pair of pneumatic shoes, there was more or less cussing and a sort of general panic.

Poor old Kallico was considerably offended at this lack of appreciation, but he kept right on a-trying, and the last we heard of him he was working overtime on a cactus bat. He said he wanted to have it done in time for the final game.

We tried to persuade him that there wasn't no possible use in trying to make a bat out of cactus wood, because it's that soft inside, like a watermelon, that you could throw a ball clean through it; but Kallico was in no wise convinced.

He guessed there was great room for improvement in the manufacture of baseball-bats, and so long as he had started out to make one out of cactus wood he was going to do it or bust.

Well, to cut a long story short, the great and glorious day wherein we were to lick our foes clean off the map arrived at length, and with it came the Little Divides in a stage-coach, all trimmed up like a Sunday-school picnic. Sorghum Riley, their manager, and Sliver went out to inspect the diamond, which was right on the edge of town.

The ball-grounds were plenty big, extending over the desert for about two hundred miles, and as bare as your hand, except for a few clumps of brush and cholla bushes.

Sorghum and Sliver put up some ropes to keep back the crowd which had already begun to accumulate, some of the people having come fifty miles and brought their families; and then they come back to town after us.

At two o'clock the Divides trotted onto the field of battle, and, having been uproariously greeted by their friends, set about displaying theirselves to the best advantage.

They were a sure-enough fine bunch of heroes, and if it hadn't been for Soakem Slade, we might have been genuinely worried. But we knew that after Soakem had got one swat at the leather it would be up to the Divides to send out a searching-party, so we didn't lose our nerve.

We let 'em knock up flies and grandstand around till they got tired, and then we ups and marches onto the diamond.

Well, you should have heard that mob yell! "Three cheers and a tiger for the Stars!" hollers Abner Green, of Coffeyville; and they give 'em with a will.

We felt mighty proud, I tell you; and when Soakem stepped to the plate to show his style, he was so plumb tickled that he sent the first one right up into a cloud, so it was gone for seventeen minutes, and come back as wet as if it had been soaked in a bucket of water.

The Little Divides looked pretty sick at this performance, and by and by Sorghum called Sliver aside and said it wasn't fair to keep a ball in the air that long unless his fielders were to be perwided with air-ships.

Sliver he 'lowed there wasn't nothing in the rules agin' keeping a ball up for a hour or sending it clean to heaven, if a man could do it, and, furthermore, he wasn't supplying air-ships to nobody.

Then Sorghum wanted an empire, He said if he couldn't have an empire he wouldn't let his men play.

We hadn't never had an empire afore, not ever being able to find one that would stick through the first inning, but finally Sliver give up, and said he would stand for an empire, pervided it warn't no Little Divider.

He kalklated they wouldn't pay much

attention to the empire, nohow, and right there is where he made an awful miskalkalation.

So they went off a-hunting for one, and finally located a likely-looking prospect in old "Texas Bill" Miller a-playing solitaire under a wagon-box.

They dropped on him afore he had a chance to draw, and 'lowed he'd hev to empire that game whether he wanted to or not.

Texas he said he hadn't never played baseball in his life, and didn't know no more about it than a cow-puncher did about the Holy Land; but if he had to —then he would, only he reckoned he'd wear his guns.

Sorghum and Sliver reckoned he wouldn't, but Texas jest cocked his triggers and says, sez he: "Who's a-empiring this game, anyhow?"

Well, of course that settled it. Then Texas he made a little speech to the audience, saying as how he had been forced to accept this yere honor agin' his will and nat'ral inclinations; but seeing as how he had accepted it, he wanted it thoroughly understood that he was boss of the ring, and would empire that game or bust.

Most everybody had it figgered out that he was going to bust, but they didn't have the dope dished out right by a jugful.

The first thing Texas did after he called the game was to begin calling strikes, and he called 'em for three innings without taking breath.

It was the quickest game I ever see. The pitchers jest rolled the ball along the ground; there wa'n't no kind of use in doing nothing else with such a fool empire.

It didn't make no difference what kind of a ball it was, Texas says "Strike," and after he'd said this three times he says "Out." It was the worst foolishness a man ever seen.

Well, after the third inning Sorghum and Sliver held a consultation, and decided to change their minds.

They apologized for disturbing the empire, but said they really didn't need him any more, and hoped he'd take hisself away. But Texas jest planted his feet a bit harder and guessed he'd stay.

Meanwhile the crowd was holding an injination-meeting, which ended in a committee being appointed to present Texas with a book of rules.

Texas took the book because he said it was his duty as a public character to hearken to the small voice of the people. He didn't think there was anything in the book he didn't know, but to prove that he warn't no conceited tenderfoot, he would suspend the fight while he bit off a few chunks of sporting literature.

At the end of five minutes he said he knowed more about baseball than a Kentucky thoroughbred knowed about blue grass; and things went rolling along their joyous course.

The fourth inning opened up with us in the field and a pretty tolerable degree of enthusiasm on both sides.

The first man up rapped out a single before Texas had a chance to open his head, and got to second on Diamond Pete's sacrifice.

Gopher Connors came next with blood in his eye but nothing in his hands, so far as results was concerned; and Tubby Stevens popped up a sweet little fly that came down right in my mitt.

The way things were going didn't please Texas a bit. His feelings was hurt, and when we come to bat he showed it. He called everything a ball till he got the bases full, and then he put everybody out for trying to steal. Also he wouldn't listen to no arguments, neither.

The Little Divides opened the fifth with a gymnastic exhibition by Three-Finger Donovan; but pricked up their ears like a desert-horse smelling water when Dutch Shultz dropped a two-bagger out in my direction and sneaked down to third. He got there safe because Texas was biting off a chaw of tobacco and couldn't say "Out."

Things didn't appear bright to us when we see their heavy-hitter, Hunky Mike, invading the lime-light; and Stack, who was always a bit afraid of Hunky, made a slip on his first throw,

and sent a beauty right square over the plate.

Hunky was just laying for that kind of an opening, and, swinging hard, he lambasted a corker clean over Soakem Slade's head.

Soakem, he turned to run back, with his eyes on the ball, and, as luck would have it, stepped right plumb down on a loafing rattler, and immediately lost all further interest in the game.

He run straight in for the home plate, clean forgetting the ball which he might just as well have brought along with him, seeing as how we needed it so bad, and, having drunk off half a gallon of booze, became unavailable for any purpose.

In the meantime Dutch had brought in his run and Hunky fourteen more.

There was some talk of disqualifying the last thirteen, because there ain't nothing in the rules about snake-bite. But Texas 'lowed a snake bite was a dispe'sation of Providence; and, taking any sich action would be nothing short of flying in the face of the Almighty. He emphasized his ruling by shooting six holes in the first base, and this argument warn't answerable.

Well, you kin maybe imagine about the way we felt with the score fourteen to nothing in the sixth inning of a seven-inning game, to say nothing of having our only hope chewed up by a rattlesnake.

We all felt powerful down-spirited, and Sliver he walks out to Texas, hat in hand, says as how it ain't possible to play the game without a right-fielder, and so the contest has got to be adjourned till Soakem gets sober.

Texas goes to pawing around in the rule-book, and had jest about got to the point of sending the game up for thirty days, when Sorghum comes a-butting into the confab and busts up the whole plan.

"Excuse me, Mr. Empire," says Sorghum, "but if a player is put out of a game by injuries received therein, a substitute must be got; I would refer the gentleman to rule number thirty-five on page sixty-eight."

Texas got mighty red in the face at this, and told Sorghum to mosey along and count his own chips; that he warn't calling for information from no Little Divider; but all the same he took a sneaking squint at page sixty-eight, and seen that Sorghum was giving him straight goods, and that made him sore at Sliver for getting him into it.

"Ain't you got no substitute?" he snaps.

"Sure we have," says Sliver, kind of faintlike, "but he ain't no good. Why, honest, Mr. Empire, Kallico don't know no more about baseball than you do."

Sliver didn't mean that speech the way it sounded, but he couldn't make no explanations to Texas, and we all went off to hunt for Kallico with the cheerful news a-ringing in our ears that if we didn't find him in less'n three minutes the game would be forfeited to the Divides.

However, it warn't no trouble to find him because he was sitting quietlike on the edge of the crowd, playing checkers with Doc Adams.

When he first seen us he thought we had come after the cactus bat, and his face lit up like a sunflower. We told him we didn't need the bat yet a while, but for him to come on in and help us play. And he said he would, but for us to wait a little while till he got another man in the king-row. He was jest that meek and innocentlike.

Of course we didn't do no waiting; jest grabbed him and hustled him out in the field, where we left him, with the instructions that whenever he seen the ball he was to run after it. That was all he could do.

But them inhuman Little Dividers done the rest. They put 'em over him and under him and on all sides of him. Why, acshully, he like to killed hisself a-chasing 'em. Two or three of 'em fell on his hands before he could get 'em out of the way; and Buck McCarthy lifted a fly that come square down in his pocket.

There was considerable excitement about this because Texas said it was a safe hit, and Buck got to third base before Kallico found the ball.

Most of the crowd seemed to think

that Buck ought to been put out, but Texas, he said no, and explained this-away: "When a man pockets a ball in a game of pool, he don't give the other feller a point, does he? No. Well, then, I reckon it's the same thing in baseball."

There warn't no answer to this, so Buck went on around and brought in the twentieth.

After this they didn't get no more for a spell; but when we come to bat we was all that worked up and sick that we warn't no more fitten to hold sticks than a passel of prairie-dogs; and the Divide twirler initiated three healthy candidates into the Down and Out Club before we had time to get started.

Twenty to nothing in the first of the seventh! That looked encouraging, I don't think! The audience was about half-asleep, and even the Little Dividers was getting tired of the massacre. A victory like that ain't much glory to nobody. However, they knocked a few out around Kallico jest to keep him in practise.

Kallico picked up the fine points of the game mighty quick, and by this time he could tell within a hundred yards of where a ball was going to land. In fact, it was in this inning that he almost caught one. Afterward he said he would 'a' got it if a horned toad hadn't run between his legs and tripped him.

But there ain't no use in lingering over disasters like this, and to make a sad story sadder, the Little Dividers increased their lead to twenty-four, and only went out then because they got tired, and didn't care.

A good part of the crowd was going home now, and the balance was playing horse-shoes or setting around swapping lies. The enthusiasm had kind of petered out, which warn't surprising, all things considered.

When we come in from the field Kallico said he guessed he'd better go up home now and get his bat, but most everybody told him to go to blazes. He was still hanging on to his favorite idea and chinning about it, when Sliver happened by and heard him.

"Go on and get it," says Sliver mournfullike, "and if you've got a basketful of home runs stowed away anywhere, bring them along, too. We may need 'em before we get through."

Most of us laughed, but Kallico hadn't waited for the last sentence, and was scampering away across the desert.

Shovelfoot was the first man up, and he must have had a awful friendly feeling for the ball, because he couldn't be persuaded to touch it. After him comes Spider, who makes three weak-kneed swipes without doing any more damage than to disturb the atmosphere.

"Next," says Texas, with a yawn.

And who should come a-waltzing up to the block but Kallico Dick! Yes, sir, Kallico Dick, with his cactus bat and a sad, smiling look in his eyes like a lamb being druv to the slaughter-house.

Well, it was pitiful. The crowd groans, and begins to stretch itself. The Little Divide fielders take off their mitts and walk slowly in. The catcher signals for a slow straight ball, and the pitcher grins as he prepares to deliver it.

Kallico is holding his dinky bat straight out in front of him, like a new kind of garden-rake, and waiting patiently when——

Biff! Splat!

"A hit! A hit!" yells the mob. "Run, you walrus, run!" And Kallico starts off like an express-train straight for third base.

"Drop the bat," hollers Sliver, grabbing him by the collar and heading him around in the right direction.

And Kallico, chucking his stick well inside the base-line, puffs off for first like a rusty locomotive, with everybody a-shrieking at him to follow the white line and sprint.

And all this time where is the ball? Nobody seems to know. The fielders are waving their arms and running, crazylike, this way and that.

The crowd says: "To the right!" "To the left!" "In the center!" without much choice; and the rest of us ain't recovered enough to say anything.

Sorghum appeals wildly to the empire. But Texas can't give him no sat-

isfaction—"It didn't drop outside," he says, "so it's got ter be inside." And that's the best he can get.

So they hunts while Kallico completes his third round in a blaze of glory, and starts nobly on the fourth.

But Kallico warn't built for no ten-second clip, and at the end of the tenth lap he has to have a jug of ice-water poured down his back.

This helps him some, but on the fifteenth he staggers and calls for whisky. A bucketful is passed to him, and he drinks it on the way.

Meanwhile the nine Divides has quit the diamond and is busy digging out gopher-holes.

By this time the excitement is terrible; in fact, only three people seem to have retained their senses: Texas, Sliver, and Kallico. But Kallico ain't got no more wind, and in the stretch of the twentieth he falls down, breathing very hard and begging for air.

"Get a horse," some one suggests.

"Yep, a horse, a horse," yells the crowd.

"No," says Texas. "There ain't nothing in the rules about running bases on horseback, and I don't reckon it's sca'cely allowable."

We offered to ride him in a wheelbarrer, but there warn't no wheelbarrers in the rules, neither, so that wouldn't do. More whisky, then, and ice-water; and pretty soon Kallico is up and off again.

Twenty-one, twenty-two—only three more needed, and everybody is standing on their toes and screaming like mad. The Divides has tore up about an acre of cholla bushes and is after the mesquit-trees with a hand ax.

"Twenty-three, twenty-four!"

"They've got it!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"By Heck, it's a stone!"

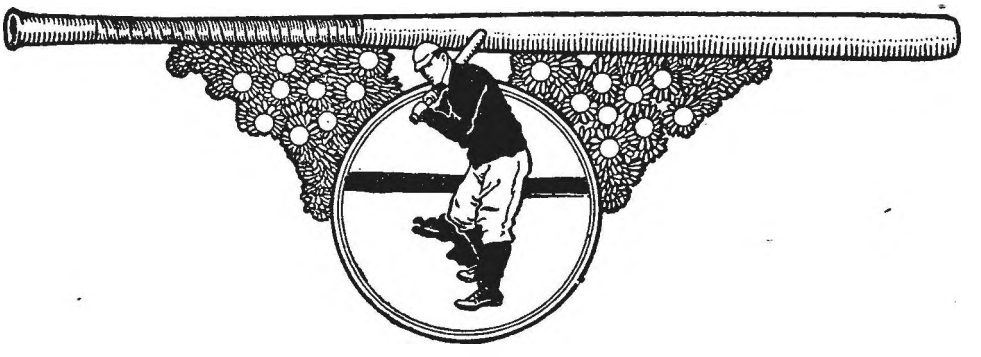
"Here he comes!"

"Sprint, you mucker, sprint!"

And Kallico crosses the tape running blind, and faints dead away in my arms.

And, stranger, do you reckon that ball was ever found? Well, it was; and not six feet from the home plate, I'll take my affidavy. Where? Why, jest a-sticking in the bat, same as if you was to sink a false tooth in a chunk of bakery pie and leave it there.

Yes, oh, yes, the Little Divides kicked some; but Texas he 'lowed there warn't nothing in rules agin' cactus wood, and if the boys didn't think to look inside the bat, that was their business, not his; and, of course, that settled it.



The Iconoclast

By T. Jenkins Hains

Author of "The Black Barque," "The Wreck of the Conemaugh," Etc.

Being an Eventful Episode in the Career of Bahama Bill, Wrecker and Sponger

(A Complete Story)

THE wrecking-sloop *Seahorse* came smashing the seas headlong past Fowey Rocks, heading for the channel over the reef into Bay Biscayne. She had left Nassau the day before, and had made a record run across the Gulf Stream, carrying sail through a heavy head sea, which flew in a storm of white water over her bows and weather-rail all day, making the deck almost uninhabitable. Bahama Bill, otherwise known as Bill Haskins, wrecker and sponger, mate and half-owner, held the wheel-spokes, and sat back upon the edge of the wheel-gear, bracing one foot to leeward. Sam, a Conch, and Heldron, a Dutchman, both sailors and able seamen, lounged in the lee of the cabin-scuttle and smoked, their oilskins streaming water, but loosened on account of the warmth of the air. Captain Smart, late of the Dunn schooner wrecked just below Carysfort Reef, on a cruise to Boca Grande Pass for tarpon, sat in the doorway of the companionway and watched the giant mate of the *Seahorse* hold the flying sloop on her course with one powerful hand, while with the other he shielded his pipe from the spray.

Smart was thinking over the strange events which happened to bring him in contact with the wreckers: the loss of his schooner caused by the leak made by Bahama Bill; the loss of his position as officer on the liner he had left to take command of the yacht, and the strange fight in the saloon at Key West, which ended in his going with the giant black to keep out of trouble.

They had now just ridden out a bad spell of weather in Nassau, where they had laid up with cartridge-cases taken from the brig *Bulldog*, wrecked on the Great Bahama Bank, and they were hurrying to the nearest American port to discharge them to some dealer, and realize what profits they could. The ammunition was perfectly good and sound, in spite of being submerged under the sea for a long time, for the cases had been put up for tropical weather and made perfectly water-proof. They had several thousand dollars' worth aboard, and it would only be necessary to prove their fitness for use to realize upon them. To Miami they laid their course without delay, to get in touch with the express and railroad.

"Seems like we got to git thar to-night, sure," said the mate, sucking at his pipe.

"Looks like we'll make it easily," assented Smart. "I suppose you know the reef well enough to go in any time, hey?"

"Jest as well at night as daytime," said the mate.

"And when we get in—what then? Do you know any one who'll deal with us? Do you know who'll buy ammunition from you even at a twenty-per cent. discount?" asked Smart.

"I reckon we won't have to burn any of them ca'tridges, cap; not by a blamed sight. We might have to wait a spell fo' suah, but we kin sell 'em, all right."

"Got enough money to live on while we wait, hey?" asked Smart.

Bahama Bill scowled. Then he gave the captain a queer look.

"See here, cap," he said. "Yo' know Bull Sanders is skipper an' half-owner of this here sloop? Well, he's on a tear up the beach. If he comes back broke he'll want toe borrow off'n me—see? Well, I knows what that means. I jest naturally sent all the money abo'd to my Jule—yo' ain't married, cap, or you'd know what a wife means. 'Scrappy Jule' kin take keer of all de money I gets, an' yo' needn't make no moan toe dat. Jule is all right, an' if yo' got a right good memory, yo' suah remember she don't do no washin' fo' po' white folks."

"I suppose that means that the ten-spot I saved from the fracas in Journegan's barroom is all the cash aboard, then," said Smart.

He was thinking how strange it was for him to be associating with a self-confessed wrecker of the old school, the type which waited not for the elements, but made events happen with a rapidity which put even a stormy season to shame.

He would have liked to get away from the whole business, get away from men of Bahama Bill's class, but he could not help thinking that the giant black man had some cause, according to his way of looking at things, to do as he had done.

The yacht owner had insulted him, had made it an open question of hostility between them, and the wrecker had simply gone ahead and regarded the owner's feelings not at all, but caused by indirect means the loss of his vessel.

Bill had many good points. He had helped Smart out of a difficult situation in Key West, where the land-sharks had set out to trim him clean. He had put him in the way, almost in spite of himself, of making a few thousand dollars within a week or two, and had saved his life by diving into a dangerous wreck after him when caught in her shifting cargo.

Smart was in a strange position, almost dead broke, with several thousand dollars' worth of salvage due him from his efforts. He would be tied up with the sloop for several weeks, perhaps several months, until the sales were made and the salvage divided. To leave her would risk losing the share due him, for Bahama Bill would hardly stand for desertion until the affair was settled, no matter what the provocation.

They beat in over the reef, up the crooked, shallow channel into Biscayne Bay, and laid their course for the docks at Miami, where they arrived during daylight.

Two days were spent trying to make the sales of the cargo, but the dealers insisted on testing the powder from each and every case before paying, or taking it on, so there was a delay of at least two weeks staring them in the face. The crew having enough to eat minded the waiting not the least. The mate cared nothing as long as the ultimate end was in sight, for he had enough hog and hominy aboard to last twice as long.

The sloop lay off the docks in a scant seven feet of water, her keel just grazing the coral bottom, which was as plainly visible beneath her as though she were surrounded by clear air instead of the clearer water of the bay. The huge, fashionable hotel loomed high against the background of palms and coconuts, making an impressive sight, and also a comfortable abode for the rich tourists who filled it during this end of the season. Prices were high, and Smart spent much time watching the idle rich wandering about the beautiful gardens.

Several gambling-joints were in full blast, for it was always the policy of the eminent Florida philanthropist who owned the tourist accommodations on the east coast to build a church upon one side of his dominions, and then a gambling-hell upon the other. Both were necessary to draw the lazy rich.

Smart noticed several of the sporting

gentry wandering about, but, having nothing to gamble with, he was forced to look on with little interest.

On the third day of their stay in harbor, a man sauntered down to the dock close aboard, and stood gazing at the *Seahorse*. He was perfectly dressed in the height of fashion, and he swung a light cane lazily while he gazed at the wrecker. He wore a thin mustache, and his high, straight nose seemed to hook over it to an abnormal extent. His eyes were a very light blue, so pale that they appeared to be colorless, but he had an altogether well-fed, well-satisfied look; one of seeming benevolence and kindliness, which attracted Smart's attention. Smart and the mate of the *Seahorse* were sitting upon the cabin-house in the shade of a drying trysail, and the stranger spoke to them.

"Sloop for charter?" he asked abruptly, in a high voice, which carried over the short distance of water with some force.

"What fo'?" asked Bahama Bill, without moving.

"Oh, we want to fish, and shoot. I don't care for the yachts for hire; their owners don't seem to know where to go to get sport. I'd rather charter from a man who knows something of the reef to the southward, and you look like you belong around here."

"Yo' sho' got a bad guesser in yo' haid, Mister Yankee," said the mate. "What make yo' think we belongs around here?"

Smart studied the man carefully while he was talking. He was a close observer, but he failed to place this suave, well-groomed gentleman in his vocation. He might be a gambler, a sport, or just a rich fellow wanting amusement. The latter seemed most likely, so Smart spoke up, hoping to land a few dollars while waiting for his share of the salvage.

"We'll charter for thirty dollars a day," he said reluctantly, and, as he did so, the black mate gave a grunt and grinned insultingly at the shore.

"Will you go anywhere we want?" asked the man.

"Sho' we will dat, perfesser," broke in Bahama Bill, unable to restrain himself at the thought of the graft. The idea of thirty dollars per day was good, and he slapped Smart a terrific blow upon the back in high good nature at the thought of it. "Sho', perfesser, we'll carry yo' toe hell—an' half-way back, fer thirty a day. Are yo' on?"

There was a slight sneer on the man's face when he heard the mate's manner, but he answered quietly, in the same far-reaching voice, that he would consider the vessel his, and that if one of them would come ashore for the money, he would bind the bargain by pay for the first day at once.

At the instant he stopped speaking Heldron the Dutchman came aft to where the mate sat. Bahama Bill at once seized him about the waist and hove him far out over the side.

"Git that money, yo' beggar," he laughed, as the sailor landed in the water with a tremendous splash. Sam, the Conch, snickered. "Yo' go after him, toe see he comes back," said Bill, and, making a pass at the man, sent him over also. They swam the distance in a few moments, much to the amusement of the gentleman on the wharf, who seemed to like the mate's energetic manner of doing things. The money was paid, and the men swam back aboard, climbing into the small boat towing astern, and coming over the taffrail none the worse in temper. There was good money for all in the deal, and they were pleased.

II.

In about an hour the man returned with a friend, both of them loaded with fishing-rods and other parts of a gentleman's sporting outfit. They were rowed aboard by the mate, and announced that they were ready at once to get to sea. The mainstail was hoisted, and in a few minutes the wrecking-sloop was ready to stand down the channel.

Just at this moment the gentlemen, who had been arranging their fishing-rods and clothes upon the transoms in the cabin, came on deck and said that

they had forgotten to bring any provisions for the cruise. The second man declared he had ordered a large box sent aboard, and asked with some anxiety if it had arrived.

"There ain't nothing come abo'd sence yo' left," said Bill surlily, annoyed at the delay. "We's got good grub abo'd here, an' enough fer a week."

"You will pardon me, my good fellow," said the second man, who was very tall and thin, with a lined face. "You know, or should know, I'm an invalid, and cannot eat the ordinary food which I love so well. It is for this that we have taken the boat. Won't you allow me the use of your crew to help carry the provisions aboard? We expect to be out for several weeks, and must have plenty of the kind of food I am forced to eat."

"Yo' don't look so very puny," said Bill; "but, o' co'se, if youse an invalid, yo' sho'ly wants toe git some soft feed. We eats hoag an' hominy abo'd here, an' I tells yo' it's mighty good hoag; costs me seven cents a pound."

The small boat was called away, and, with Sam and Heldron to help carry the provisions, the two gentlemen went ashore again.

Half an hour passed, and Bill was getting surly. The tide was falling, and the chances of hitting the reef were good. The wind dropped, and the surface of the bay was just ruffled by it. Far away to the southward the little hump of Soldier Key stood out above the surrounding reef, and the tall palms of Florida Cape seemed to be motionless.

"What the name o' sin d'ye think dem folks is doin'?" said Bahama Bill finally, rising from the quarter and gazing toward the shore. "I sho' likes toe make money easy, but when I gits de sail on dis hear ship, I likes toe see her go. Gittin' hot, an' de wind's dropped. I hate to run that channel on a fallin' tide without wind enough to drive her good an' strong over dem shoal places. Hello! what's dat?"

Smart looked up, and followed the direction of the mate's gaze. A wagon was tearing down the street at a breakneck pace, and upon it were the two gentlemen who had chartered the sloop. Sam and Heldron sprang up from the dock to meet them as the vehicle drew up, and with a great show of haste all four men were struggling with a small but apparently very heavy box.

In a few moments, in spite of its weight, it was being lowered into the small boat, and Smart noticed that when all hands sprang in, she was nearly gunwale down with the cargo. The men rowed as though urged to their utmost, and in a few minutes the boat was alongside.

"Didn't want to keep you waiting," cried the tall, thin-faced man.

"No," said the man who had chartered the sloop, "we knew you would hate to be delayed, so we hurried." His benevolent expression beamed up at the mate, but Smart noted that every now and then his pale eyes shifted uneasily toward the dock, where the wagon was still standing unattended.

A line was cast over the side, and Bill took hold to hoist the box on deck. He gave a tug, and then stopped suddenly.

"What in thunder yo' got toe eat in dere?" he growled. "Dat's lead, sho' 'nuff lead, an' no mistake. We got sinkers enough abo'd here fer all de fishin' yo'll do dis spring. Sam! Heldron, yo' Dutchman! Cap'n, come, all hands git a hold an' h'ist away. Man, I nigh broke my pore ole back with de heft ob dat box."

They all tailed onto the line, and hoisted the box on deck.

"Get it below," said the man with the mustache and pale eyes; "we'll give you a hand."

In a few minutes the weighty box, which appeared to be of wood, was landed safely below in the cabin. The gentleman opened a small bottle of liquor, and offered a drink all around. It passed until Bahama Bill came to it, and he silently uptilted the bottle and drained it to the last drop, flinging it up the companionway and overboard.

"Good!" cried the gentlemen together. "Now for the open sea. Let's try to find out how quick we can get from

here to the end of the reef." And suiting the action to the words, they sprang up the companionway, followed by the mate, who was now in a better frame of mind.

"Git de hook off'n de groun'," bawled Bill. "Hi'st de jib." And he hauled flat the mainsheet, and rolled the wheel over as the short cable came in and the anchor broke clear.

Smart hoisted the head-sails, and they filled away for the open sea.

Smart sat aft upon the taffrail, and the two guests settled themselves upon boxes which Sam brought out in place of chairs. Bill held the wheel, heading the *Seahorse* down the narrow channel. She moved slowly in the light air, and the thin-faced man stretched out his long frame and looked her over critically.

"Seems like she isn't very fast," he remarked to his pale-eyed companion.

Bahama Bill looked at him a moment, but said nothing.

"Pretty dirty sort of ship, hey?" said the thin fellow again, in a low tone.

The mate was about to make some reply, but Smart nudged him, and he relaxed into a scowl.

"Aw, well, I reckon we'll make it all right," said the pale-eyed man, his face beaming satisfaction and his high nose sniffing the salt air.

"With a decent boat, yes," said the other, "but this one's mighty rough. I never saw a more poorly rigged affair. Seems like she's rigged from the wrecks of other vessels. Don't look like she'll make six knots."

Bahama Bill grunted, but Smart nudged him again, and he said nothing. The yacht captain knew that gentlemen would not stand for rough talk from men of Bahama Bill's type, and he did not want to lose the charter. It meant plenty of money and comfortable living until he could get his salvage.

"Let them talk—don't butt in—say nothing," he admonished Bill, in a whisper.

The big mate heard, but seemed resentful. "What dey want toe knock my ship fo'?" growled the giant. "Ain't she a good sloop? Ain't she done her work all right every time? She's paid me good money, me an' Bull Sanders—no, I don't like no knockin' goin' on abo'd here."

"Cut it out, keep quiet—we get the money if you do," said Smart. "What good will it do you to get them angry, so they won't want to charter us again? Man! it's good money, thirty dollars a day—let it go at that."

The pale-eyed man looked at the mate. "It's about dinner-time, isn't it?" he asked. "We're mighty hungry, and if you can let the cook get to work, we'll be ready."

"Where's the soft grub fo' dat invalid?" growled Bahama Bill. "I thought he couldn't eat hoag an' hominy—Heldron, yo' Dutchman, git the fire started an' let the perfessers eat as soon as yo' kin."

They were well down the channel now, but Smart, on looking back, saw a small schooner making sail hastily. She started off, heading in their wake, and about a mile astern.

The passenger with the pale eyes watched her sharply for some moments, and the benevolent expression faded from his face. The thin man, the invalid, started up and gazed at her, but was pulled down again by his companion.

"That fellow astern," said the charterer, his high nose sniffing sneeringly at the schooner, "thinks he has a smart vessel, and bet us this morning that he could beat this old sloop to the Fowey Rocks. Don't let him come up on us whatever you do. I'll give you ten dollars extra to-day if you run him out of sight before dark."

"Looks like a smart vessel," said Bahama Bill, gazing aft. "I ain't much at racing, but give this sloop a good breeze, an' maybe you'll land yo' money."

The passengers ate their meal, and to the credit of the invalid be it said that he ate more of the "hoag" than his companion. He also put away an immense portion of the hominy, and his thin face seemed less wrinkled when he appeared on deck to take a look at the schooner.

Smart watched the following vessel, and saw that she was gaining. The expression of the pale-eyed man was even more sinister than before, and the quiet, urbane look gave way to one of ferocity. The high, thin nose seemed like the beak of some bird of prey, and the mustache bristled with anxiety and apparent vexation. The thin-faced invalid's expression was also one of evident concern, the lines of his face drawing tighter as the distance lessened between the two ships.

"Who's that fellow that looks like the marshal abo'd the schooner?" asked the mate.

"Oh, that's a friend of mine. He dresses up like that when he goes hunting or fishing. He used to be in the army, and he likes to wear the clothes like a uniform," said the thin-faced man.

"Speaking of the army," said the pale-eyed one, "that puts me in mind of that little Colt automatic-gun I have. They use them now in the service, and say they carry like a rifle. I believe I'll take a pop at Charlie just to scare him, hey? It won't hurt him at this distance, anyway."

"By all means," laughed the thin-faced man, "take a try at him. It'll scare him to death, I bet you."

Bahama Bill eyed the men curiously, but as it appeared to be none of his business whether they indulged in rough play, he said nothing. Smart was too engrossed to notice that the pale-eyed man had drawn a large automatic pistol, and was resting it upon the rail, until he had pulled the trigger. The sharp, whiplike report without any smoke startled him. The shrill whine of the projectile whistled over the water, and the man who stood upon the schooner's deck quickly disappeared. In a few moments the "cheep" of a rifle-bullet cut the air, and "spanged" with a thud into the mainmast, followed by a faint crack sounding over the sea.

The pale-eyed man fired six shots in answer now, and they came so quickly that there was hardly a second between the reports.

"What yo' doin', havin' a gun fight?" roared Bill. "What yo' mean by shootin' a fellow up what ain't doin' nothin' but sailin' after yo'? What's de lay? Sing out."

The pale-eyed man turned his gaze upon the giant mate, and, as he did so, he shoved another clip of cartridges into his weapon.

"Don't get excited," he said calmly. "My friend here is an iconoclast, a knocker. He objects to the simplicity of your ship, to her rigging, to her going qualities. He objected to the perfection of that schooner, also. He speaks out, and consequently gets into trouble. Now it's for you to show him that he's right; that, after all, racing is a game between men, not between ships. I'll make it fifty dollars if you keep that schooner just where she belongs."

"I'll run her out of sight befo' night, if de wind comes—hit looks like it's coming now, by the shake outside the reef—but dat's de United States marshal youse fired on, perfesser. I knows him of old, an' I got no use fer him. But watcher got in de box? Speak up, or I throws her into the wind."

"If you so much as alter the course of this sloop one point," said the thin-faced man quietly, from a place to leeward, where he had gone unobserved, "I'll fill you so full of lead that you'll make a hole in the bottom where you'll strike. Head her out over the reef, and then due east, until further orders."

While he spoke he rested a long-barreled six-shooter of the heaviest pattern in the hollow of his arm, with its muzzle pointing directly at the heart of the giant mate. The man with the pale eyes sat upon the taffrail with his Colt automatic in readiness, and looked Smart and the two men over without a word. Speech was unnecessary. The iconoclast had done all that was needed to bring about a perfect understanding, and, as both men were armed with guns that admitted of some respect, the *Seahorse* held her way over the reef under all sail, while the freshening breeze heeled her gradually over until she fairly tore along through a calm sea, leaving a snowy, boiling wake astern.

III.

Bahama Bill looked his men over. He feared neither gun nor knife when the time came for a fracas, but there was another consideration which moved him deeper than the threat of the thin-faced invalid. The marshal had libeled his vessel upon an occasion, for the payment of a small bill. Here he was forced, at the point of a gun, to run away, to carry the evident prey with him. It would exonerate him if caught, for he could prove that it was a matter he had no discretion in. He could, with all safety, put as much space between the two vessels as possible. All hands would swear that he was forced to do so.

The idea tickled him, and his huge, ugly mouth broadened out into a sinister grin as the *Seahorse,* racing along through the choppy water of the edge of the Gulf Stream, poked her short horn out over the foam, and tore away to windward.

The box in the cabin excited his curiosity, but he felt sure that it was of value, and that the men were trying to make a getaway with it. Smart was sitting quietly watching the affair, and being, like the mate, under the guns of the passengers, there was nothing to do but obey orders, or take the consequences.

"Seems like your health has improved wonderfully since you dined on the ship's grub," said the yacht captain, addressing the invalid, who held the revolver.

"The sea air is good for the health," assented that gentleman, his thin face lining up into something resembling a smile. "It'll be healthy for all of us out here in the broad ocean, free from all cares. Oh, the life on the bounding wave for me—isn't that so, Jim?" said he, referring to his companion.

The sharp "ping" of a bullet interrupted the answer, and it was found that to be perfectly safe it was necessary to remain under cover.

"Those bullets would go through the ship both ways and back again," said the invalid, as the rest snuggled down, "but of course it's well to keep out of sight. Better put everything you can on her, skipper," he added, addressing the mate, "if you want to keep clear. Let her go. Don't stop on our account. When we get an offing, I'll trust you to steer without trouble, and I'll put out a line to catch some supper. There ought to be fine fishing off the reef this time of year."

"Oh, I'm mighty feared ob those guns," said Bahama Bill, in a deep voice, which he tried to raise to a frightened treble. "I'll steer her all right toe any place yo' wants toe go. Lay de co'se, says me. I'll take youse dere if the hooker'll go."

"It's a pity you haven't some decent canvas aboard her," said the invalid.

"If you had some decent gear, we might show that fellow a clean wake. You seem to know your business, all right."

"If you want to make a getaway, you better stop knocking this sloop," said Smart.

"Dat's right, cap'n, ef dese perfessers want toe make good, dey better quit hittin' de *Seahorse.* I won't stand fer much ob dat foolishing," said Bahama Bill.

"The invalid is a regular image-breaker," said the pale-eyed man sympathetically; "don't mind the knocks, my good fellow. Tell me what other cloth you can put on the ship, and I'll see that it's spread. They're getting out everything that will hold wind astern of us."

This was the case aboard the schooner. The United States marshal, Tom Fields, had been told of the successful onslaught of "Thin Jim" and Dick Nichols, sometimes known as "The Owl," on account of his colorless eyes, upon the safe of the gambling establishment. This contained seven thousand dollars in cash, and nearly as much more in jewelry that had been accepted for gambling debts.

The two crooks, a pair of the most desperate and notorious cracksmen, had made good the haul in broad daylight, having first arranged to have the sloop ready and waiting for the reception of

the valuables. The ignorance of her crew was rightly depended upon, and the plot had so far been fairly successful. If they could once get to sea, the rest would be easy, for they could land anywhere upon the Bahamas, from Nassau a thousand miles down to the Great Inagua Bank. It would be next to impossible to catch them. It all depended upon the vessel and her maneuvering.

Fields recognized the *Seahorse* at once, and, knowing her peculiar character, and also that of her owners, he at once came to the conclusion that the giant mate of the wrecker was in the game with the other two experts from the North. He at once pressed the yacht *Silver Bar* into service, and, making sail about the time the *Seahorse* was standing out the channel, came along in pursuit, with the conviction that he would soon run the heavier working vessel down under his gun and force her to surrender.

Armed with a modern rifle of small bore and great range, he had returned the fire of the burglars at once, in the hope that he might cripple some one, even at the range of half a mile. His ammunition consisted of hardly more than a handful of cartridges, and he was forced to use these sparingly, depending now upon the seamanship of his crew and the seaworthiness of the *Silver Bar* to make his catch.

With all sail he stood down the channel, and was beginning to haul up on the *Seahorse,* when she took the first of the southerly wind coming over the reef. This had given her a good start, and she was now about a mile to windward, and going like mad to the eastward, across the Gulf Stream.

"Clap everything you can on her," begged the marshal; "put out the awning, tarpaulins, anything that will drive us. It's a thousand dollars reward if we land them, and I'll split even with you if we do."

The captain of the *Silver Bar* needed no urging. He wanted that five hundred. He would have to go, anyway, and here was the chance of the season. He broke out jib-topsails, stretched his mainsail to the utmost, and trimmed his canvas for the struggle, setting a club-topsail aft and a working one forward, with a big maintopmast staysail. He was soon making the most of the lively breeze, and plunging through the blue water to the tune of ten knots, heading right into the wake of the flying *Seahorse.*

The wrecking-sloop, leaning well down to the now freshening gale, tore a way through the Gulf Stream, sending the spray flying over her in a constant shower. She headed well up, a trifle closer than the schooner, and she waded through it like a live thing. Her rough gear, meant for work and hard usage, stood her in good stead in the heavy water off shore.

All the lines stretching taut as bowstrings to the pressure made a musical humming which sounded pleasantly upon the ears of the listening men aft. They still held their weapons in readiness, but it was evident that Bahama Bill was going to send his favorite through to a finish in a style fitting her record.

With one hand upon the wheel-spokes, he lounged upon the steering-gear, nor ducked nor winced as the rifle projectiles now and again sang past. The range was getting too great to be dangerous, and the ammunition of the marshal was getting low. Finally the fire astern ceased, and the two vessels raced silently across the Stream, each striving to the utmost for the objective point, the Great Bahama Bank, seventy miles away, due east.

Once upon the shoal, the wrecker would have the advantage, for he knew the Bank well, and could follow channels which the heavier schooner would almost certainly fetch up in. The marshal knew this, and urged the schooner to the limit of her powers.

Away they went across the Stream. The *Silver Bar* was rooting deeply into the choppy sea, caused by the strong northerly current which flows eternally between the Florida Reef and the Great Bahama Bank. She would plunge headlong, and bury her bows clear to the knightheads, ramming the

water so heavily that it burst into a great comber from both sides. Then she would raise her dripping forefoot clear, until one could see under her body aft to the heel of the foremast, rearing up like a spirited horse under the spur. Down she would plunge again with a forward lunge, and every line of standing rigging would set like a bar with the strain.

Fields, the marshal, was getting all he could out of her, and she was gradually hauling up in the wake of the wrecker. Before the sun sank in the west she was less than half a mile astern, and coming along handsomely.

Smart, on the *Seahorse,* trimmed his canvas, stretched the peak of the mainsail, and sweated the topsail sheet and tack until the lines would stand no more. The *Seahorse* was literally flying through it, and her heavy build caused her to strike the seas with a smash which flung the spray in showers.

Bahama Bill glanced astern, and saw that he would soon be alongside the pursuer, and the anxious faces of the passengers told of a nervousness which could not be concealed. Both Sam and Heldron were aware that they were making a getaway, but they had no choice in the matter, and they would obey the mate to the last.

Smart studied out several wild propositions which occurred to him to disable the sloop and be overhauled, but, as there was every prospect of getting shot for any attempt, he wisely kept on, feeling sure that the marshal would soon be alongside and force surrender.

They had run all the afternoon, and had gone many miles, but now that they were really at sea, the schooner would have the advantage.

Darkness came on, and the thin man holding the revolver appeared to tire. "You might get dinner ready," said he. "I'm about ready to eat again."

"I don't got noddings but pork, cold an' fat," said Heldron, who acted as cook.

"Bring it on deck," said the invalid. "It's a shame you fellows live the way you do."

He bolted a full pound of the greasy meat, and seemed to enjoy it.

"Does me good to see how you've improved under the salt air," said Smart.

"The more he eats the thinner he gets," said the pale-eyed man, shifting his automatic pistol into his left hand. "You can let me have a try at it now."

After all hands had eaten, the darkness had grown to the blackness of a tropic night. The *Seahorse* kept along without lights, but those of the schooner soon showed close astern, and appeared exceedingly near. No shots had been fired, although the range was now close, and there was every opportunity, could the marshal see, of hitting a man, but the plunging of the vessels evidently made his aim uncertain, and he reserved his fire, feeling sure that he would soon be close enough to force matters to a satisfactory conclusion without bloodshed.

"Dere ain't but one chanct in fo'ty ob our makin' de gitaway," said Bill, gazing astern at the approaching vessel, "but I'll do the bes' I kin to shoo fly dat ornery marshal. Dere's a bit ob a squall makin' ah'ad, an' ef we kin hold on till it comes up, I'll try to fluke him when it's thick."

"My black friend, if your boat was any good you could make a getaway without trouble, but this craft is surely on the bum," said the thin-faced invalid ruefully. "I've no doubt you think her all right in her way, but her way is not that of those who expect to make either comfort or time when afloat—she's rotten."

"Look here," said Bahama Bill. "Yo' better take my advice an' not hit this sloop any more. If yo' don't think she's any good, why yo' come abo'd her? Why yo' want to run off with her, hey?"

"Why, indeed?" sighed the invalid, shifting his gun and gazing ahead at the gathering blackness of the squall, which was just one of those little puffs of smudge, a bit of breeze and drizzle, common to southerly wind in the Stream.

"Shall I run her off an' make the try fo' it?" asked the mate.

"Yes, do the best you can," said the iconoclast, nursing the barrel of the six-shooter. "Looks like we're up against it," he added to his pale-eyed partner, who seemed to grow more and more anxious as the pursuing schooner drew up in the wake of the *Seahorse*.

"Stand by to haul down the jib an' fo'sta' s'l," ordered the mate, and just then the first puff of the squall heeled the sloop over slightly, and gave her greater speed. The rain came with the breeze, and for a moment the vessel fairly tore along with the increased pressure. It gave them considerable advantage over the schooner, for it struck them first.

Just as it began to show signs of slacking up, Bahama Bill gave his final orders. The head-sails were run down so as not to show against the sky, and the mainsail run off until the leech was on edge to the pursuing vessel, the *Seahorse* squaring away and running off at nearly right angles to her course. In this manner she presented little besides her mast to be seen in the darkness, her white canvas being now almost if not quite out of sight.

"Stan' up an' look astern, now," said Bahama Bill to the thin-faced man.

The request was complied with, both men standing up and gazing back into the blackness, which now showed only the port, or red, light, of the schooner, telling plainly that she had not discovered their ruse, and was holding on with the freshening breeze, confident that when it let up she would be close aboard the sloop.

The course of the *Seahorse* was almost due north, while that of the pursuing vessel was east. Before the thickness of the rain was over, the wrecker would be safely out of sight to the northward, and the marshal would hold on only to find he was chasing nothing. They watched her pass on toward the Bahamas, and her lights fade out, and then the thin-faced passenger spoke.

"For a bum old boat, this did the trick, all right," said he to his partner. "I didn't think we'd make it, but I guess we will, all right, now—what?"

"Looks like we're off for fair," said the pale-eyed man. "We'll make a landing without delay, and let the marshal go hunting the town of Nassau for two well—but not favorably—known gentlemen. That's a strong shooting rifle he carries, hey?"

While they talked, interested in the chase, the mate of the *Seahorse* had begun to think of his part in the affair. Both he and Smart had now to face a serious charge, and the prospect was not pleasant, especially as they had not chosen to take part in the escape of the two men who now had shown that they were fugitives from the law and the marshal.

The mate had outwitted his old enemy, and, as the success of his seamanship became evident, he began to realize that the game was now up to him. Smart stood near, and was about to say something to that effect, when he caught the glint of the black man's eye, shining white in the darkness.

It conveyed a meaning to the yacht captain, for he was well versed in tricks of the sea, and he at once spoke to the passengers, calling their attention to the vanishing ship. He did not know just what Bahama Bill would do, but he knew from that look he would act, and act at once.

Almost instantly the mate pushed the wheel-spokes slowly over, doing it so gently, so gradually, that only Smart was aware that the wind was hauling to the lee, and that the mainsail would soon be taken aback. He spoke again, and the men gazed a moment more at the shadow passing out across the Stream. Then the mainsail took the wind to port, and swung with a quick jibe to starboard.

The sheet well off came over in a bight, and, while the two gentlemen of fortune had agility enough to dodge the main boom, the line caught the tall, thin-faced invalid, and jerked him quickly over the side into the sea.

The other man sprang out of the way, but almost instantly recovered himself, and covered the mate with his weapon. He seemed to realize that some trick had been played, but just what he failed

to understand. He hesitated to fire, and that instant cost him the game. Bahama Bill made a quick plunge over the taffrail, and disappeared in the white wake astern. The pale-eyed man held his pistol in readiness to shoot, but he was warned again by Smart's voice.

"Don't fire, you fool, he'll save your friend," cried the captain. "They'll hear the shot aboard the schooner—put up your gun."

The quickness of events seemed to cause even the cool-headed burglar to hesitate as to what course to pursue. The mate had gone overboard evidently to save his companion. It was certain death to be left out there in the ocean, and Smart was even now swinging the *Seahorse* around in a great circle, heading well to the westward, to make it farthest from the disappearing schooner.

Heldron and Sam had sprung to the sheet, and were rapidly hauling it in hand over hand, while Smart bawled out orders for them, regardless of the saturnine passenger with the gun, who seemed undecided whether to shoot some of them or not.

He sat down and gazed astern at the place where the two men had vanished. He knew his companion was a strong swimmer, but he knew nothing of the black man's giant strength, his remarkable staying powers, and fishlike ability in the sea.

Smart hauled the sloop up on her port tack, and slowly circled, knowing almost exactly where he would pick up the mate. He would not go too fast, for fear of overrunning him, and he felt certain that he need not hurry on his account.

The pale-eyed man appeared to think there was little use hunting for men in the darkness, and his knowledge of his whereabouts was evidently completely lost.

"What's the use, now?" he asked finally. "You can't find a man in the ocean on a dark night. Better give it up. Let's make a run back for the Keys."

"With Bill trying to save your partner?" asked Smart, in feigned disgust.

"Oh, well, my friend, if there was any use of hunting for them, I would stay as long as the next man."

"I'm not exactly what you might call your friend," said Smart coldly, "but I'm going to stay around here a little while. Don't try to force matters, because I won't leave this part of the Atlantic until I'm satisfied both are gone for good."

"See here, Mr. Sailor-man," said the pale-eyed one. "I hold the decision just now. I don't want to make rough-house on board of your excellent yacht, but you must do as I say. I'm not a knocker. I don't want to say anything against you. But you take my orders, and make a getaway from here in about two minutes. I want to land that box before daybreak—you understand?"

Smart was about to argue the matter further, but desisted for a few minutes while he had the forestaysail run up and the jib hoisted. He was swinging around in a large circle, and was now ready to carry head-sail and have his vessel manageable. In the meantime, Bahama Bill was busy some two hundred fathoms distant.

IV.

When the mate plunged overboard after the thin-faced gentleman, he had a very definite idea of what he must do. To attempt to retake his ship under the guns of two armed men who were expert at the use of firearms would have been suicide. They would have shot him before he could have taken charge.

He knew Smart to be a good sailor, and had considerable faith in his ability to handle himself properly in an emergency. He felt certain that the captain understood the game, and gave him merely a look to signify that he was ready. Then he had gone over the side for the man who had the six-shooter, feeling sure that the fellow would not let go of the weapon until he had to.

He swam quickly along in the swirl of the wake, keeping his eyes open for the head of the passenger to appear

upon the whitened surface. In a moment he saw him.

The thin-faced rogue was a strong swimmer. He was also a powerful man, spare and muscular, capable of taking care of himself in that smooth sea for a long time. He had suddenly found himself flung far over the side by the jibing sheet, but he clutched his pistol firmly, knowing that his partner would take charge until he was safe aboard again.

The weapon was heavy, but he jammed it into his waist-belt and struck out slowly, meaning to swim along easily until the sloop returned to pick him up. He could see her plainly, and he saw Smart start to swing her around to return.

Then he was suddenly aware of a black head and face close aboard him, the head sticking out of the sea and coming along at a smart pace. At first the sight startled him. He hardly knew what had happened. Then he surmised that the mate had been swept overboard also, and was swimming near for company.

"You got it, too?" he asked, as the head of Bahama Bill came nearer. The answer was a terrific blow between the eyes, which sent the stars sailing through his brain. Then he felt the powerful hands of the giant black closing upon him, and he fought with furious energy to keep free. They clutched and clinched, the mate getting a firm hold of the man's right hand, which he twisted around behind him. The struggle caused them to sink below the surface, and the straining made breathing necessary.

The giant mate swam fiercely to regain the surface, dragging his antagonist along with him. He finally got his head clear, and breathed deeply the salt air of the ocean, spitting out a quantity of salt water.

The thin-faced man had swallowed much brine, and he came up weakly. He still struggled, but he was no match for the black diver. In a few minutes Bahama Bill had his hands secured behind him, and then rolling easily over upon his back, he grasped the fellow by the collar, and proceeded to swim with him in the direction of the *Seahorse*, turning his head now and then to keep her whereabouts certain.

He lost her several times in the splash and froth of little seas, which broke again and again over his head, for he swam low and saved his strength, but he knew that Smart would stand by. Soon he made her out coming along smartly right for him, and he suddenly raised himself and called out loudly:

"Get the small boat over—don't yo' try to pick me up from de sloop," he bawled, in his bulllike tones.

Smart understood, and threw the *Seahorse* into the wind, Sam and Heldron heaving the small boat upon the rail, and waiting for her headway to slacken before launching her. Then they dropped her over and sprang aboard.

Somewhere off in the darkness they stopped and pulled the men from the water, but neither Smart nor his passenger could see in just what condition they were rescued. The boat seemed to take a long time over the matter, and when she finally started back the pair on board the *Seahorse* saw only the two men, Sam and Heldron, rowing as they had started out.

As the boat came alongside, the pale-eyed man peered over to see if his partner had been rescued. He still held his weapon in readiness for enforcing his orders, intending to push matters rapidly the moment the men were aboard again.

The first intimation he received of anything wrong was a spurt of fire issuing from the bottom of the small boat, accompanied by a loud explosion.

At the same instant a heavy bullet struck him just below the collar-bone, slewing him around and causing his pistol to fall from his hand. The next instant Smart was upon him, and bore him to the deck.

The men clambered aboard, Bahama Bill leading, and in less than five minutes they had the two worthies triced up in a shipshape and seamanlike manner, lying upon the after-deck.

The giant mate gave a grunt of approval as he glanced at Smart.

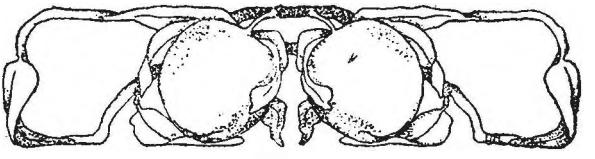
"Yo' suah did de right thing, cap—I reckoned yo' might—but dat was a bad place toe jump a man, out dere in de water; it was dat, fer a fact. Now, yo' Dutchman, yo' Sam, git de grub from de box ob dat invalid, I'm mighty hungry, I kin suah eat a tidbit—then we'll see how long it takes us toe git in behind Floridy Cape. I s'pose yo' wouldn't mind a bite ob dat good grub yo' brought abo'd, hey, perfesser?" he asked, addressing the reclining invalid.

"Don't rub it in, cap'n; don't rub it in," said the thin-faced man from his place upon the planks. "You take my advice and let that box alone. It'll take a stick of dynamite to bust it, being as it is, made of steel under the outside wood cover. It's a very good safe, and strong. Better let that Dutchman get us a few pounds of that salt pig you have aboard, and some boiled corn. I'll risk the indigestion—and let it go at that."

Before daylight they had landed their prisoners and the safe upon the dock at Miami, and Sam had gone up-town to notify the authorities that the marshal was taking a cruise for his health to the Great Bahama Bank.

"If the vessel had been any good," muttered the thin-faced one, as he was led away, "we'd have made good easily enough. She was a bum ship, mighty poor, and that was what caused the trouble."

"I still has a lot ob faith in her," said Bahama Bill.



THE LURE OF THE BALL-FIELD

HERE is a good example of juvenile precocity which comes to us from Philadelphia:

The manager of a Philadelphia manufactory was suddenly called away to New York, leaving negotiations for the sale of a large quantity of merchandise uncompleted.

After his departure the office boy, anxious to witness a big baseball-game, asked the under-manager for a half-day holiday, but was refused.

In the meantime, an offer was received for the merchandise referred to above, which the under-manager did not feel justified in accepting without the authority of his chief, to whom he despatched a telegram, worded:

"Ninety-five dollars offered; shall I accept?"

The boy was deputed to take the message to the nearest telegraph-office, but before handing it over the counter he added a few words to it on his own account, with the result that when it reached New York it read as follows:

"Ninety-five dollars offered; shall I accept, and can William have the afternoon off?"

In due time the under-manager was much amazed to receive the following reply:

"Accept ninety-five dollars, and give William afternoon off."

When all the facts were subsequently revealed, the boy was reprimanded for his audacity, but the manager could not help but inwardly admire his enterprise.

The Fortunes of Geoff

By K. and Hesketh Prichard
Authors of "Don Q.," "Roving Hearts," Etc.

IX.—THE PASS OF THE MEXICAN

(*A Complete Story*)

GEOFFREY HERONHAYE walked out of the posada into the morning. Nothing save the sea could have been bluer than the scene around him, where a hundred peaks rose turquoise color from their jackets of white mist. Below him on one side lay the solitude of swamp and forest, from which he had newly emerged; on the other the republic of Bovador gave promise of more or less South American civilization.

"See, señor," said the innkeeper at his back.

But Geoff did not turn his head; he was wondering if he had not forgotten the taste of civilization.

Now, there are several ways by which the intending traveler may enter the republic of Bovador. Well-appointed ships will, for a consideration, cast him upon her sun-warmed shores; a railway, of which the engines are painted red, will drag him across one of the highest mountain ranges in the world, and land him with every bone in his body jarred at the capital of Santa Marta; or, again, he may reach the republic in a coaster engaged in the fruit-trade. But it was by none of these means of transport that Geoff made his entrance. Three days before the woods and morasses on the farther side of the sierra had disgorged him, gaunt and bearded, together with his small band of Indian carriers, who were restive and scared because they had traveled so far beyond the confines of their accustomed country.

The Indians had said farewell and departed again to their native gloom of forest-land, chanting as they climbed down the windy terraces a tribute of praise to the White Cacique, whose children they were, and whose deeds should be forevermore a song among their tribes.

"The señor sees!" repeated the innkeeper, with a note of finality in his voice. If the Englishman would but look, there could be no need for any further argument.

Geoff turned at this second time of asking. Don Benito waved a dark hand toward a four-wheeled coach, which resembled nothing so much as a bloated, drab-colored insect, and which was evidently a relic of the days when such vehicles formed the sole means of conveyance upon the highways of the republic. Long since they have disappeared from the plains, but they still exist in the remoter districts, where they are likely to remain in use until the millennium.

"Nevertheless, it was built in Spain, señor," added the innkeeper, in reply to the look on Geoff's face, "and it was brought hither by the Conde."

"It will serve," said Geoff shortly. "Let it be ready at dawn."

Don Benito flung out his hand in expostulation. "But impossible! The caballero knows the coach cannot move of itself."

"You have a horse in the stable."

"The coach you can hire, señor, with all my heart; but the horse, ah! that is altogether the tassel of another cap!" said Don Benito, in local idiom.

Geoff faced round and fixed the fellow's shifty eyes. "What is all this talk about?"

The innkeeper dropped his glance, then he hissed a whisper in Geoff's ear: "The road is not safe. I should never see my horse again. There! you have the truth, señor."

"Robbers on the road, eh? Some of the defeated insurgents, I suppose?"

Don Benito shrugged his shoulders. "*Quien sabe?* Who knows? There are many men now without a master."

"Which side of the quarrel did you back, *patrón?*" asked Geoff.

The innkeeper took off his hat to the powers then current. "I am but a poor man; I live at peace with all," he said. "And the government at Santa Marta is always the government—whatever the color of the sash. I say again that the road to Illibarca is not safe."

"It is, however, necessary that I start for Illibarca to-morrow," returned Geoff, unmoved.

"Then you will never arrive there, señor; no, never, if you travel alone! Wait but a little time, excellency. Every fortnight the government sends up a patrol of troopers, and those who desire to journey on these dangerous roads travel in their company. There is a fee to be paid, but what is that to an English caballero?"

Geoff considered. "When will this patrol start?"

"Remain in safety here, excellency, until the day appointed; is not my posada renowned throughout the entire sierra for its many excellencies? What more would you have?" urged Don Benito, with such persuasiveness as pertained to him.

"When is the patrol due to start again?'" repeated Geoff.

"Alas! señor, they left the place only the day before yesterday."

"That settles it. If you do not choose to lend me your horse, I will go down into the village and hire mules."

Don Benito protested against the caballero's stooping to so undignified an office. "I myself will go forth and make inquiries," he said, and paused. "There is indeed Isidoro, who has four good mules. He will himself drive them, moreover. I go, yet the señor will bear me witness that he did not start without a warning—if indeed it still pleases him to start at all?" he waited, expectant, with a grin on his face.

"It does please him," said Geoff, and he stood with his hands in his pockets watching the pointed hat of his host jogging down the hill-path on his errand to the huts below.

"If I were you, señor—you will pardon me for speaking—I should think twice before I traveled to Illibarca alone," said a hesitating voice in the doorway behind him—"with Isidoro."

Geoff moved to one side as an old, gentle-looking priest stepped out.

"I am grateful for your warning, father," he replied. "But what is the precise danger?"

The padre shook his head. "It is Permuza who holds the road," he replied. "What more can I say?"

"I have heard much talk about him within there," said Geoff, "but surely they spoke of him as a captain of the National Guard?"

"It is, indeed, true that he has been a captain of the National Guard; and doubtless, if the saints permit him to live, he will be so again; though just now he gains a living upon the roads."

"But the revolution is over?"

"So it is, señor, and that is why El Capitan Permuza——"

"Has become a highwayman," ended Geoff, with a smile.

"Has taken to the hills, señor," corrected the padre seriously, with the air of a man who states an important difference. "It is, after all, the custom of the country. What would you?"

Geoff's reply sprang ready to his English tongue, but he could not utter it to the kindly old man. "This Captain Permuza appears to be a terrible fellow," was all he said.

"Señor, you jest, yet I pray you to remember that he is a man at bay; and one who lives for his own hand must of necessity be ruthless. He has held up a train single-handed, and to those who prove obstinate he shows, alas! no mercy. Yet there are things in his favor. Before he took to the mountains he was the best man-at-arms in the army of Bovador. He is not a boor, señor, but a personage of education, of purpose, and of settled aims. He is, moreover, brave beyond belief."

Geoff's manner of life had not been of a kind to wear down the original doggedness of his character, and perhaps he possessed rather more than his share of the racial spirit which resents interference with the liberty of the individual. Another motive even stronger hardened his resolve. A letter from Gabrielle van Rooven was due to be awaiting him at Illibarca, and the idea was not to be tolerated that Permuza or any other should forbid him the road by which he meant to travel toward it. He spoke again, but the padre was not deceived by the courtesy of his manner.

"You are yet unconvinced, señor, but, although Captain Permuza seems to carry out most of his plunderings alone, he has many helpers and friends in this region. He is famous for his gallantries—yes, women worship him—and for his cruelties, on account of which the whole province adores him. In a word, he is a true son of the soil; and if he has not the misfortune to be shot by some chance bullet, a fate, señor"—he laid his finger in significant appeal upon Geoff's arm—"which is equally likely to overtake the wisest and the most foolish, the strongest as well as the weakest, I think I may prophesy that he will yet make a name for himself, not only in the mountains, but in the country. It is therefore indispensable that he should obtain command of money in order to be able to seize his opportunities in the future."

"I wonder," said Geoff, after a pause, "if he has collected much so far?"

"Yes, he has done well of late. In a few weeks he will have made his fortune, so it is rumored. There is no better road in the republic for one of his trade. There are, see you, so many mines up in the mountains. They lie deserted at present—it is always so when a political crisis passes over the land—for the managers have fled to Illibarca."

"But, father, he will get little from me, for I possess nothing worth the taking," remarked Geoff.

"These packages, my son?"

"Contain orchids, a property on which your Captain Permuza would find it difficult to realize."

The priest threw up his hands. "In that case he may forget all scruples in his disappointment!"

Geoff lit a cigarette in silence.

The old man scrutinized his face. "Yet he will go," he said to himself, and turned sadly back into the posada.

As the ancient Spanish coach lumbered out from the arch of the small courtyard under the trailing blossoms, Geoffrey Heronhaye was aware of many faces watching him with many expressions. There was the innkeeper, sinister, half-frightened, wholly to be distrusted; above him from between the shutters of a half-closed window two girls peeped and laughed; at another the mild face of the old priest appeared for a moment with concern writ large upon it; by the wayside some natives of the village exchanged a jest, while the cochero, a heavy-browed, surly half-breed, stared rudely into his face. Geoff had not seen such unanimity of solicitude, combined with such diversity of interests, for many years.

To the ordinary traveler life holds few things more weary than a coach journey, but Geoff had so long been dependent upon his own thews and sinews that for the first few hours a sense of contentment stole over him. He was being borne upon his way, and that without effort of his own; the mere fact lulled him to pleasant thoughts. The main reason for these was the anticipation of Gabrielle's letter. Also his expedition had been fairly successful; he had penetrated farther than the others, and he had reaped the benefits which sometimes, but not always, fall

to the pioneer. He had wrung a few treasures from the innermost shrine of nature, as his orchids testified. He had not made his fortune, it is true, but he had gained at least enough to buy another picture from Gabrielle's well-remembered studio in New York.

After the forests through which he had been toiling, it was pure joy to smell the Sierran breezes, to look out across the thirty-mile views. So he patiently endured while the old leather wheezed, and the whole vehicle creaked and jolted along at the mules' leisure, first through the straggling village below the wine-shop, where the harsh-haired, half-breed women thrust their brown faces from the doors to catch a glimpse of *el Inglés,* and later through other clusters of huts, which grew up beside the roads like mushrooms.

It is possible that but for sheer chance, Geoff might have fallen into the trap which was laid for him. Brooding lazily, he scarcely noticed a flaring match thrown by Isidoro on the dust, just short of the patches of wild wheat bordering the wayside. A second, third, and fourth match, dropped in the same manner, roused him; the fifth lit among the dry blades, and Isidoro turned to whip up his mules, that had slackened to a walk, while the flame spread, and soon a spiral of blue smoke was curling up into the bluer sky.

At once the full meaning of the curé's words recurred to Geoff. He was to beware of Isidoro. He sat up, and realized the position. Here was he rolling along at ease in this clumsy, decorated coach, with a scoundrel on the box signaling to another scoundrel —no less a one than the admired Permuza himself—who would presently be discovered waiting at some spot where natural obstacles would place the coach and its occupant at his mercy.

As the ancient wheels swayed up the next hillside between trees, Geoff stepped out upon the white dust. "Hands up, Isidoro!"

"Señor!" snarled the man.

"One, two——"

The two hardened brown hands shot up.

"Get off!"

Isidoro looked down into the gray-green eyes, and understood suddenly that protestations had lost their value. He descended, and stood waiting the next order.

"Now you will answer my questions?"

"Yes, señor." Isidoro felt that here, at last, the game inclined toward him. He would answer the questions, but how could *el Inglés* check the truth of the answers? He licked his lips; he was an expert liar.

"If by any chance I conclude you are not telling me the truth, I shall shoot. So be careful, Señor Cochero."

"I swear by San José!"

"Did you light that smoke as a signal to Captain Permuza?"

The directness of the question and the knowledge it implied disgusted Isidoro, yet—"El Capitan Permuza? I have never even heard of him, señor," he ventured injudiciously. The cold mouth of Geoff's revolver touched his ear. "Yes, señor, yes, it was a signal. He forced me to swear. He was my officer."

"Where did he arrange with you to stop the coach?"

Isidoro was silent for an instant. "Do not shoot, señor," he cried, in desperation. "We arranged nothing. I have not seen el capitan since he tied the manager of the Vesana mine to the tree ten days ago—ten days ago, I swear it, señor."

This seemed probable. "What, then, is the usual place?"

The inexorable cold pressure under his ear had not relaxed. "I know nothing, señor, but there is of a truth a favorable spot by the wooden bridge over the torrent in the Pass of the Mexican."

A few more words and Isidoro handed over his weapons, his hat, and his serape.

"Off with your shoes," ordered Geoff; "throw them into the coach and shut the door. Good. Go!"

"Without my shoes? It is impossi-

ble thus to walk! Have mercy, señor!"

Geoff pointed down the hill, and without a word the half-breed took his way shrinkingly along the roughness of the track. As soon as he was out of sight, Geoff flung the serape round him, looked for a second at the unsavory hat before he rammed it with a vicious push low on his brows. It had to be done, if he was to carry through the adventure forecast in his mind. Then he mounted to the box, and with a truculent imitation of the local curse urged the mules up the incline. The country had grown lonelier since the freshness of morning lost itself in the heats of day, and Geoff almost drowsed as he jolted on the box-seat.

Some study of a wine-stained map that hung in the posada now served him well. He remembered that the road rolled north and east through the lower hills for a considerable distance, debouching at length upon the plains, through the famous gorge known as the Pass of the Mexican. This spot was haunted by the memory of a savage deed. It was here that Guara the Mexican had waylaid a former president of Bovador. The rest of the story is too horrible to tell here. Nor was that the only crime of which the dark rocks had been witnesses. Geoff's notion that this would be the scene of Permuza's attack was strengthened by the fact that his departure from the posada had been timed to bring him to the pass when the sun was already low.

With evening the wind rose behind him; once or twice a red fox crossed the vistas ahead or barked among the crags, for, as the mules padded on, the trail sank between rocky walls until it seemed that the road of blue sky far above had narrowed until it was no broader than the dusty road below, over which the ungainly coach of the long-dead Spanish grandee lurched with grumbling axles. It is not an easy feat to hold the senses at full stretch over a prolonged period, and it must be confessed that Geoff's thoughts occasionally wandered to Gabrielle's expected letter.

Captain Permuza had passed the previous night sleeping beneath a rock, but he ate his midday breakfast comfortably at the log-hewn table of a hill farm. There news was brought to him of the smoke-signal seen on the road to Illibarca. This surprised him, for the mountain mines were deserted, and he had been looking to the northeast and not to the southwest for his next victims. Yet Isidoro was at La Ultima Casa, and Permuza flattered himself that his countryman knew his character too well to risk drawing him away from his dalliance with his host's daughter on an inadequate errand.

He sauntered out with the dark-eyed girl at his side, and gave orders to three of his men to ride ahead to the wooden bridge below the Pass of the Mexican, from the center of which they were to tear away certain planks. After that their usual custom was to disperse for the time being. This fact that Permuza frequently chose to deliver his attacks upon the commerce of the road single-handed throws a strong light upon the man's cast of mind. He was, in truth, as suspicious as he was brave; further, an ambition which he hid deep in his heart dominated his whole outlook upon life. What he did with the money of which he relieved travelers remained a profound secret, a state of affairs which could not have existed had it not been his habit to work alone with such few followers as he owned; thus there could be no awkward auditing of accounts, though he was reputed to be fast becoming a wealthy man.

Yet he was generous enough to the woman he admired, and the catholicity of his tastes in this respect must have levied a heavy toll upon his ingatherings.

On the day of which we write, Permuza allowed himself to be detained long at the farm, for Margarita's jealous heart was wrung by visions of a rival in Illibarca, so that the afternoon was well advanced when he rode down the steep bridle-path which joined the highway at a point hard by the bridge in the Pass of the Mexican. He quick-

ly satisfied himself that his orders had been carried out, and the disturbed dust on the side leading to the town showed him that his man had gone away in the usual manner.

He at once took shelter in a convenient thicket of dwarf trees from which the curve of the road was visible, and stood leaning against his saddle and meditating matters that, in truth, lay nearer to his heart than Margarita of the farm or any of her possible supplanters. The champion man-at-arms of Bovador was not tall, but his chest, round as a barrel, gave promise of immense strength. His eyes were clear and black, the eyes of the Latin fencers, which have more than held their own with the grays and blues of the north. His short, pointed beard was silhouetted against his big corded brown throat.

The brief dusk was already falling when Permuza's sense of hearing heralded the coming of the coach. There it turned the curve, jolting from rut to rut. On the box was the figure he had expected to see, and, as the mules' hoofs struck upon the bridge, he called out his habitual formula demanding surrender.

The driver pulled the mules back upon their haunches, as Permuza sprang, revolver in hand, to the coach door. For a second his eyes saw but dimly into the dark interior, and in that second he was aware of a hard voice delivering an ultimatum. He looked up. The driver had sprawled across the top of the coach, and Permuza found himself staring at the long, slender barrel of a rifle.

He raised his arms at the word. "You have the advantage of me, señor," he remarked quietly.

"I think I have," said Geoff.

There was a moment of silence, then Permuza forced a laugh. "What next?"

"Turn your back," said Geoff, and, leaping down, he took the other man's weapons and flung them over into the bed of the torrent below. "Now replace those planks which your zeal has torn from the bridge."

Permuza obeyed.

"Mount the off-mule in front of me; we can talk as we go along," went on Geoff. "As it is growing dark, I fear I must make sure against your escaping, and your intelligence will tell you, captain, that should any of your accomplices be on the road between here and Illibarca their firing on us will be rather less to your interest than to mine."

A quarter of an hour passed in silence. Permuza, jogging ahead, was the first to speak.

"May I ask what you have done with Isidoro?"

"He is far behind, but his shoes are in the coach."

"I congratulate you, señor."

"Thanks!"

"And your intentions with regard to me?"

"I understand that there is a post of troopers at Illibarca."

"And you mean to give me up to them?"

"What else can a bandit expect?"

Permuza half-turned in his excitement. "Señor," he cried, "it is clear that you have not been very long in Bovador, or you would save yourself such a mistake. Permit me to inform you that I belong to the Army of the Republic."

"To the insurgent army," corrected Geoff politely.

"For the moment, yes, but to-morrow or next day——"

"I do not anticipate that our business will outlast to-day."

Another and far more prolonged silence followed. At length Geoff drew up, and, slipping a knot or two, he made Permuza unloose the mules and tie up his horse at the roadside.

The hill above them was covered with a thick growth of trees, but by the starlight Geoff discovered a little track that wound into the wood. After some twenty minutes of walking he came to a little natural clearing, where, choosing the biggest tree-trunk, he secured Permuza to it in a manner which won that gentleman's silent respect.

"Señor," Permuza burst out, "are you resolved to give me up?"

"An hour ago you meant to rob me."

"But not to kill you," cried the other; "and I tell you if you deliver me up into the hands of the government post at Illibarca, I shall be taken and shot forthwith against the wall of the guard-house. Not because I am a bandit, señor, but because I am a patriot!"

"I understand that you have been an —ah—patriot on this road for six months?"

"I am still a belligerent, that is all."

"And as the result, you have become a rich man," continued Geoff in the same tone.

"I have been able to live. . . . Señor, I should have made you buy your liberty from me; let me now buy mine from you."

Geoff laughed; a whimsical notion of making this very demand had struck him at the outset of the adventure; the humor of it gained upon him now.

"How can you pay me?" he asked.

"I have notes for a large sum about me."

Geoff grinned in the dark as he plunged his hand into Permuza's pocket and found a bulky envelope. "I am a novice at this game," he observed modestly, "but it strikes me that I should confiscate this, anyhow."

He lit a match and glanced hastily through the roll of notes, which represented a good amount. As he was replacing them in the envelope, something in the feel of the paper made his heart jump. Another match flared. Sure enough upon it he read his own name in the upright, clear handwriting of Gabrielle van Rooven.

"You have robbed the mail?" he said, in an odd voice.

"But certainly—as a belligerent," replied Permuza, with dignity.

"What about the letters?"

"I retained everything of value, as you see; the rest I destroyed."

Geoff leaped to his feet, in a fury of disappointment. "Come," he cried, "the sooner we get to Illibarca the better."

"*Bueno!* they will shoot me!"

"I hope they may."

"But I have never done you any harm," expostulated Permuza.

"There is no man in America who has done me as much!"

"How, how? I have never beheld you until to-day!"

"You have robbed me of a letter of far greater value than your miserable life. Come, there is no time to spare!"

"But I will give you a large sum. . . . I will pay for my indiscretion . . . for the involuntary injury which I have done you."

Geoff stopped short in his angry wrenching at the knots which tied Permuza. There was something in this. He should pay, yes, heavily for what he had done.

"How shall I get this payment that you speak of? When the money is in my hand I will come back and set you free. I suppose you have lodged your hoard in a bank?"

Permuza breathed deeply. It cost him a struggle to part with so much as a cent of his newly gotten wealth. "I have never entrusted my gatherings to a bank," he said, "for if my identity were discovered, the government would possess themselves of the whole; this vile government which aims at ruining the country for their own purposes. They are the true foes of Bovador. No, I have hiding-places which are far more safe."

Another five minutes, and Geoff, equipped with the necessary knowledge, prepared to start.

"You will return to release me?" exclaimed Permuza. "Swear you will return!"

"I have said it," answered Geoff coldly, as he made a last examination of the bonds of his prisoner.

Then leaving the clearing, he began to stride along the track toward the road. His ill humor was evaporating, and the whimsicality of the situation struck him afresh, with that silent, inward amusement which is more moving than laughter. Within the hour, by rather devious ways, perhaps, he would be possessed of means to practically empty the studio at New York,

even though his last advices from his agent brought him the good news that the demand for Miss Van Rooven's work was increasing enormously, and that the prices had doubled, since it had got about among the picture-dealers that persons in widely different parts of the continent had been persistently buying up her paintings for a couple of years past.

An unexpected sound from the road ahead broke up his thoughts. He halted in surprise, for it strangely resembled the banging of the coach door. He ran softly on until a sudden gleam of light caused him to slip into the shadow of the undergrowth.

Some one had lighted the coach-lamp, and was moving about with it, hurriedly, as if in fierce search. The rapid footsteps came nearer and nearer, and before Geoff could reach the spot where Permuza's horse had been made fast, the wavering light fell full upon the animal. The dark figure rushed forward with an inarticulate cry, and began to fumble at the saddle.

Geoff groaned. Here was a development! It was a woman, and he had had his troubles before now in dealing with women.

"It is Pedro's horse!" exclaimed the girl. As she held the lamp high to the saddle-bags, she showed a wild young face, crowned by a glorious tangle of black hair. "The accursed Faquita came in the coach! I see it all. Ah, Dios! the perfidious one! Pedro, Pedro! And only to-day you swore to me——" She thrust her head against the horse's shoulder, and sobbed tempestuously.

Geoff stood fascinated. He guessed this was that Margarita of whom there had been much talk at the posada.

The girl snatched herself upright and shook her clenched hand in the air whispering maledictions, too suffocated by her emotions to speak them aloud.

"I will find them! I will kill her—kill her!" she repeated to herself as she picked up the path through the trees into the wood. Stumbling and running, she followed it with Geoff at her heels.

"Pedro!" she called suddenly, as if she could no longer stifle her rage.

A thumping and beating among the dry leaves answered her. She stopped short, crouching to listen. The thumping was repeated, and in another moment she was clinging to Permuza with hysterical caresses.

Geoff saw there was nothing for it but haste. He could not struggle with the girl, and, unless he prevented her by force, he was well aware that she would release Permuza. So he ran back to the road and stampeded the mules in a frantic gallop down the hillside, where they were soon lost in the gloom; then, throwing himself upon the bandit's horse, he spurred toward Illibarca.

Geoff rode fast. As he gained the more level ground he began to distinguish something of the ravages of the last revolution. Many of the estancias were either burned or deserted. It was, in fact, in one of the latter that Permuza had made his principal cache.

It may have been after two hours of riding that a young moon, rising out of the east, showed Geoff the humped walls upon a mound which Permuza had described to him. He dismounted and led his horse over the broken ground. He had taken the precaution to bring with him one of the lamps of the coach, but fortunately he had not kindled it, for, as he entered the patio of the deserted house, he was aware of four plush chairs drawn up about a fire, which had been lighted in the dry basin of the central fountain. He paused in surprise, till, with a burst of shouts and laughter, four men came staggering out from the surrounding rooms, their arms piled with furniture, hangings, pictures, which they thrust pell-mell upon the flames.

Meantime, as Geoff stepped back out of the light, his foot struck upon a wooden stair which gave upon the upper gallery that ran round the whole patio. He climbed it cautiously, and, crouching in the shadows, looked through the railing upon the group below.

They were all heavily armed, and

from the mud and dust upon their clothes they must have ridden fast and far, and forded at least one river. From their talk Geoff gathered that they were some of Permuza's people, and that Permuza himself was expected before the night was over.

Geoff realized his own danger, which increased with every moment, and he was gradually bringing himself to acknowledge that it would be well to take the wiser course of vanishing in good time, when one of the men, who wore the remnants of a uniform, spoke sharply:

"Silence, he will come soon. Gervasio, it is time for you to go."

The youngest of the men rose and disappeared in the shadows of the patio.

"I hear, Faquita——" began a squat fellow, and broke off.

A woman's laugh echoed round the walls, there was a soft tread of feet, a murmur of voices, and Permuza appeared at the entrance with his arm round a girl's waist.

The men at the fire rose sullenly as their leader surveyed them. Then the girl flung her arms round Permuza's neck, while Gervasio, from behind, smothered his head in a serape. Instantly the other three men sprang upon him, he was torn from his feet, and dashed upon the ground. Geoff had the sensation of being the spectator of a melodrama, and almost before he realized what had happened, Permuza was lying bound and helpless, the firelight gleaming in his dark eyes.

"So you have betrayed me, Faquita?"

"Yes, because you have betrayed me. Do I not see the kisses of your mountain girl upon your cheek? There and there!" Faquita's dagger followed her words, and two drops of blood sprang out upon Permuza's face.

"Yet I loved you, Faquita."

"Pah!" interrupted the man in the uniform, "he would hoodwink you again; he has been with Margarita this day. Go!"

The girl shrieked as they thrust her out, barricading the entrance against her. Then each man returned to his plush chair and sat up, looking conscious. Permuza was bound and helpless, but Geoff perceived that the grip of his personality was upon them still.

"What explanation have you to give of this insolence, Garcia?" said Permuza haughtily.

"I'll tell you, Señor Capitan," replied the man in uniform with an air of bravado. "We have all taken risks together, but you have secreted most of the plunder that should have been divided equally among us all."

"This becomes interesting. What more . . . you dogs?"

Garcia's scowl grew darker. "You must at once restore the money so that we may make a fair division of it."

"And after?"

"We shall let you go free."

"I will consider the matter. Keep silence! . . . By the way, did you imagine I had a cache in this estancia?" Permuza added, after a pause.

"We know it. Faquita——"

"Enough. How long have you been here?"

"For four hours," replied Gervasio.

"Good. You will instantly unloose these ropes. I am unarmed. Two of you can remain to guard me, and to the other two I will tell the secret of the hiding-place." He laughed a little, and Geoff guessed he was thinking of him. "You had better find it quickly!"

The men argued among themselves while Permuza lay listening with his scornful smile.

"We agree," said Garcia at last, with a bad grace.

"I think you are wise to agree," returned Permuza, and, while they cut the ropes from his hands, he asked: "And you, Garcia, will, I suppose, be elected leader of the guerrillas in my place?"

"No!" exclaimed the man angrily. "I am for the government now, and with part of the money we are to buy our pardons."

"From Colonel Voruba?"

"Yes."

Permuza raised himself on his elbow.

"You traitors! You cursed hounds! You, at least, Gervasio, cannot join in this vileness?"

But Gervasio turned his face away. Then from that squalid floor Permuza spoke like a man inspired. Geoff had heard much of the patriotism common to the Central and South American republics, and report had told him that it always found its root in self-seeking. But he came to think this was not altogether the truth as he listened, for Permuza told them of his dreams of Bovador, of a young nation struggling to be free, to rise to an honored place among the peoples of the earth, and who would yet be free, in spite of those who were tightening the chains upon her limbs.

In a flash Geoff realized that this patriot-bandit was absolutely sincere, and that what he (Geoff) had taken for mere verbiage, was the statement of innate hopes. Later Geoff came to know that the republics do breed such men, one in a hundred thousand, and that by such men they may be saved, even as Mexico had been saved. But the fellows about the fire stared at Permuza first with surprise, then with impatience.

"No more!" ordered Garcia. "Show us where the money is hidden and you will be free."

"The money? It shall never come into your hands."

"But you have sworn it in order to save yourself!" cried Gervasio.

"Yes, I swore it, in order to save a life which I believed might be of some value to Bovador, and while I believed you were still true to her interests. But now that I know your design, no! That treasure shall never serve the enemies of my country. I will never tell where it is hidden."

"We give you ten minutes to decide," said Garcia. "Make up the fire, Gervasio," he added significantly.

Without a word their prisoner lay back. Minute followed minute. Geoff's rifle was ready.

"For the last time, captain, will you tell us where the treasure is?"

Permuza made no reply. Garcia seized him by the arm. "On with him!"

Gervasio bent down. "You will get nothing more from el capitan," he said.

"Why, you fool?"

"Because the dead cannot talk."

"Dead?"

"I warned you, Garcia. He has been too clever for you!" said the young man. "See, the stone of his ring is turned; that is where he found death. I told you no good would come of this; he was a hard man to cross."

"You were wrong," sneered Garcia. "We shall buy our pardons, after all"—he pointed to Permuza's body. "Even that is worth six hundred dollars."

Ten minutes later the men had departed carrying that in exchange for which they would receive the blood-money. By the light of the fire they had left burning, Geoff discovered the place in which Permuza had hidden his hoard. Soon he, too, was on the road to Illibarca.

Who told the story of Permuza's death Geoff never knew, but it happened that a year later he chanced to be in Santa Marta, and there he saw a marble statue which had been erected by order of the new government "to the glorious memory of a patriot and a hero." Below ran the legend:

PEDRO PERMUZA.

Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori.

As it chanced, just as he passed it Geoff became aware of a man who was gazing up at the statue with a sorrowful expression. Moved by involuntary interest, Geoff inquired of the man whether he had been a friend of the dead patriot.

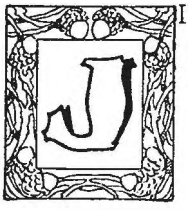
"Oh, no, señor," said the man. "Only the minister who raised the subscription to erect this statue has just fled to Europe with the money. I designed it, and now I shall never be paid, never!"

The sculptor was a surprised man when, a few mornings later, a roll of bills amounting to the price of his work came to him through the post. Truly South American life has its ironies.

Out of the Depths

By William Ferguson

How a Westerner with a more profound knowledge of broncos than of motor-boats took a trip in a high-speed twenty-footer and ran into a brisk northeaster and an equally brisk love affair. Incidentally he has a demonstration of how love mixes up a man's philosophy, but he makes the best of a bad situation and gives Cupid a helping hand.



IM BLAGDON, punctual as death, met me at the station. Of course, it was Brooks who had faithfully promised to be on hand, but, as usual, his memory was as indifferent as his tobacco.

"Brooks is working awfully hard," offered Jim ingenuously. "It's going to be a big success. Academy of Fine Arts, I believe. Portraits, you know, are his strong suit." There was a sublime enthusiasm in his voice, but his eyes were shifty. Loyalty sometimes goes to a point where sincerity cannot follow.

Brooks had messed with Art—the real capital "A" kind—until he had a few gray hairs in his mop of black and his friends had either turned enemies, indifferent, or hypocritical. Only Jim Blagdon had remained bulwarked with faith. Or perhaps it was liking.

"And who is he painting now?" I asked, as I followed Jim's big feet through the twisting trail of the pine woods.

"Don't know," he flung back over a brown, jutting shoulder. His coat was over his arm, and I had a refined view of very long legs and an apologetic little swimming-shirt. Blagdon was built for trouble.

"It's a girl, of course," I hazarded, trying to keep the wheeze of approaching exhaustion from my voice. I'm more accustomed to a horse's legs than my own.

"Why of course?" he asked lazily, increasing his stride.

"Oh, well, you know, Jim, it's always girls."

Jim turned and faced me on the bank of five-fingered Coosac.

"I don't quite like your tone, Fosdick," he said deliberately. "You don't understand the artistic temperament. Brooks isn't like you or me. The feminine type being the most refined is necessarily more appealing to the true artistic——"

"Oh, cut it, Jim. You've chummed with Brooks so long that he has rubbed that messy stuff all over you. Artistic temperament be hanged! Brooks was a human like you or me before being artistic—only more so."

"That's my new boat. How do you like her?" asked Jim bluntly. He changes an inharmonious subject with all the finesse the Mississippi might use in changing her course. And there would be just as much use in trying to stop it.

"It's very pretty," I ventured, accepting the new subject. "I like the way she stands—er—that is, the jib——"

"Oh, shut up, you old fraud," he cut in good-humoredly. "You know as much about a boat as I do about art. She isn't a bit pretty, for pretty things don't wear well—I mean only as regards boats, of course."

"And women," I added.

He ignored this. "She's a black, ugly little beast," he ran on, "but she's the fastest thing in New Jersey; bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. My brains and hands are in her. I've entered her for the motor-boat races in September."

The motor-boat—she *was* a black, ugly little beast—lay snuggling her sappy little nose against the crescent-shaped Blagdon wharf. Jim, after three years at Princeton, came back to his home town and entered into all sorts of schemes for the promotion of money. The town is a bit of a high-class summer-resort, and, besides boat-building, Blagdon rents canoes and runs launches to the big hotel up at the head of Coosac Lake. Sometimes when the notion grips him he turns life-saver, and I've seen him do half a mile in a heavy surf in the time it would take me to do a two-twenty on a pinto. He's all there with the strong-arm business.

Now he stood looking down from his great height at the unlovely little product of brain and hand much as a mother might regard her first offspring. "Yes, she looks pretty good to me," he murmured with pardonable pride.

"And so her name's May?" said I, squinting at her nose. "And who's May, eh?"

The red began to show under the tan on Jim's cheek-bones.

"Oh, just somebody," he said vaguely, and he stooped to untie the painter —or whatever you call the thing that looks like a bronc's lariat.

"Um-m," said I. "Just somebody. I see. Well, I congratulate you with all my heart, and, remember, I'm godfather——"

"Eh?" and he looked up sharply. "Say, Texas has made you kind of jump at things, hasn't it?"

"Got to. If you don't, they'll jump you. And so you're in love——"

"Texas must be a hot place," he commented conversationally. "Here, jump in. . . . No, don't straddle her, as if you were on a horse. . . . That's it. Now, tell me what you've been doing in the last two years. You only write one measly letter a year."

And, as he had the conversational helm, I had to loose off a lot of family history with a little cow-punching on the side while Jim opened up the dinky little boat and we shot up the great splash of water like a rattler striking for blood.

I've hit many trails in my time, always with something living between my knees, but now I felt all to the queer, shivery, and shaky, as that little bum-boat threw space behind her like a comet, the wind meeting our faces like the slap of a mule, and the water tearing its way over our galley poop-deck —or whatever you call the roofed-over snout of the boat.

And all the time the engine was sobbing and panting fit to break its mother's heart, and the saddle I was trying to stick to was full of spasms and vibrations. And there sat Jim, wide-eyed, indifferent, like a modern Viking, controlling the wild, pesky little thing by the wink of an eye. And maybe we didn't go some!

"Say, is this runaway going to keep up much longer?" I bellowed against the tempest of our speed. "I pretty near swallowed my teeth at that last spurt."

"Only twenty-five an hour," sang Jim cheerfully. "We're only crawling."

"Well, let us crawl," said I. "I never was in a hurry, anyway."

"It's five miles to the shack," he replied. "Shall I let her out?"

"Yes, but let me out first," said I. "My dinner's way up behind my ear, and I'm afraid to give it any more encouragement."

"Oh," said he, and he did something to *May* and she quieted down a bit, and I got a look round at the scenery, which had stopped whirling past. There was a lot of canoes sprinkled about with Rah-Rah boys and flippy-looking girls, and there were all sorts of cozy-corner coves, and a homing sun made everything rosy and optimistic. It sure did look right pretty in a sort of pink-tea way. Jim reared right up when I mentioned this.

"Wait till you get a northeaster from the Atlantic," he sniffed. "You'll get

all the action you want. I've seen a big-ton ship come driving right over both bars plumb up onto the board-walk. It's the worst coast I know. There's no rocks, but there's no harbor from the time you leave New York until you get to Delaware. The railroad-bridge splits the lake in half," he explained conversationally. "This is the upper half, where it branches out in five directions. Below the bridge it runs east for about two miles. The flume is——"

"The what?" said I, giving *May* a pat so that she wouldn't run away again.

"The flume—a sort of sluice," he explained, bowing to a bunch of roses in a passing canoe. "Twice a year it's raised, and then the Atlantic changes the water in Coosac. You can go sailing right down into the ocean——"

"And into hell," said I. "I wouldn't care to face the Atlantic, if it was fussy, in this pen-wiper."

"You're not likely to experience it," he laughed. "That form of suicide isn't in vogue down here."

Another moment and we had come in sight of Coosac's five fingers.

"The shack's on the third one," offered Blagdon, "that big pile on the second is the Como House. If you go in for pumps and silk socks you can drift over there for the dances."

"I forgot them, and I didn't bring my valet," said I, eying my solitary dress-suit case. "Camping out is camping out, and it can't be too campy for yours hungrily."

"The menu is primitive," he laughed, "but filling at the price. Each man takes a hand at the gasoline-stove and the soap and water. The shack is certainly not a beauty."

And it certainly was not. It looked like a pumping-station down Beaumont way. Jim tied *May* to her hitching-post, and we essayed a sort of Jacob's ladder. The shack was on a twenty-foot bank. That was the only lofty thing about it. Of course both Brooks' and Blagdon's folks owned houses in the town, but Jim had rigged up this affair as a studio for our artistic ex-classmate, and as Brooks' folks had rather soured on his chronic moneyless tussle with the big "A," he was glad to get out of the family circle when the weather permitted.

The cattle country had rather spoiled me for city life, and when I came east on a vacation I welcomed this opportunity of getting out in the open air with two former chums.

It was a warm afternoon, but the "studio" door was fast locked. I was about to suggest an entry via a window when we heard Brooks' voice.

"Oh, is that you, Jim? Didn't expect you back so soon. . . . Why, hello, Billy! Glad to hear that voice of yours again. Welcome to our palatial mansion. How is it with the boy? I'll let you in in a minute."

But it was a good five minutes before the door swung and I had Brooks by the hand.

"I've been just fixing up a bit after the model," he explained, taking a brush from behind his ear.

"I hear it's a portrait," I ventured. "How's it coming along?"

"Great," he said effusively. "Keen as life; keen, keen. Sargent has the same effect that I have. . . . No, I'm sorry, but I can't let you see it."

"It's a blooming mystery," put in Jim lazily, as he prepared to rustle grub. "Our common inspection, Billy, would pollute it." There was no malice in his voice, and he regarded Brooks affectionately. "We mustn't see either the model or the picture."

"I hate to until it's finished," said Brooks restlessly, rolling a cigarette. "And the girl is shy. I promised that no one should butt in. So, Billy, you'll have to pike off mornings with Jim. The slightest disturbance and the atmosphere——" And he flowed on about tone, color, depth, technique—all the esoteric formulas of art. And through all the brilliant discourse the self-satisfied, personal note ran dominant.

There he sat as I had known him of old, one leg cradled, sucking an old meerschaum pipe, his dreamy eyes aflame with enthusiasm, his face clean-

cut as a knife-blade. It was the old Brooks; lazy in a certain way; working eight, ten hours a day—getting nowhere. The egoism factory was still running at full blast.

Brooks went off to a dance that night at the Como House, and Jim promised to run across for him in the motorboat. Even in my short few hours' stay I had grasped conditions at the shack. It was Blagdon who did all the work. I casually mentioned it that night as we lay smoking on the bank watching the canoes glide past ghostlike on the starlit water.

"And it's not," I finished, "as if you were really helping Brooks. He'll let you do for him as long as you care to. It's his nature. You surely can see that, Jim. I saw when it came his turn to dry the dishes. It was only a little thing, but little things are the footnotes to character. He just ran 'em through water and let the air do the rest. Called it vaporizing 'em—much better than the stereotyped way."

"He works very hard," said Blagdon doggedly, sucking at his pipe. "What's the odds? Anyway, I guess I can handle any little work that's going around. You always forget that Brooks isn't an ordinary man like you and me."

"And I suppose he's out every night," I sniffed, for Jim's complacent simplicity galled me at times. "And you run over for him—wait on him hand and foot."

"A microscope doesn't go with friendship," commented Blagdon, and he changed the subject in his blunt, irrevocable way.

After a while he proposed a spin in the *May* preparatory to calling for Brooks, and we were soon throbbing down dark Coosac. Once or twice we nearly smothered a canoe, for they showed no lights, and *May's* eyes weren't bright.

Suddenly I called out: "There's a light ahead. Stop her, Jim! Stop her!"

Then came two long whistles from somewhere ahead, and with a great whirl and sob we had ranged up near the shore in the shadow of the railroad-bridge on which dangled a lantern.

"This is the Cut," said Blagdon. "The railroad crosses here. That light is always there to lead the way—there's a launch coming through—those whistles were her signals." The words had hardly been born when the big, ghostly white prow of a forty-footer surged through the Cut and went wallowing up, giving us the benefit of her wash and reeking gasoline.

"You see, there are two openings," explained Jim. "One for launches, one for canoes. Launches signal before driving through or else something might happen. It's a failing of mine to take it on the jump."

He gave two long toots, and *May* went kiting oceanward, just missing a couple of shadowy canoes that had ranged up near the south bank.

"That's the *May*," I heard one of the Rah-Rah boys say. "She'll rip her paint off some night trying to take the Cut full blast."

After a lively gambol we headed up for the Como House. It looked like a great, brilliantly lighted pagoda, and was about a quarter of a mile across from the shack. There were a lot of funny little summer-houses sprinkled around, and as we swirled up to the steps I saw a man and a girl emerge from one of them.

"Hello, Brooks! Ready?" called Blagdon. He could see like a bald eagle.

"Hello! Is that you, Jim? Yes, I'm ready." And I fancied there was a curious note in our friend's voice.

The girl had half-withdrawn into the summer-house, but she advanced at Jim's greeting: "Good evening, Miss Strothers."

"Oh, is that you?" she asked needlessly, and came tripping down the steps with Brooks. And I was introduced to Miss May Strothers. She was little, young, fluffy, dainty, with a lot of gold in her hair.

"I understood you were still in the city," said Blagdon pleasantly, in his drawling, lazy voice. "Called over last week for a swim."

"I was just away for a few days." And she showed every pretty tooth in her head. Brooks, hands in pockets, was humming an air from "Rigoletto."

"I'm very glad you're back," said Jim simply, looking up into her eyes. "I suppose we can resume the swimming to-morrow. Eleven o'clock? It's low tide."

"Why," she said, poking a blue kid toe into the steps, "I'm very sorry—I'd love to, really—but I have an engagement."

"Pardon me. Perhaps I'll have better luck next time."

She joined in his laugh. "Let us hope so."

Brooks was brilliantly talkative on our way back, but Jim was rather silent. And so was I. I had discovered the original of *May*—and a few other things.

Next morning, mindful of Brooks' hint, I piked off for a swim while Blagdon went down to the dock to take a whirl out of a new boat he was constructing. Down on the beach I happened to fall in with a life-saver who had been Blagdon's side-chum last season, and from him unconsciously picked up a few more threads in Jim's romance.

"It was along in September last year," he said, speaking of rescues, "and there was one of these big, diked-up northeasters running that happen along in the autumn. You know, you take a header and come up 'way beyond that third post out there. There's no use fighting the undertow or a seapuss. Play mousy and let it carry you out till it gets tired, and then work north or south. Well, a girl lost her nerve and got stuck out there, and, of course, those with her thought she was playing off when she began making eyes the wrong way. She was under for the second time when Blagdon got wise. He didn't wait for the line, but went hands over. Some well-meaning old guy was fussing with her and making things worse—her father, I guess—and he got water-logged, and Jim had to give him the knee—right under the chin, you know—and there was a deuce of a time, and how Jim got the two of 'em into shoal water God knows, for I don't, and the three of 'em were all in when I drove up with the boat. . . . Yes, her name's Strothers, and I guess Jim has it bad—maybe, I don't know."

On the way back, Blagdon picked me up at his wharf, and we came back spinning in the *May*. The model had gone, and Jim rustled the lunch while I went up-stairs to attend to a little sunburn.

As I passed the door of the room Brooks used as a studio, I kicked something white. It was a handkerchief, and mechanically I put it in my pocket, intending to give it to him. As usual he was dreaming with himself while Jim was working the gasoline-stove which was booming like an auto. I went in to lend him a hand.

We had canned tomatoes that day. Funny what little things mean in life. I couldn't force the can, we had no opener, and Blagdon took an old knife, and with his horse-power strength knocked it silly. He cut himself, and I handed him my handkerchief, as I thought. I saw his nose wrinkle.

"That's funny," he said, tying it about his finger, "where did the lady who owns this postage-stamp get the perfume?"

I began to smell it—a subtle, haunting odor that made you sort of wish you might have more of it.

"I thought," he continued, "there was only one person who used that perfume——" Then his eyes came from the cambric to mine, and his mouth looked queer. "This is Miss Strothers' handkerchief," he finished quite evenly. "Where did you get it?"

I saw all kinds of things that moment, and that it was up to me to lie—hard.

"I found it in the *May* to-day. I suppose Miss Strothers must have dropped it," said I, and I looked him fair in the eye.

"Oh," he said, and that was all. He folded it up reverently and put it in his pocket.

When Blagdon had gone that afternoon I faced Brooks in his studio.

"I want to know," said I, shutting the door, "what kind of a deal you're going to hand to Jim Blagdon."

He was astonished, ignorant, haughty, but I broke through and nailed him to the carpet of fact.

"I'm neither as simple nor as good as Jim," said I, standing over him, "and I don't have to have my head shoved into a mess before seeing it. You cut it, Brooks, cut it dead, or you'll get broken wide open. You know all right what I mean. It's Miss Strothers. She's only a foolish girl, easily flattered by having her picture painted. But *your* playing time is over. You have her here to pose while she breaks engagements with Blagdon; while she is supposed to be in the city. You fool around painting her, spouting great masters, and making love on the side——"

"Damn you, Fosdick!" he said, white-faced, "keep out of this. It's none of your business——"

"If it was, I'd have blown your lights out long ago. You know that. But you keep on your merry way, and I'll make it my business yet."

He stood there white with passion. He looked very like his Italian mother at that moment.

"You always go off at half-cock. See here, Billy, this is my affair and Jim's. It's fair fight. If Miss Strothers prefers me——"

"I don't feel around in the dark, nor does Blagdon," I kicked in. "Blagdon's stuck by you when it would have tried the stamina of glue. You know what he has done for you. You take it all as your right. I don't care what your intentions are with Miss Strothers, but Jim should know them. He was there first. If Jim knew you prevailed upon her to pose for her picture, unchaperoned——"

"Oh, so you'll tell him?" he sneered.

"No, I won't. I can't. You know that. I'm not an old woman. But you're trading on Jim's good nature, friendship. You think him a stupid, big lump. Well, you keep on and you'll wake up with it raining all over you, and don't come to me for an umbrella. And while I'm here Miss Strothers' visits cease, understand? Jim can take care of affairs to his face, I'll take care of them behind his back as long as I can."

He eyed me narrowly for a long moment, playing with a palette-knife. "If I told you Miss Strothers loved me—me alone," he said slowly, "what would you say?"

"I'd say you were a liar."

"Take care, take care," he whispered, and his fine Italian passion had him. "I say I love Miss Strothers, and all hell and earth can't separate us. As you say, I have played enough. Now I love, I love——"

"Yes, you love yourself," said I, "and you don't love a fair squeal."

Now he was greatly quiet, but his eyes burned. "You are out of this," he said, aiming a finger at me. "Out of it, understand? You have forced my hand in your brutally coarse way. I wished first to make a name for myself—for her—yes, for her, but now—I will tell Jim that I love Miss Strothers when he comes back."

"Now you're singing," said I heartily. "That's the music. Maybe a man can't help falling in love with his chum's girl, but let 'em have it out fair and square in the lime-light. Let bygones be bygones. I won't say a word of this—of what's happened—and there's my hand on it. I guess love does mix up one's philosophy a bit."

Brooks gave me his hand, and I thought we were all fixed for a new, square deal.

What Brooks said to Jim I don't know. I wasn't there, but Blagdon looked as if he had been struck by lightning. He opened up a bit that night when Brooks was at the Como House.

"It's funny," he said, apropos of nothing, "what a fool a man can be without half-trying. You go on dreaming up in a cloud and then one day—bing!" He smoked hard; half-cynically fingering over his shoddy little romance. "I was in love with a girl"—

he laughed, not a very pleasant laugh —"and all the time I was blind to the fact that Brooks loved her and she him. Pardon personalities, but sometimes you have to talk to some one." He passed a weary hand over his face.

"Jim," said I, "God save you for a fool! You don't mean to say you're going to take his word for it? Get in front of the furnace and thaw out."

"See here, Fosdick," he said gravely, sternly, "I don't buy a girl's love, understand? No, you *don't* understand. *I've* been the fifth wheel all along, not Brooks, and I didn't know it. It seems he knew Miss Strothers in New York. And what have I to offer compared to him? He was generous enough not to warn me off for poaching—that's friendship. But he had to when he saw I was making myself a nuisance to the girl. He proposed last night, and was accepted."

"I don't think you loved her very much, or you wouldn't have renounced so easily," I sniffed.

He turned on me, his eyes blazing through the night. He didn't say a word. He didn't have to. I fell strangely silent. And I wondered vaguely what would happen when Blagdon found out. I had known one or two men of his caliber.

And now a queer, three-cornered affair grew up at the shack. Brooks had wronged Blagdon, and, as is the way of the mean-spirited, hated him; hated and feared. And he hated and feared me. I saw it in his woman's eyes.

Jim had accepted the other's engagement unequivocally, and he tried hard not to show the sting. And Brooks, while hate was in his eyes and heart, stealthily jeered at me. He knew I was tied; I couldn't break man's code. I couldn't tell Jim. And, privately, I thought him well rid of the girl.

And yet, neither could I sit around sucking my thumb while Jim got the knife and bled inwardly without a whimper. And so one day I went over and tackled Miss May Strothers. We had it out in a canoe. I came prepared to dislike her, but I couldn't.

"You take a great deal upon yourself, Mr. Fosdick, for an hour's acquaintance," she said, white-faced.

"I've known Blagdon fifteen years," said I. "He's the kind that needs some one to speak and see for him, but he can—feel." I knew enough not to say a word against Brooks, but, piecemeal, I learned that she had not known him in the city; that he had proposed last night, but that she had not yet given her answer.

"I will try to be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Fosdick," she said, nervously twisting the rings on her fingers, eyes on the dancing water. "I suppose there is something wofully lacking in me. I am not like other girls. I'm not normal, perhaps. I'm on the fence, and—and I think it would be best to remain there until I can't help falling off. Which side it will be I don't know, but it will be either Mr. Blagdon or Mr. Brooks—no one else. I—I like them both very, very much indeed. I *can't* choose. Please don't think me egotistical"—wrinkling her pretty brows in great distress. "I'm the weak, silly kind that have to have their minds made up for them. If—if Mr. Blagdon carried me off by force—if he cared enough—— Oh, what am I saying? I mean he's so—so cold and indifferent. He never said he cared for me very much, and—and I haven't seen him for three whole days. And Mr. Brooks is so masterful. He makes you do this or that whether you want to or not. And—and I think women like that, don't you?" And she looked up distressfully perplexed with curiously childish eyes.

"I think," said I in conclusion, "that you are not awake yet, Miss Strothers. And I think Blagdon's an ass."

I left in high spirits. Jim was too shy, too much in awe of woman. A little coaching, or the right opportunity, and Miss Strothers would awaken with a vengeance—and for him only. I saw how it was. She liked Brooks for what Blagdon lacked through oversensitiveness. And I will say this for Brooks, he loved the girl with all the ardor of his nature; let that be justification

enough for whatever sins he may have committed. His was the Southern passion, all exclamation points, which glows at white heat; Blagdon's the more temperate Northern love—but the more enduring, sacrificing.

It was not until it was too late that I learned that Brooks knew of my conversation with Miss Strothers. It seems he had seen us together and guessed the rest. If I had but the least hint I could have interpreted that light in his eyes. But all ignorant, I went out to the fishing-banks with Blagdon that afternoon. We were late getting back, a storm whipping slowly up in the east. Waiting my time, I had a chest-to-chest chat with him as we beat over the first bar.

"If you've got any gumption," I said, "you'll take your fighting chance tonight at the Como House, and forget friendship—everything—but love. And don't you come back unless you have put your signature on Miss Strothers for keeps."

"But, hang it all, Fosdick! she's engaged to Brooks," he blared. "I'm not a blackleg."

"You misunderstood Brooks," I lied. "She has not given him his answer yet. It's a fair fight, and I never knew you afraid of one yet."

He was silent, but I saw the fighting blood and something infinitely more surge to his eyes.

"Brooks has had his. It's *your* chance now," I persisted.

"I'll take it," he returned very quietly, and his mouth snapped. "But—but is it fair to Brooks?"

"Oh, the devil, Jim! If he had been as square to you——" I jumped off in time, and he was too preoccupied to notice.

Brooks wasn't at the shack when we got there, and after a hasty supper Jim, very white and determined, set out in the *May* for the Como House.

"I'm in an awful funk," he confessed, with a forced laugh. "Look at my hand tremble." And I marveled on some men's awe of mere woman. The bigger they are the bigger cowards they are.

It was about half-past eight when Blagdon returned. I was reading on a cot. I had one glance at his face as he swung up-stairs without a word. Once I saw somewhat the same expression when a bare inch separated Yale from his goal-line and victory.

When he returned he flung a canvas on the cot and stood over me with clenched hands. "Look at that! Did you know it was going on?" And his eyes were venomous. I glanced at the half-finished portrait of Miss Strothers, and then rose and faced him.

"I did, Jim. Since the day after I came. I stopped it, and tried to warn you without playing the sneak. I've been a fool. Take it out of me now."

He eyed me, chest heaving. Then, very passively, he sat down on the cot. "No, I was the fool," he said slowly, looking at his big hands in an impotent sort of way. "Thank you for your interest. I saw Mrs. Strothers," he added, after a long minute, speaking as one in a dream. "She learned that—that May had been coming here to pose. I know other things. I know the lies. They eloped an hour ago," he added calmly, his mouth working. "She left this note." Mechanically he handed it to me, and mechanically I read it. It was a poor little message, tear-stained, pitifully inadequate.

Jim, dear, good-by. I can't help it. If you had only come to me——

That was all. She had fallen to the masterful force.

"See here," said I, trying to speak calmly. "There's no train out of here until the morning. The nearest place is Belmont——"

"I know, I know," he cut in feverishly. "I was forgetting. There's work to do. Give me a hand, Billy, and I won't forget it. Get your gun. I'll fight for her. Come on, the *May* is waiting."

"The *May?*" I stuttered.

He caught me fiercely by the arm as mechanically I reached under my cot and strapped on my gun-kit. It was like old times to feel her on my thigh.

"It's the sea," he said, shaking me. "The sea, do you understand? It's his only way. He took *Reina Blasco,* the forty-footer, and opened the Flume. He can run up to Belmont along the coast and get the ten-fifteen to the city. Come on, come on!" And in a whirlwind rush he had me aboard the motor-boat before I knew it, and we were running for it down Coosac.

"There's a storm coming," I bellowed, holding on frantically. "We'll be knocked mushy. But I'm game, if you are."

He never replied. On, on we throbbed, panted, plunged, wallowed, and amid the tempest of our speed I tasted the tang of the east wind.

Suddenly Blagdon sang out, anxiety in his voice: "Can you see the light of the Cut? We ought to be there about now——"

Then came the crash. I awoke in two feet of water. In the full flare of a lantern I saw Jim, absorbed, the blood on his face, inspecting the motor-boat.

"What—what exactly happened?" I ventured, as, dizzy, dripping, I scrambled aboard. We were under the shore.

"Why," said Blagdon quite dispassionately, "I suppose Brooks had an idea we might follow, and so he considerately removed the lantern. We drove against the bridge and bank. Lucky thing it wasn't mid-stream. Instinct, I suppose, lead me near the Cut. Lucky thing I timed the distance and shut off a bit. *May* has skinned her nose. That's all." And that was all his comment on this cold-blooded attempt at crippling us—perhaps murder. He was admirably biting in his venom.

He threw over the control-levers, and we took the Cut on the jump. I crawled into a pair of oilskins and crouched down, my eyes a bare two feet above the dancing water. Fascinated, I watched the speed waves curl high over our bow. We made the two miles in four minutes flat—so said Jim, and his shout sounded like a whisper in the enveloping roar.

"We can give the *Blasco* fifteen miles an hour," he snapped. "I'll catch her if I have to swim for it."

I agreed, but I wondered where I would come in. However, I had no time for speculation, retrospection. The crashing action of the present eclipsed all else. Then, somewhere off in the gloom, I heard the soft swish of the breakers, and I knew that the Flume was waiting for us.

"It's flood-tide," sang Jim, "and she's like oil—thank God!"

With a great swirl we shot past the outlet in a smother of spray. A watery moon leered at us as we gamely took the first breaker without a halt. Up, up we went, until I felt like ducking the sky; then down—down until I thought the *May's* heart would break loose.

A heave and a lurch, a great slap of water all over us, the racing of the momentarily freed propeller, and, driving over the first bar, we were streaking it up the dark coast with its galaxy of fringed lights. An Old Dominion Liner stood out off to the east, her double cabins stringing along, like some phantom army of fireflies, down the lines.

The *May* was a twenty-footer, and it was good for us that the sea was showing her unholy calm, the calm that precedes the storm. But *May* showed her mettle that night. Blagdon had put all his sterling merit into her. She had stamina, strength, as well as speed.

"We've got to catch them before *that* reaches us," said Jim, and he swung his head to the horizon.

And with a certain unlovely fascination I watched the ever-encroaching march of the storm king as he marshaled his black army for conflict. I knew vaguely of the perils of a lee shore, and a tyro could have estimated the chances we would have. One of those ten-foot combers that the northeasters brew would snap *May's* backbone to flinders and send us swirling, a tangled mass of death, high up on the sands.

I don't know when it was I first heard the muffled sob of the *Reina Blasco's* engines. Jim said our racket would carry five miles with the wind.

"They're about a mile off," he said

quietly, "and showing no lights. Now they've stopped. Listen! Yes, they've stopped. Here, let me have that gun of yours, Billy."

"No," I said bluntly.

He didn't answer, for a flash of lightning opened up the sky; there came the crash of a bolt striking home. The moon had ducked, but in the fragmentary gleam of the electric force I had seen Jim. He was crouched in the cockpit, one great iron hand on the wheel, the other on the control-levers. The blood on his face had dried in an ugly welt, and his hair was matted. He wore no oilskins, only shirt and trousers. The former was open, and I saw his great, tanned neck and the ugly muscles of his forearms all sweaty and wet. No, he didn't require a gun.

Primitive man was there in all his might. It was a new Jim. The good-humored laziness and indifference had vanished, drowned out. His fight with the sea, man's old, old enemy, had but whetted him, stimulating his other passion. Even his voice had changed. He was the incarnation of a mighty, implacable force that would brook no opposition. He was master. He owned sovereignty of dominion to nothing; to no one. And I humbly accepted the position of a negative quantity. Blagdon would control affairs.

"There she is!" I gasped. The moon looking sickly forth from her swirling bed of cloud, was showing up the dirty white of the forty-footer as she lay wallowing sluggishly in a sea that had swollen amazingly. The wind, too, was getting very ugly. I guessed that we lay about half a mile due south of Belmont. I vaguely saw the pier with its great electric light swinging off into the night.

"Her shaft's smashed," said Jim briefly, and he drove to windward.

"Ahoy, there!" he cried dispassionately. "Throw me a line——"

The answer was a spit of fire, and the whine of a bullet. Then came Brooks' voice. I hardly recognized it.

"Keep off!" he warned. "I'm sorry, Blagdon, but this is my game to the finish. Keep off! I'll drill you next time."

Jim stood up in the full moonlight, hands on hips. "Throw me a line and come aboard," he said evenly. "That northeaster will break you up in a few minutes. We just have time to make a run for it to Belmont. Think of Miss Strothers. This is no time for differences. We can have it out later."

"You go to the devil!" said Brooks. And that was all.

Now the *Blasco* was driving down on the wind and the combers were coming in. Then I felt my gun shoved into my hand, and Jim said: "You can use that better than I can. We're going to board."

We circled round the wallowing launch, and then, Jim working the levers like a fiend, swept up against the wind. The next thing I knew was seeing the great hull of the *Blasco* towering alongside.

"Keep off!" screamed Brooks.

There was a shot, and Blagdon bit off an oath. Then came another flash, and I up with the Colt and loosed off for blood. Everything got hazy, like a nightmare. I remember my hand rubbing the *Blasco's* wet flank and wondering how cold and slimy it felt. Then came a crash, and I was in the water, fighting—fighting. Then I remember looking up and seeing Jim's blazing eyes above me. He was on the *Blasco's* deck and had me by the collar. I was landed with a thud, like a hooked flounder. The *May* had been smashed to kindling under the other's counter.

The storm broke just then. We found the girl half-unconscious and hysterical in the cockpit. She clung to Blagdon like a limpet to a rock. I gave her the oilskins, and Jim wrapped her up. Then I went to look at Brooks. He was unconscious. I had got him in the shoulder, and he was all in. He lay like a ton of dirt. It was ugly work, anyway, all around. Any veneer of civilization had been rubbed to oblivion.

The girl started to let out a few teary cheeps when she came to, and Blagdon turned on her like a puma. If she had any hankering after the masterful force she had it right there a-plenty. He was running things hard, and he let her

know it. And she just curled up there white-faced, her big dark eyes on his, and—worshiped him.

But he had no time for that. The northeaster had us for a pretty little plaything. It was only a question of time when we would strike, but we were driving south as well. I had swallowed about a gallon of water, and wasn't feeling hopeful. Jim threw a tarpaulin over Brooks, and we huddled down in the cockpit.

I asked him what chance we had.

He answered briefly, coolly: "There's a chance that the beach-patrol heard the firing up Belmont way, and saw how it was with us. They would then wire to Hollywood to pick us up as we came down—if we don't strike before then. If they don't show up—well, we'll have to swim for it. We may reach the second bar before going under. The girl snuggled her hand in his.

"Are you afraid?" he asked half-contemptuously.

"No," she said meekly, very gently. "You conquered the sea once before. But I—hate myself. You must despise me. This is all my work——" She glanced toward the huddled thing that had been Brooks.

Just then, with a great heave and horrible tremor, we struck the first bar, and, after a moment's harrowing, furious stress, the *Blasco* righted herself. Then a rocket went hurtling dead ahead, and I knew that the life-savers were getting busy. I'm not particulary pious, but I said something then that may have been a prayer, and the girl gave a great sob and flung herself at Jim—soul, body, everything.

And then a mighty wave lifted us sky-high, and we were in the water fighting like devils. The ocean was pounding the breath from me. I had a vague recollection of seeing Blagdon holding Miss Strothers by the back of the neck, like a puppy. As I went under he flung out an arm like pig iron and caught me under the armpit, while he trod water. After a minute that seemed like an eon of agony that life-boat was upon us. How I got aboard I don't know. Suddenly a great cry rang out: "Jim—Jim—Jim!"

It was Brooks, revived by the shock of the water, clinging to the upturned launch. Again came his terror-stricken voice.

Jim, without a word, slipped a rope under his arms and kicked off his shoes. Some tried to dissuade him, some called him a fool. But I understood, and was silent. And the girl understood. She lifted her white face to his. "Kiss me," she said simply. "And—and good-by, dear."

Then he was over the side in the spume of water. He fought a good fight, a savage fight, and the girl watched him wide-eyed. Again we headed for the sea, the water-logged *Blasco*. Jim had reached Brooks and had tied the rope fast to him, the other submissive, frightened as any child. And in the teeth of the gale we at last succeeded in picking them both out of the sea's maw; out of the Valley of the Shadow. Blagdon was all in, and it was only when we had beached him, battered, scarred, on the floor of the life-saving station, that I found that one of Brooks' bullets had gone clean through his chest and that he must have been spitting blood for the past hour. Men like him are few and far between. It was a mighty victory.

He married Miss Strothers last month—she insisted upon it as soon as he was able to be about, and no man had ever a more faithful, worshipful sweetheart. Brooks is in Paris still messing with the big "A." But it is another Brooks, a different sort of Brooks, and a picture of his is to be on the line at the coming Salon. It's called "Out of the Depths," and it shows a man clinging to a derelict amid a wild northeaster, while another, on a life-boat, dares all—— But I've just unwound the yarn.

The Man Who Was Dead

By Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "In the Cause of Freedom," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

The scenes are laid in Servia at the time of the revolution. An Englishman, Guy Pershore by name, connected with the consulate, has just parted from a beautiful girl, Normia Obrenowitz, in Valjavo woods. But a minute later he hears her cry for help, and finds her struggling in the grasp of two men. In saving her he is wounded by a bullet and rendered unconscious. Recovering, he finds that he is in the house of Stephanie, Baroness Dolgoroff, who loves him, but for whom he has no regard. Of Normia he can hear nothing; but later she sends him a letter stating that she is leaving Belgrade, and they can never meet again. This letter he shows to his chief, only to learn that Normia claims to be a princess, and is a dangerous woman. It is known in Servia that there is a plot to overthrow the Government, and that at its head is Prince Lepova, who aims at the throne by marrying a princess acceptable to the revolutionary section. Pershore is sent to Vienna to find out what he can. The baroness warns him to leave the city at once, as his life is threatened. One foggy evening, when Pershore goes back to his rooms, he finds his cousin, Geoffrey Pershore, who resembles him closely in features, lying dead in his armchair, evidently murdered in mistake for himself. Geoffrey is one of Prince Lepova's spies, and all the nature of the conspiracy is laid bare by a paper in his pocket. Guy Pershore intends to take this to his chief at once, but is frustrated by three men—Hammerstein, Yuldoff, and Doctor Arnheim—who appear in his room, mistake him for Geoffrey Pershore (known to them as Gerard Provost), and think the dead man is Guy. Doctor Arnheim, however, entertains suspicions, so Guy is taken to the Black House to meet the baroness. At the suggestion of the baroness who tells him that his life is in peril he assumes the identity of Gerard Provost, the revolutionary spy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DREGS OF THE CUP OF DEGRADATION.

AS Prince Lepova led Normia away on his arm, I glanced after him with a very unamiable frown. So far as she was concerned, Guy Pershore might in reality have been as dead as common report stated.

She could never be anything to me, nor I to her. I knew that. I had carefully schooled myself to accept that as a hard, unalterable fact.

But love is love, and hot blood hot blood, and will not be denied. And to see her marched off in this fashion with his air of masterful ownership galled me no less than it would have done had I been once more myself, instead of the pitiful pigeon-carrier and go-between of these conspiracy-mongers.

The mask must have fallen from my face for the while, for suddenly, with a sneering chuckle, a low, deep voice said in my ear:

"A handsome couple, Monsieur Gerard Provost, eh?"

I turned, to find a tall, angular man at my elbow staring at me, his narrow-set, gray-green eyes screwed up, and his long, thin, ugly face wrinkled into a cunning grin.

I returned his stare, and had the greatest difficulty in repressing a start of surprise as I recognized him as a Captain Neschers, of the Servian Army—a man whom I knew to be heart and soul a supporter of his government.

What could such a man be doing here in the center of this Black House conspiracy? A hundred suggestions

This story began in the April issue. The back numbers can be obtained from any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents each.

flashed through my thoughts in the moment of pause before I spoke.

"A cat may look at a king," I said coolly.

"Or a rat at a princess."

"Or an honest man at a rascal."

"One of us may be doing that at this moment," he retorted pointedly.

"You're none so pretty a sight that I wish to detain you," I said, with a shrug.

Instead of taking offense, he laughed, and let out an oath with a sort of tolerant contempt of me.

"They tell me you've picked up some courage during your absence—as well as some other things."

That he had not resented my insult was plain proof that there was something behind his manner, and I resolved to investigate what his last words meant.

"Time to talk about that when the need arises."

"Come out on to the balcony, here. I have something to say to you."

We went out, and he led me to an alcove at the far end, which was almost concealed by palms and shrubs. A very cozy corner indeed.

"We can talk here without being overhead, but keep your voice low. So you've been out of your mind, they tell me! Vosbach says so, and Arnheim believes it. Very convenient at times."

"Have you brought me out here to give me your views on lunacy?"

"No, I haven't—except on your lunacy. I've brought you out to tell you I don't believe in your madness. Others may, but I don't. See?"

"I don't see that I need care what you think. Others may, but I don't. See?" And I mimicked his manner and his phrase.

"In my opinion, it may be a very convenient excuse for forgetting things. That's all. No more. Places and times of unwelcome meetings, possibly. Possibly, also, the whereabouts of sums of money."

This was suggestive enough. Was it possible that he was one of the men of whom Vosbach had spoken? One of the men in the plot to carry off Normia? If so, the affair was vastly more significant than I had believed. I was interested now, indeed.

"Personally, I prefer plain speaking," I said.

"Patience, Monsieur Provost, patience. You shall have that from me, I promise you. Am I right that you *forgot* the meeting with us?"

"What meeting?"

"Exactly," he laughed. "I suppose you are not yet sane enough to remember that? But make an effort—just a little effort." His manner was a blend of banter and threat, and the talk interested me greatly.

"I am afraid my wits are in too great a whirl," I answered lightly.

"I suppose you haven't forgotten that you went to Belgrade?" he asked next. He was beginning to lose his temper.

"Oh, no. That's all clear enough."

"And that you saw Major Raskoff?"

"Well?" I was obliged to him for telling me what I wished to know.

"And that he spoke to you about the princess?"

"A good deal was said about the princess," I agreed.

"And also about the sum to be paid when she was safely in the hands of his friends here?"

"Ye-es," I assented, as if recalling the fact with difficulty.

"And that he gave you a considerable sum to bring to us?"

"Ah! that's just where I begin to get very hazy."

He sat up suddenly, with an oath.

"And that's just where I mean you to be perfectly clear," he cried sternly.

I assumed a good-natured air.

"I'll try. To oblige you. You're such a nice fellow, and have such winning ways that——"

"Enough of that," he broke in angrily. "I'm not Vosbach, to be fooled by you; nor Arnheim, to be frightened by your monkey tricks with a revolver. You're dealing with Jacob Grundelhof, and I don't suppose you've forgotten the lesson I gave you once before."

"Let's see—what was that?" I asked, putting my hand to my head.

This enraged him. He seized my hand, tore it away from my face, and forced me round toward him.

"If you seek to fool me, I'll do worse next time than thrash you."

I affected to be cowed.

"There's no need for force, Grundelhof. What is it you want?"

"That's much better," he said, laughing with great self-satisfaction. "There was a meeting last Thursday night in my rooms to hear your report and receive the money you brought back with you. We meet again to-morrow night. Don't forget it, and don't forget to bring that money. If you come without it, Provost, something ugly will follow; and if you don't come at all—well, you'll regret your failure of memory as long, or as short, as your life lasts. Is that plain speaking enough for you?"

"What time?" I stammered.

"Nine o'clock—the usual time; and the usual address—368 Kammerstrasse. You sha'n't have any excuse for forgetting that, either, for I've told it you *after* your madness." And he chuckled sneeringly as he rose.

"I'm not likely to forget, after this," I muttered, with a shudder. He glanced down at me with another chuckle, and as he was moving off, another man came out and lit a cigarette. "Is that you, Baumstein?" he asked.

"Hello! Cogitating a poem, Grundelhof?" was the reply.

"No. Something more practical. Been curing a man of madness—Gerard Provost. Teaching him how to get back that memory of his."

"Oh! that sort of madness!" laughed Baumstein. "Suppose because the dragoness has taken him up he thinks he can do as he likes, eh?"

"I've told him that if he doesn't remember where that money is and bring it to us to-morrow night, there'll be trouble."

"I think we can find a way between us to lead him back into the paths of sanity and virtue," sneered the other.

"Depends on the value he puts on his skin," said Grundelhof, as they moved away together chuckling, leaving me with the knowledge that they regarded me as both a liar and a thief. If I attended the meeting I should probably be killed; while if I stayed away the probability became a virtual certainty.

A comfortable outlook. It was a good thing that I had made up my mind to face death. But it was not the men's threats that disturbed me so much as the cheap contempt in which they held me. Nothing was too mean and despicable to be set down to my credit. I had the feel of the fellow's grip on my arm still: he had boasted of the thrashing he had given me, and had expected me to cringe at the mention of it. I was a sort of door-mat for others to wipe their feet upon.

I don't know whether men who are the "real thing" in blackguardism feel anything like the hot shame which I felt that night. But if they do, then, poor devils, they must carry their own rack about with them and stretch themselves on it in every moment of leisure.

I could, and would, do something to change the character these men so lightly gave me, and this thought eased the sense of degradation. But if I had been in truth the miserable wretch they believed, I would have jumped there and then from the balcony and broken my neck on the flags below.

These personal feelings outweighed for the time even the significance of the discovery I had made that behind this plot against Normia was the Servian Government. This Captain Nescher was, without doubt, acting for the government, and Normia was in vastly greater peril from it than I had thought.

But for the moment I was so mad with rage that I could think of nothing else. I was sick to death of the part of Gerard Provost, and as my temper cooled I grew profoundly miserable and dejected.

The lights of the great city which spread out in front of me served only to remind me in bitter mockery that in the world they typified I had lost everything. Position, hopes, desires, ambi-

tion, love—all gone; and the very memory of my name would have been tainted by the foulest of crimes but for an elaborately acted lie and fraud.

Here in this false little world of which I was now a lying part, those who believed they knew me could think of nothing too despicable to believe and say of me. And as I sat there, brooding over my troubles in this moody fashion, flushing at one moment in shame and the next in rage, it did not seem possible that there was any lower depth of degradation or bitterness left for me to sound.

Yet there was worse still to come.

One minute crumb of comfort I had; the merest starvation diet, it was true, yet something. I had succeeded in getting that paper to Normia, and I had hoped she would read in the act a desire to help her.

It was evidently a matter of much moment to her. She had sent some message to Belgrade by Provost to which this paper and the money were the reply. It was an easy guess that she had sent an appeal for help, for I held to my belief that she was only taking part in this scheme because of the hold which Stephanie held over her, the "dragoness," as Baumstein had rather happily called her.

Why she had chosen Provost, never having seen him, was something of a puzzle; but I looked for the solution in the fact that Catarina had been at the Black House and had probably persuaded her that he could be trusted. My delivery of the paper might be accepted as a proof that that trust had not been misplaced, and in that case I might be able to persuade her to trust me still further.

For me to be of any assistance in the dangers that threatened her, it was essential that she should trust and come to rely on me. But it would have to be in the hated character of Provost.

Tell her the truth about myself I could not. In the first place I was bound by my pledged word to Stephanie, and that must have held me silent without any other consideration. But there was another and a far stronger consideration. If she cared for me it would be the rankest cowardice to tell her the truth so long as I was unable to clear myself from the charge of murder and while I had resolved to end my life. The result would but be that in a measure she would have to bear a part of the shame and misery which had forced me to that resolve.

No. If I was to win her trust it would have to be as the man Provost, and I must succeed in showing her in my acts that my desire to help her was sincere. My secret must be kept at any cost.

I was deeply absorbed by these thoughts when I became aware that some other people had come out on to the balcony and were standing close to a huge azalea which shielded my seat from observation.

I had no wish to play the eavesdropper, and was about to strike a match to light a cigar, and thus make my presence known, when I recognized Stephanie's voice:

"I will know, Normia, I swear I will. And if you won't tell me, I can force it from him. I saw the whole thing, and I know there was something in the handkerchief. I watched you afterward, and saw you put it away."

Rightly or wrongly, I did not strike the match, and so did not reveal my presence.

"You are mad to think of such a thing, Stephanie. It is only your insane jealousy, and you shame me. Jealousy! And with such a man as Gerard Provost!"

"That was not always your cry!"

"I did not know him then. I declare, on my honor, that nothing would ever make me stoop to such a baseness. Have you ever known me lie?"

"Then what was in the handkerchief?"

"I have told you I will not even answer a question so dishonoring to me."

"I will tell the prince," said Stephanie spitefully.

"If it would but cause him to break this hateful match, I should be glad enough."

"Have a care how you anger and defy me."

"I know," replied Normia desolately, "you can threaten the lives of those who are dearer to me than life or honor even. Through them I am in your power. But even to save them I would not falsely confess to the shame of an intrigue with such a man as Gerard Provost."

I had ears for no more. The contempt and scorn of the last words cut me like a sword-thrust, and I winced and flinched at the pain.

Never before had I fully realized all that Normia was to me. I had set her before all else in the world. It was only for her that I was willing to endure the shame and vileness of my present position. I had no thought but to serve her. And yet almost at the moment when I had been indulging the hope that she might glean enough from the old relations between us to trust me, this scathing, bitter, relentless condemnation had come.

Presently the scrape of feet on the balcony told me that others had come out. I heard Baron Von Epstein's self-satisfied tones and Stephanie's replies, mingled with light laughter, and then the soft frou-frou of silk as they all went in.

After a time I rose. I would take my misery back to the dingy lodgings which were my home. I would . . . but at that moment I saw I was not alone, as I thought.

Standing by the railing in front of the balcony, staring out vaguely over the lights of the great city, was a girl who, judging by her pose of dejection and the deep, deep sigh which escaped her as I approached, was well-nigh as desolate and wretched as I myself.

Then I saw that it was Normia, and I stopped.

The slight start I had given was enough to rouse her, and she looked round at me. Her eyes widened when she saw who I was. Then she drew herself up and shrank away. "Monsieur Provost!" she said, with a mixture of surprise, disdain, and suspicion in her tone.

I bowed, and, moved by a blundering impulse to try to shake her distrust, I replied: "That most miserable of men, princess, who for the sake of the past would give his life to serve you."

She paused a second, and I was fool enough to hope that the sincerity of my offer had impressed her. But I was speedily undeceived.

"How dare you insult me by such a reference? Oh, if I had only known then what you were!" I lowered my head in bitterness at the taunt. "You will be good enough never to address me again, monsieur. The services of such men as you I regard as an insult."

"For God's sake, listen to me!" I cried desperately, as I looked up. "Your own safety——"

But she would not hear me.

"Monsieur!" she protested indignantly, and with a look of disdain, as though I were less than dirt in her eyes, she turned her back on me and swept away into the house.

With a groan of despair I dropped into a seat, feeling that at last indeed I had plumbed the lowest depths of misery and degradation.

CHAPTER X.

NORMIA.

As I left the house about an hour later—as black an hour as any man could pass—Vosbach joined me.

"I have been waiting for you, Provost. I want to speak to you particularly."

"I am in no very amiable mood," I replied.

"I can understand that. Grundelhof told me."

"Has he sent you now to find out what I think of him?"

"No. I shouldn't do that."

"Then, what is it?"

"Will you come to my rooms? We can talk better there."

For an instant I hesitated, suspecting some trap, but finally agreed. "Of course I will, if you wish," I said.

He guessed the reason of my hesitation. "You needn't doubt me, Provost. I sha'n't play you any tricks."

We walked on without speaking, and I saw him glancing at me every now and then in some perplexity.

"You're very quiet," he said.

I understood the cause of his perplexity, and played up to it. "I have had a serious talk with Grundelhof," I said, with a short laugh. He set down the absence of bombast in me to cowardice, of course, and it was not worth while to undeceive him at present.

As I did not know where he lived, I made a mistake when we reached the house. I was passing it, when he said:

"Here we are, man. Where are you going? You don't pretend not to know where I live?"

"No. It wouldn't be much good, would it?" And I laughed as we went in. Then I made another blunder. He closed the door, and I began to mount the stairs.

"Where are you going now?" he called, stopping at a door on the ground floor.

I mumbled some excuse about thinking I was in my own house; and then went on to commit blunder after blunder, until, had he not been thick-headed, he must have discovered the imposture. As it was, he commented on the many differences between me and Provost, and actually referred to Arnheim's suspicion on the night of the murder.

At that I looked very serious, and asked him if he wanted to know the truth.

"It's all true about my having been nearly out of my mind; my memory has gone all to pieces. I didn't know where you lived, I can't remember half the things I ought to know; I—oh, don't let us speak of it—I can't bear it." And, clapping my hands to my head, I groaned and pretended to be overcome.

He seemed to have a streak of good nature in him, and then it came out that I had in some way rendered him a service, and that, being grateful, he wished to warn me not to go to the meeting on the next night.

I affected to be so distraught that I was heedless of what occurred. I was, in fact, playing my "agony of mind" mood for all it was worth to work on his feelings and lull his suspicions. And in the midst of this he told me his reason.

To his intense surprise and consternation, I burst into a loud peal of laughter the moment I heard it.

Grundelhof and his companion were going to play a dirty trick on me, he said, and have the Greek girl Catarina at the meeting and a priest, and force me to marry her. The thought of Stephanie's amazement if I had to tell her that I could not marry her because her followers had already mated me to the amorous Greek, was too much for my gravity.

I am sure that Vosbach took my laughter for the proof of madness. His face showed it, and he was distinctly relieved when I rose and said I must go.

"You're worse than you think, Provost," he said sympathetically.

"Does Catarina know about this little plan?"

"Not yet, I think. He will see her to-morrow. If I were you I should bolt."

"Oh, I don't know. She might make as good a wife as another." And with another laugh, I went away, leaving him in a condition of absolute bewilderment.

I had been so tried that night, and my nerves were so highly strung, that I found intense relief in that laughter. It was, of course, largely hysterical, but it did me good, and I put off the consideration of the serious side of the complication until the morning; and thus succeeded in sleeping well.

One thing I was quite resolved upon. I would go to the meeting at any cost. I must get at Grundelhof's intentions in regard to Normia. And I must devise some means during the day of preventing the Greek from being present. She would inevitably recognize me, and that must be staved off as long as possible.

Time was more urgent now than

ever, indeed. What I had overheard on the previous evening between Stephanie and Normia made clear the nature of the threat which held the latter in fear of Stephanie, and I knew that there was no foundation for it in fact. Get that information to Normia by some means I must; and I turned over a dozen devices in my mind.

Normia's attitude to me had greatly increased the difficulties. I could not blame her for her prejudice against me, but at the same time while she entertained it I could not hope to get her to listen to me. I could not write to her, because I was convinced that Stephanie would be careful to read all the correspondence that entered the Black House. Nor could I gain admission to her apartments. No one was admitted without a written order from either the prince or Stephanie.

It was exasperating to a degree to feel that I had the means of freeing her from the influences that were surely leading her to ruin, and yet could do nothing for lack of the mere opportunity of speaking to her. I was worrying with this problem when the unexpected happened.

Normia herself entered my room.

I sprang to my feet in such intense surprise that I almost forgot my manners as I stared at her. She was very pale, very nervous, and trembled in such agitation that she could scarcely speak at first.

"This visit surprises you, Monsieur Provost," she said hesitatingly.

I pulled myself together and placed a chair for her.

"I scarcely know what to augur from it, princess, after—after your words last night."

She did not sit down, but remained at one end of the table while I stood at the other. She paused, evidently at a loss how to approach the object of her visit.

"Yet you must surely know why I have risked coming to you?" she said.

"If you will only permit me to say what last night——"

"It is about the paper you brought to me," she broke in.

It was to secure my silence to Stephanie, then, I concluded.

"Let me assure you that you may rely absolutely upon my silence," I said.

She started and glanced at me suspiciously.

"Why do you say that?"

"I was on the balcony when Baroness Dolgoroff told you she had seen there was something in the handkerchief."

The color rushed to her face in a crimson flood, her eyes snapped angrily, and her hands clenched. Then, as the color ebbed, she replied, with a curl of the lip:

"I had forgotten. It is, of course, your business to listen."

It was my turn to wince at that, and I felt myself grow hot and cold in turn. But I made no reply. She saw how the words had stung me, but the reason, of course, she could not know.

"I did not wish to anger you, monsieur. Heaven knows I have no such desire at such a crisis!" She sat down then as if overwrought.

"You have not angered me. You have said no more than others believe, and I have lost the right to contradict them, or you. And if your coming here means that you will honor me by allowing me to serve you in any way, nothing else that you can say will count with me."

"You really wish to serve me?" she asked, with unmistakable earnestness.

"I ask no more than that you put me to the proof."

"You can prove it at once, monsieur. Explain the meaning of the paper you brought for me from my friends in Belgrade."

"Explain it," I echoed, in blank amazement.

Her face hardened, and her eyes filled with doubt and fear.

"Yes, monsieur. Explain it and the presence of this money." And she laid it down.

I was dumfounded, and had no reply.

"Whom did you see in Belgrade, monsieur?"

Again I was silent, bitterly cha-

grined, as I felt how this silence must convict me in her eyes.

"You cannot have forgotten that, Monsieur Provost," she said indignantly.

"I am aware that you must believe that," I answered feebly.

She rose. "And this is the proof of your desire to serve me! Heaven pardon you for this falseness! I see that I have risked this visit in vain."

"You must not go like this," I cried hastily, as she turned to the door.

"Monsieur!" she exclaimed, drawing herself to her full height and looking at me with eyes that flashed with anger.

I would have given my life to be able to tell her the truth then, but it was out of question. But go she should not until I had told her about her own danger; so I went to the door and stood between it and her.

"You must listen to me before you go."

"You dare to detain me forcibly."

"For God's sake, can't you see there is something I cannot explain?" I replied passionately. "Just as there is something I must tell you, for your sake."

She shrank away from the look in my eyes.

"Let me go, monsieur."

I paid no heed to her plea.

"Last night I overheard that the hold which the baroness has over you is the fear that she will betray your mother and sister to the Servian Government. I can tell you that you have nothing on that account to fear. The government knows where they are living, and so long as the government and you take no hostile action against them, they are safe."

"Yes, monsieur. Thank you. Now may I go?"

I tossed up my hands with a sigh of despair. Her tone showed me that she did not believe me.

"In Heaven's name, do try to understand that I am not all lies," I cried vehemently. "I know that I seem to you no more than a scoundrelly spy, and I cannot utter a word to undeceive you. But what I have told you is the truth. That I swear to you. And you are taking the actual steps in this fatuous conspiracy which will do the very thing you are risking everything to avoid."

"Yes, monsieur. Thank you. May I go?" she repeated, fear alike in her eyes, voice, and shrinking attitude.

I stepped from the door and threw it open.

"As you will. But Heaven help those who are dear to you if you persist in this terrible mistrust of my warning!"

She was partly reassured by my opening the door, and turned when she reached the threshold.

"How do you know this, monsieur?"

"I cannot tell you that. But it is true—as true as that there is now here, in this city, a scheme on foot to seize you and hand you over to the Servian Government. But, no doubt, you will take that warning as lightly as the other because it comes from Provost, the spy," I said bitterly.

She returned to the table and sat down again, burying her face in her hands.

"If I could only make you believe in my good faith, princess, I could help you."

"Why did you refuse to answer my questions about these?" touching the papers.

"My lips are sealed, or I could explain it all."

"By the woman who has bought you and your silence, and whom you are to marry?"

"No doubt I seem to you to deserve that. You must think of me as you will," I replied, with a sigh. "If you will but heed my warning, I am satisfied."

"What am I to think?" she cried, with a gesture of perplexity.

"If you will be counseled by me you will communicate either with this government or your own, and lay the whole facts before them."

She started in alarm.

"Turn traitor?" she cried quickly. "*You* advise this! And against your—against the baroness? And directly af-

ter you have played me false with these?"

I could have cursed the papers for the effect they had had upon her. I picked up the blank sheet.

"If you judge me by this, and hold everything I say to you false because I cannot explain, you will walk straight to your ruin as surely as you are speaking to me; and will drag others down with you. I swear to you I have no thought but for your good; and if you can find a single grain of the trust you once had in me, try to believe me for the sake of that time."

But this angered her. She rose.

"How dare you, monsieur?"

"I dare, not for my sake, but for yours. Heaven knows I have nothing to gain now except to save you from the fate you are so recklessly bringing on yourself!"

She fixed her eyes on me in a long, steady stare, but at the close tossed up her hands and shook her head.

"In the face of this, no—no—no!"

I had been holding the paper in my hands, and now, as I glanced down at it, I noticed some faint marks. It occurred to me they had been brought out by the warmth of my hands; and as I had had plenty of experience with ciphers and secret inks, I guessed that there was secret writing on this.

It took me only a short time to test this, and I soon perceived that my guess was right.

"There is some secret writing here, princess," I said.

"Why did you not tell me that before?"

"I have but this moment discovered it."

She was greatly excited now, and trembled nervously as she watched the words come out gradually under the means I employed.

"Turn the paper up, that I may read it, monsieur," she said. I was intentionally holding it with the back toward us, so that I should not read the writing.

"It is to you—not to me. Whoever wrote it did not mean me to read it. I do not wish to pry into your secrets."

"If you have not already done so."

I let the taunt pass, and when the writing was sufficiently clear, I gave her the paper. She read it quickly, and turned on me with an angry start.

"As I thought; it is only another proof of your deceit!" she cried, her eyes flashing with rage as she handed it to me:

> We cannot understand your messenger, or why you want money. Why did you not write? We cannot send the amount you ask for, but do send all we can. Do you know that your messenger is not a Frenchman, but a renegade Englishman named Pershore?

I read the message in silence, and with an inward curse at the scurvy trick which fate had played me. It was the hardest blow I had yet endured.

"What message did you give them, monsieur?" Her voice was hard as steel.

I was once again dumfounded, and my eyes fell in confusion.

"Come, monsieur. You must know that. Explain, if you please."

"Unhappily, that is impossible," I said. "Heaven knows what it costs me to have to confess that!"

"Instead of giving my message you asked for money."

"It seems so," I admitted fatuously. I was at the end of my wits, dazed by this most unexpected turn.

"My friends—my mother, for that is her writing, monsieur—would not write what is untrue," she went on relentlessly.

"I do not even suggest that."

"Then how can I believe a word you say? Oh, it is cruel—it is dastardly! By this deceit, in not carrying my message, you have cut from me the one hope I had. Go on with your work, Monsieur Spy! Tell your employer that I sent a message by you to my friends; that I plotted to have a friend sent here; that I tried to escape from her; and that I degraded myself today by coming here to beg you at least to do that for which you had been paid. You deceived me before by masquerading as an honest man whom I would have trusted with my life, and, of

course, you would deceive me now with this treacherous suggestion that I should give myself up to the government. But you have opened my eyes in time."

I took it without flinching. The facts as she knew them warranted every one of the bitter words.

"I have no answer, except to beg that if you can put this aside and give me a further test, you shall have proof of my sincerity."

"You have given me the proof, thank you," she cried bitterly. Then, as if overcome, she fell back in her chair and hid her face in her hands.

I was standing by the window and turned away to stare out into the street, while she recovered self-command. In the pause, infinitely distressing to me, a carriage drew up at the door of the house, and, to my dismay, Prince Lepova alighted and handed out Stephanie. And both entered the house.

At the same moment Normia rose to go.

"One thing you can do, monsieur. I wish this visit to be kept secret."

"It is too late for secrecy, princess. Prince Lepova and Baroness Dolgoroff are just entering the house. The test you would not make has come unsought. I am not the scoundrel you think, and I will prove it now. I beg you to appear composed, and leave it to me to explain the reason for your presence here. Take your stand just there, please."

She was intensely agitated, but did as I wished. I crossed the room and set the door slightly ajar, listening for the footsteps on the stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

MY MARRIAGE FIXED.

Normia appeared to be scarcely more alarmed by the arrival of Stephanie and Prince Lepova than by my actions and sudden assumption of a swaggering manner.

"That letter must not be seen," I whispered hurriedly, as I saw it still in her hands. "Quick—quick!"

She put it away with nervous haste.

There were two or three seconds' pause, and then I heard the rustle of Stephanie's dress on the stairway.

I burst suddenly into a loud, raucous, insolent laugh, and Normia shrank away a step in consternation.

"Well, I trust now, madame, whether princess or no princess, that I have taught you your lesson," I cried in a truculent, bullying tone. "You know now that Gerard Provost will brook no such insult as you gave me."

There was no need to give her a stage direction, to make the necessary show of indignation. She thought I was in earnest, and was referring to what had passed between us. Her face flushed.

"How dare you, monsieur?" she cried.

I laughed again.

"Your anger, madame——" I began, just as the door opened and the two entered. "Ah, Baroness Dolgoroff! Monsieur Le Prince!" And I changed my tone to one of surprise. "You are welcome, indeed. You come in time to bear out what I have just told this lady: That Gerard Provost is not the man to let any one—even princesses—trample him in the dirt."

Prince Lepova's surprise at seeing Normia there was genuine, but Stephanie's was obviously assumed. Her face was eloquent of suspicion and jealousy.

"How dare you address the princess in that way, monsieur?" cried Lepova.

But Stephanie turned on Normia.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked, with an unmistakable threat in her voice.

"As it is my doing, I can best explain. The princess came here at my bidding."

"Monsieur Provost!" burst out the prince furiously.

I turned, and stared at him slowly from head to foot.

"At my bidding, I said, Monsieur Le Prince—mine, Gerard Provost." And I tapped myself arrogantly on the chest.

"At somebody's dictation—yours, perhaps, monsieur, or another's." And I looked meaningly at Stephanie and paused. "The princess was pleased to put an affront on me at the Black House last night. I did myself the honor, therefore, to write and inform her that if she would not come here—here, to this house, to my rooms, Monsieur Le Prince—and make me amends, I would revenge the affront by carrying such information as I possess to those who would be careful not to affront a French gentleman giving valuable information."

"A French gentleman!" sneered Lepova. "Infamous."

I paused and knitted my brows, like the bully I was playing.

"A French gentleman, Monsieur Le Prince, who does not use the presence of women to insult a man."

But Stephanie was not misled.

"Why did not you tell me?" she asked Normia.

"Or me, Normia?" added the prince.

"If you will show them my letter, it will best explain that," I said coolly.

"I have not kept it, monsieur," answered Normia; and to the others: "I was frightened by the threats."

Good! Here was the beginning of an understanding. She had accepted the explanation I had vamped, and trusted me.

I laughed offensively.

"And, by the Cross! I'd have made them good. But my honor is satisfied; you have done what I required; and so far as I am concerned the matter is ended." And I made Normia an elaborate bow. "I intended it as a test, and it has answered its purpose."

A quick flash from her eyes seemed to signal a reply to this equivocal sentence, and at that the situation entirely changed its character for me. The prince believed my story, and with Stephanie I could deal afterward. She would not venture to speak out before Lepova, and as three of us had now secret cross-purposes, the position became divertingly artificial and unreal.

Normia had recovered her spirits the moment it was patent to her that I did not intend to betray the real reason of her presence, and I hoped she would accept this as a proof, despite the black evidence against me in the matter of the Belgrade business, that I was really anxious to serve her.

After her glance at me she looked across at Stephanie, and, with a contemptuous wave of the hand in my direction and a curl of the lip, she said:

"It seems that we are all to take our orders from this new favorite of yours."

This note of open antagonism was quite new, and it delighted me as much as it surprised Stephanie.

"It is true," I declared arrogantly, "that fortune has placed me on the center of the seesaw."

"It may prove a perilous position, monsieur," snapped Stephanie coldly.

But Lepova took everything very seriously.

"You did very wrong to come here, Normia. I will take you home."

"Have we this gentleman's permission?" she asked, in a bitterly scornful tone.

The prince's eyes glittered with suppressed passion.

"Enough of this," he cried.

I crossed to the door and opened it.

"Permit me." And I bowed low to Normia.

"Stay," cried Stephanie, taking a paper from her pocket. "There is still a matter to be discussed. A charge against Monsieur Provost."

"Another!" I said, with a mocking laugh. "Upon my word, I thought the indictment was about full enough. Poor Gerard Provost!"

"One of our adherents—your late serving-maid, Normia, Catarina Machia—demands our aid as the leaders in righting this gentleman's betrayal of her."

The malice of this was as clear as the sun at noontide. She had come to consult with me about this Catarina complication, and, angered by what had just occurred, she was using the letter to blacken me further in Normia's eyes. But I managed to blunt the barb.

"Poor little Greek girl! And does

she propose to force me to marry her, baroness? Is that the justice she seeks?"

And, hugely to my glee, Normia followed this with a thrust on her own account. She drew herself up, and with a nasty little laugh, said:

"I have no wish to listen to the discussion of this gentleman's love-affairs. They concern you more than me, baroness. Your arm, prince, if you please." And with that she swept out, leaving Stephanie pale and furious at her discomfiture.

"That comes of meddling with your future husband's old love matters, Stephanie. If you will marry a blackguard you really must have more tact," I bantered; and throwing myself into a chair I gave way to unrestrained laughter.

I could afford to laugh now, indeed. Normia and I had a secret in common, and an understanding, and all Stephanie's malice had been unable to disturb it.

"Why did Normia come here?" asked Stephanie. She was pacing the room, her face set and angry. She flung the question at me with a searching glance.

"You heard me give the reason."

"I want the truth," she snapped hastily.

I tossed up my hands in affected protest.

"Stephanie! Stephanie! Such rudeness! And before marriage, too! Really! Really!"

I looked for a further outburst, but instead, she grew cool and dangerous. She sat down to the table and drew some writing materials in front of her.

"You do not understand me yet, Guy. You think you can safely deceive me. You cannot. You are bantering me now to hide facts and plans. You will tell me, please, what sort of secret understanding you have with Normia."

It was clear that we were in for a little contest of will-power. I would not shirk it.

"A little plain speaking on both sides will do good," I agreed.

"That is not answering my question."

"I am not going to answer it, Stephanie," I said firmly.

Our eyes met in a long, steady stare.

"You set Normia before me?"

"Leave Normia out of this and settle our own relationship first."

"You set me at defiance, then?"

"I am going to be no mere marionette for you or any one else to pull the strings as you please. I don't dance to any one's orders—man or woman."

"You have counted the cost?"

"Yes. You can do what you will." And again our eyes met fixedly.

She dipped a pen in the ink.

"If you will not answer my question I shall write to the police stating who you are."

I smiled. It was obvious that she dared not do that.

"Threaten something that you dare do," I said. "And when you threaten, remember how much I know."

Her eyes flashed at the word "dare," and, being a woman, the opposition drove her to persist in her mistake. She wrote a letter very deliberately, read it through, and addressed it.

"You are mistaking bluff for strength, Stephanie. Give me that letter if you dare, and I pledge my oath to take it to the police myself."

"You would betray even Normia, then?" she said, rising. She was still white with passion, and her lips quivered.

"Oh, no. Last night I was on the balcony when I heard the nature of the hold you have over Normia, and I know that she has nothing to fear from her government when that fact is known to them."

"Have you told her?"

"Yes." I noticed her hands tighten on the letter, and her brows came together in a frown. After a moment's pause she resumed her seat. "It is more serious than I thought," she said. Her tone was quiet and her passion gone.

"You take the wrong line with me, Stephanie," I told her. "You threaten me because you are angry, and perhaps jealous. I heard that last night. There is no cause. Normia can never be any-

thing to me so long as I am under this terrible charge. I——"

"Have you told her your secret?" she broke in.

"Certainly not. I gave you my word, and I shall keep it; but if I can save her from the ruin that you are plunging her into, I shall. That was no part of our compact."

"Why did she come here?"

"I have no other reason to give than that already given."

"I know that is not true. You could not get a letter to her."

I smiled.

"You forget. You yourself accused her of having received a letter from me last night."

"What was that letter?" she flashed.

"You haye already had her answer that there was nothing of the sort. Try at least to be reasonable. Tear up that foolish letter. We both know that it is no more than a blank-cartridge. If you were in earnest in a threat of that sort you have only to utter a half-dozen words, and my life would not be worth ten minutes' purchase. I know that. I know I am completely in your power in that respect, but not in that way." And I waved my hand toward the letter.

She sat fingering the letter strenuously, and at length looked up and asked:

"Do you care for her, Guy?"

"I'll tell you what you may be glad to hear. Last night, after you had gone in with Von Epstein, I found her alone and very miserable on the balcony. I begged her to let me help her; and her reply was—she regarded it as an insult that I should even speak to her, and forbade me ever to do so again. You have done your part well, so far as making her despise me is concerned."

"But she came here to-day," she retorted quickly.

"Would not you have come had I threatened you to reveal everything?"

"No, that is not the reason," she replied, shaking her head. "You are not the man to use such a threat to any woman. She came to seek your help."

"On my honor, no. Even after I had told her that she had no reason to fear your threats, she denounced me as a spy, and refused to believe a word I said. You have done your work well in that respect, I repeat, even without that last ingenious attempt to blacken me in regard to this Greek girl."

"I was mad with anger. I was jealous, I know. But I love you so."

"That letter!" I said, pointing at it significantly.

She tore it to shreds impulsively. "You don't think I meant it. Do you believe I would send you to your death? Oh, how you wrong me!" she cried, wringing her hands. "And I have risked so much for you." She got up and began to pace the room again in great agitation.

I deemed it best to say nothing. I had got out of giving an explanation much better than I could have hoped, and waited for her next move. It came soon.

After about a minute's pause she stopped in front of me. "I have made up my mind, Guy. After what has happened here to-day, I shall not feel sure of you until I am your wife. You cannot break away from me then."

"Which means?"

"That our betrothal shall be made public at once."

"Why not—except Von Epstein? It will complicate matters with him, won't it?"

"This is more to me than the cause itself. Our marriage shall take place almost at once."

"Normia again?" I smiled.

"Normia again, if you will. But it must be so."

"Very well. Just as you like," I said lightly.

"Oh, don't use that tone to me," she cried, with a very angry gesture.

"If I were to speak seriously and tell you all my thoughts about it, you might like it less," I replied earnestly, adding in the bantering tone: "Do you think we shall make a success of it? However, it's one of the little scenes of the comedy that I leave to you, and probably it will be safer. If I encourage the idea of the speedy marriage, you

will abandon that other idea—the happy despatch business."

"Have you nothing but these jibes for me, Guy?"

"Something sentimental? Certainly. I can turn it on at will. What vintage? Flowery, languishing, sparkling, melancholy? Give your orders."

"Oh, you madden me," she cried, and was hurrying out of the room when I reminded her of the Catarina matter.

"I will deal with her," she said.

"How?"

"Do you think I will not protect you now?"

"Who is the girl?"

"She was Normia's maid companion, but we suspected her of treachery, and she was sent away."

"And Provost's share in the matter?"

"They were lovers. But at need she shall be driven away."

"Well, I hope you won't be jealous of her, too," I laughed.

She made no reply, and in silence we went down to her carriage.

As she settled herself in her seat she leaned forward. "The marriage shall take place this day week, Guy. I cannot wait longer."

"Very well. Any time you please," I answered with a smile, as though it were the best news in the world, and I waved my hand as she drove off.

In truth, it was all the same to me whether she said a week or a year. What I had to do could be done in a week, and then—well, there would be no "then" for me.

I stood a moment gazing after the carriage thoughtfully, and then walked slowly back up the stairs to my rooms. Before I reached them some one came running up after me in great haste.

It was Vosbach.

"Provost! Provost!" he called quickly.

I waited for him by the door of the room.

"What is it?" I asked as he reached me.

He was a little breathless, having run up so quickly.

"Catarina!" he said, in a whisper. He was very excited.

"Well, what about her?"

"She is here—coming up the stairs now."

I listened, and heard some one just below the turn in the stairway.

In another moment she would reach us, and Vosbach would learn the reason why I was so unlike Gerard Provost.

And he could be trusted to spread the news far and wide.

It was about as awkward a situation as I had yet had to face. Discovery seemed inevitable, and how to avoid it baffled me.

CHAPTER XII.

CATARINA.

I stood staring helplesly at Vosbach as I listened to Catarina's approaching footsteps, and it was not until her hat was already showing over the balustrade rail that my wits woke up.

I grabbed Vosbach, pulled him into my room, shut the door, and took him into the bedroom beyond.

"What are you going to do, man?" he asked.

"Have it out with her, but alone. We don't want any witnesses. You'll see that?"

She knocked at the door of the sitting-room as I spoke.

"There she is. You can't get away," he said.

"I'm not going to try. I want you to open the door to her, tell her I'm here, and will see her in a moment. Then take yourself off."

He hung back a second, and laughed sheepishly. "Of course I don't want to be present."

"Go on, like a good fellow. Don't keep her waiting, or she'll get wild."

I pushed him into the room, and he did precisely as I had asked, and I heard her pull a chair forward and sit down. I allowed him time to get out of hearing, and then, without in the least knowing what I was going to do. I went in to her.

"At last, Gerard!" she exclaimed as I entered.

For the instant she was misled by the resemblance coupled with her confident anticipation. But recognition followed directly, and she sprang up and stared at me in profound amazement.

She was exceedingly handsome, even for a Greek. Dark as night, with a rich olive complexion, heavy, straight brows which almost met, and long lashes fringing large eyes, now wide and wonder-filled and flashing with intense feeling.

A glance told me she was no ordinary woman. Every feature spoke of intelligence, resolution, and shrewdness; and in the expression of her liquid eyes and beautiful face, when allowance was made for her present emotion, I read heart and abundant womanly sympathy.

"I am aware that I have caused you a very painful surprise, mademoiselle," I began.

"Who are you, monsieur?"

"I am going to speak with perfect frankness. I shall put my life in your hands in doing so, but you are one to whom the truth must be revealed at any cost. I have that to tell you which, I fear, must give you infinite pain and grief. I beg you to be seated."

"I don't understand," she said. "Where is Monsieur Provost?"

"I am supposed to be Gerard Provost, and only you and one other person in Vienna know I am not. I urge you nerve yourself to hear the worst, mademoiselle."

Her hands clenched, and she bit her lip as I said this.

"I am waiting, monsieur, in dire suspense."

"Gerard Provost is dead, mademoiselle, and I am falsely supposed to have killed him."

"Dead?"

Just a whispered echo of the word followed by a deep, deep breath of acute agony. Her body stiffened, and she sat staring out blankly before her with a face as white and set as marble. The whole pose and manner were eloquent of infinite anguish, and, moved to profound sympathy, I turned away.

Some minutes of intense pain-filled silence followed.

"Tell me, monsieur," she said presently, her voice little more than a whisper.

"Gerard Provost was, as perhaps you know, only an assumed name. He was an Englishman, my cousin. His real name was Geoffrey Pershore; mine is much the same, Guy Pershore."

"You knew, then, that we—that we were betrothed?" Her lips faltered.

"I learned it only after his death. I had not seen him for months, and knew——"

"You were his enemy." The words were as sharp as the glance was keen.

"In any bitter sense, no. We were not friends. That is all."

"How did he die, monsieur? And where?"

"A little more than a week ago, here in Vienna. There was, as you will see, a very striking resemblance between us. I had had a warning that in consequence of certain political affairs I was in danger of assassination. I returned to my rooms one foggy evening, and found him dead in my chair. He had been murdered; and my belief is that the deed was done by those who mistook him for me." And I went on to describe in detail what had occurred. "I can now never free myself from this terrible position until I find the murderer and bring the crime home to him," I said, in conclusion.

It was impossible to judge of the effect of my recital upon her. I spoke in a calm, even tone, striving to make every syllable ring true and absolutely convincing of my sincerity. But not a muscle of her face moved, not a single sign or gesture did she give to show whether she believed me.

The silence was searching. She broke it at length to ask:

"And afterward?"

"It was *my* death which was announced. I was said to have died under an operation. He was buried as Guy Pershore, and I became Gerard Provost."

"And no one discovered the differ-

ence?" Unmistakable suspicion was in her voice.

"It appears he was scarcely known to any one except Andreas Vosbach. I was very ill for a week, and much changed in appearance. The fact of my being Provost was generally accepted, and for these reasons no one has yet detected the change."

Again she was silent for a long pause. This time she lifted her eyes and scanned my face searchingly, but without speaking lapsed again into thought.

"How came Gerard to visit your rooms?" was the next question.

"I did not guess that he even knew my whereabouts in Vienna."

"And the three men who came afterward, do you know them?"

"A Doctor Arnheim, a man named Yuldoff, and the third, Hammerstein."

"I know them." Then after another pause: "You say some one knows who you are?"

"Baroness Dolgoroff."

At this reply, apparently quite unexpected, she looked up quickly, and her eyes flashed with anger.

"And the Princess Normia?"

"She believes me to be Gerard Provost. In my own name I knew her before in Belgrade, but she has been told I was then Provost, playing a part."

"The baroness told her that, I am sure." Her lip curled. "You and the baroness have not played a very honorable part, monsieur," she said slowly.

"Yet I have had a motive that is not wholly dishonorable."

"Tell me."

"At present I cannot. I have spoken with this complete frankness because your relations with my unfortunate cousin made it right that you should know the truth. My motive does not concern that in any way. Let it suffice that, unless I can discover the assassin, the accomplishment of my object will mean the end of things for me."

"Your object has nothing to do with that discovery?"

"Nothing."

"You will kill yourself?"

"But for the object I spoke of I should not be alive to-day."

She fixed her great eyes on me, nodded her head, and her features relaxed into a smile as she said:

"Ah, you love, monsieur. And it is the princess. I, too, love her."

It was more than disconcerting to have my thoughts read, and I could not wholly repress my surprise. "I can say only that my purpose is my own secret."

"Ah, monsieur, you need not be afraid to tell me. I, too, have loved and have sorrowed, and sympathy teaches heart to read heart. You are either one of the vilest men on earth, or one of the most unfortunate. How shall I know which?"

"I have no proof to give you, unless you hold it proof that it is no longer worth my while to lie to you. I have at most but a few days to live; I have put my secret into your hands, and by telling you that I am not Provost, it is in your power to shorten even those few days. In that way my purpose would be thwarted, but for no other reason has death any terrors for me."

"You would not seek this assassin, then, even if the chance came to you?"

"Would a poor devil of a shipwrecked sailor refuse to enter the lifeboat that came to save him? But my case is more hopeless than his. I dare not let myself hope, lest I should go mad."

She sat thinking intently. "You will tell me this purpose of yours?" she asked then. Her tone was sympathetic, even solicitous.

Her reference to Normia decided my reply.

"You have already guessed it," said I.

"Ah, monsieur, from my heart I grieve with you!" she cried, with a sigh and a gentle lifting of the hands in sympathy.

"I should have feared you would be too engrossed by your own deep sorrow to have room in your heart for sympathy."

Her expression changed on the instant. Her eyes flashed, she threw up

her head, and her face set with intense strength of purpose.

"I am a Greek, monsieur, and we Greeks wait to lament our dead until we have avenged them. Rest assured this deed shall not go unpunished, however hopeless such a quest may appear to you. Henceforth, it will be the one purpose of my life."

"Would to Heaven I could see a way to help you!" I cried.

"You are overquick to despair, monsieur. Besides, you have other thoughts. I shall have but one. I shall not fail. I have many means of finding out the truth."

"You will find what I have told you, that all who know a murder has been committed believe me to be the murderer."

"And best so, is it not? The real murderer will believe himself safe. You will help me in the search, for we have a common bond in it?"

"You have but to show me how."

"You will continue to be known as Monsieur Provost. I was to have confronted you to-night at Herr Grundelhof's, but of course now I shall not go. He and his colleague, Baumstein, are dangerous men, and if you go there to-night you will be in danger. They mean harm to you. You know their object, and that it touches your purpose?"

"Yes. It is to learn the details I am going to-night."

"Monsieur Provost was taken into the scheme because at the time I was in the service of the princess, and it was thought that I could aid it. Even he did not know how I loved that most unfortunate girl. It was because I sought to help her to escape that the baroness turned me away. That is a further bond between us."

"I thank you for this, and for your warning," I said earnestly.

"I warn you because I believe all you have told me, monsieur. A strong man does not seek a woman's pity, but her sympathy she may offer, and her trust. And my trust is yours absolutely, for the princess' sake. I would say to you, my friend, put aside your despair; together we will find the man who has put this blight on both our lives. And now tell me—I can bear it now that my purpose is formed—all the facts, as you know them, of Gerard's death."

"He was stabbed—I had forgotten——" I broke off, as I remembered my possession of the knife. "I have the weapon with which the deed was committed."

I got it and handed it to her. She examined it without a tremor, looking at it long and earnestly; but when she turned her eyes to me I saw they were shining with unnatural brightness.

"It is stained, monsieur."

"It is stained, mademoiselle."

"It is blood, monsieur?"

"Yes, his blood, mademoiselle."

She drew a deep breath.

"And having this you could despair of tracing him! Monsieur! It is but to find the owner of this!"

"To me a hopeless search."

"Ah, you are not a Greek!" she cried excitedly. "And now the other question—was there anything to indicate the motive?"

"Nothing, except that, as I told you, my life had been threatened. That and the fact that nothing had been taken. It was not robbery."

"I do not call that nothing," she answered, with a confident smile. "It narrows the circle. I may take this?" And she rose.

"Of course."

"Have faith, monsieur, even as I have confidence. And now, if I can help you in regard to the princess, let me. I can find out things."

"If I need your help I will certainly come to you. Where can I find you?"

She told me.

"I pray Heaven you will succeed in your quest," I said.

Her face grew hard again, and she replied in a tone of absolute conviction, as she offered me her hand: "In a cause like this, and with a motive such as mine, a Greek never fails, monsieur."

She held my hand a moment and fixed her large, luminous eyes upon me.

"We stand together in the dark val-

ley of sorrow, my friend, but have courage; together we will climb the pass and find the light. Courage!"

I was almost staggered by the result of the strange interview.

I had entered the room firmly convinced that the crisis had come, and that a few hours, at most, would see the end of Gerard Provost; and yet now here we were, firm allies, and I was positively beginning to hope, almost to believe, that what I had deemed the impossible would be actually accomplished by her.

I had not been able to persuade myself that any one could be brought to believe my story of Provost's death; and that of all others this Greek girl should have been able to perceive its truth, seemed little short of a miracle.

The fact excited me intensely. I was soon conscious of a complete change in myself. She had laid the foundation of hope, and I soon began to build all sorts of fancy castles upon it.

If she believed in my innocence, I in turn had a strange trust in her capacity to discover the truth. She had infected me with some of her own calm conviction of success; and, as the hours of that day slipped away, this conviction strengthened, and my confidence rose.

The grim resolve to take my own life weakened as hope quickened the blood in my veins. All my fighting instincts began to reassert themselves.

I would make a desperate struggle to retrieve my lost position in the world, to wipe the stain from my name, and clear myself from this infamous charge.

I would no longer be the man who was dead, but once more *myself*; and I would fight for that end, not with the stubborn fatalism of despair, but with the live courage of confidence in myself and the set resolve to win.

I was still Provost, the spy, for the time; but a very different Provost from the swaggering swashbuckler I had shown myself. I was no longer the man under sentence of death. Freedom and honor were coming once again within reach, and I was a man with a future.

It was in this mood I started for the meeting with Grundelhof and his companions. There was considerable risk in attending it, but, although I looked at the risk differently now, I had to run it. In no other way could I ascertain the scheme against Normia.

I knew well enough the reputation which Grundelhof had in the Servian Army. He had been engaged in several desperate affairs, and he was alike physically powerful, brave, and reckless. In all respects a man to be labeled dangerous.

I had seen in the short interview with him on the preceding night that he had persuaded himself that I was a coward, and that he could ride roughshod over me. Before the night was out I should have to disabuse him on that point. While he and others believed me to be a coward, I should be exposed to constant menace and interference.

It was a great point in my favor that he would act on this mistaken assumption; and with such a man I should need all the points I could find if I was not to come off badly.

I decided, therefore, to lay aside the swaggering manner for the time, and to wait quietly and coolly until he gave me such a chance as I sought.

I took my revolver with me, of course. I calculated that I should most probably need it in self-defense. That was the key-note of my attitude. I was to act only in my defense.

Strong in this resolve, I entered the room quietly, where I found four men already assembled and waiting for me.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Unheavenly Twins

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Rowdy of the 'Cross L,'" Etc.

In which the remarkable resemblance between two of the cowboys at the "Flying U" Ranch once again brings trouble. In this instance there is a woman to be reckoned with—also an unusually jealous man

THERE was a dead man's estate to be settled, over beyond the Bear Paws, and several hundred head of cattle and horses had been sold to the highest bidder, who was Chip Bennett, of the Flying U. Later, there were the cattle and horses to be gathered and brought to the home range; and Weary, always Chip's choice when came need of a trusted man, was sent to bring them. He was to hire what men he needed down there, work the range with the Rocking R, and bring home the stock—when his men could take the train and go back whence they had come.

The Happy Family was disappointed. Pink and Irish, especially, had hoped to be sent along; for both knew well the range north of the Bear Paws, and both would like to have made the trip with Weary. But men were scarce, and the Happy Family worked well together—so well that Chip grudged every man of them that ever had to be sent afar. So Weary went alone, and Pink and Irish watched him wistfully when he rode away, and were extremely unpleasant companions for the rest of that day, at least.

Over beyond the Bear Paws men seemed scarcer even than around the Flying U range. Weary scouted fruitlessly for help, wasted two days in the search, and then rode to Bullhook, and sent this wire—collect—to Chip, and grinned as he wondered how much it would cost. He, too, had rather resented being sent off down there alone.

C. BENNETT, Flying U: Can't get a man here for love or money. Have tried both, and held one fellow up with a gun. No use. He couldn't top a sawhorse. For the Lord's sake, send somebody I know. I want Irish and Pink and Happy—and I want them bad. Get a move on. W. DAVIDSON.

Chip grinned when he read it, paid the bill, and told the three to get ready to hit the trail. And the three grinned answer, and immediately became very busy; hitting the trail, in this case, meant catching the next train out of Dry Lake, for, since there were horses bought with the cattle, much time would be saved by making up an outfit down there.

Weary rode dispiritedly into Sleepy Trail (which Irish usually spoke of as "Camas," because it had but lately been rechristened to avoid conflictions with another Camas farther up on Milk River). Weary thought, as he dismounted from Glory, which he had brought with him from home, that "Sleepy Trail" fitted the place exactly, and that whenever he heard Irish refer to it as "Camas" he would call him down, and make him use this other and more appropriate title.

Sleepy it was in that hazy sunshine of mid-forenoon, and apparently deserted. He tied Glory to the long hitching-pole, where a mild-eyed gray stood dozing on three legs, and went striding, rowels a-clank, into the saloon. He had not had any answer to his telegram, and

the world did not look so very good to him. He did not know that Pink and Irish and Happy Jack were even then speeding over the prairies on the eastbound train from Dry Lake to meet him. He had come to Sleepy Trail on a mere chance of some message from the Flying U.

The bartender looked up, gave a little, welcoming whoop, and leaned half-over the bar, hand extended. "Hello, Irish! Lord! When did *you* get back?"

Weary smiled and shook the hand with much emphasis. Irish had once created a sensation in Dry Lake by being taken for Weary—Weary wondered if, in the guise of Irish, there might not be some diversion for him here in Sleepy Trail. He remembered the maxim "Turn about is fair play," and immediately acted thereon.

"I just came down from the Flying U the other day," he said.

The bartender half-turned, reached a tall, ribbed bottle and two glasses, and set them on the bar before Weary. "Go to it," he invited cordially. "I'll gamble yuh brought your thirst right along with yuh—and that's your pet brand. Back to stay?"

Weary poured himself a modest "two fingers," and wondered if he had better claim to have reformed; Irish could—and did—drink long and deep where Weary indulged but moderately.

"No," he said, setting the glass down without refilling. "They sent me back on business. How's everything?"

The bartender spoke his wonder at the empty glass, listened while Weary explained how he had cut down his liquid refreshments "just to see how it would go, and which was boss," and then told much unmeaning gossip about men and women Weary had never heard of before.

Weary listened with exaggerated interest, and wondered what the fellow would do if he told him he was not Irish Mallory at all. He reflected, with some amusement, that he did not even know what to call the bartender, and tried to remember if Irish had ever mentioned him. He was about to state quietly that he had never met him before, and watch the surprise of the other, when the bartender grew more interesting.

"And say! yuh'd best keep your gun strapped on yuh whilst you're down here," he told Weary, with some earnestness. "Spikes Weber is in this country—come just after yuh left; fact is, he's got it into his block that you left *because* he come. Brought his wife along—say, I feel sorry for that little woman—and when he ain't bowling up and singing his war-song about you, and all he'll do when he meets up with yuh, he's dealing her misery and keeping cases that nobody runs off with her. Why, at dances, he won't let her dance with nobody but him! Goes plumb wild, sometimes, when it's 'change partners' in a square dance, and he sees her swingin' with somebody he thinks looks good to her. He's dead sure you're still crazy over her, and ready to steal her away from him first chance, only you're afraid uh *him*. He never gits full but he reads out your pedigree to the crowd. So I just thought I'd tell yuh, and let yuh be on your guard."

"Thanks," said Weary, getting out papers and tobacco. "And whereabouts will I find this lovely specimen uh manhood?"

"They're stopping over to Bill Mason's; but yuh better not go hunting trouble, Irish. That's the worst about putting yuh next to the lay. You sure do love a fight. But I thought I'd let yuh know, as a friend, so he wouldn't take yuh unawares. Don't be a fool and go out looking for him, though; he ain't worth the trouble."

"I won't," Weary promised generously. "I haven't lost nobody that looks like Spikes—er——" He searched his memory frantically for the other name, failed to get it, and busied himself with his cigarette, looking mean and bloodthirsty to make up. "Still," he added darkly, "if I should happen to meet up with him, yuh couldn't blame me——"

"Oh, sure not!" the bartender hastened to cut in. "It'd be a case uh self-defense—the way he's been makin' threats. But——"

"Maybe," hazarded Weary mildly, "you'd kinda like to see—*her*—a widow?"

"From all accounts," the other retorted, flushing a bit, nevertheless, "if yuh make her a widow, Irish, you won't leave her that way long. I've heard it said you was pretty far gone yourself."

Weary considered, the while he struck another match and relighted his cigarette. He had not expected to lay bare any romance in the somewhat tumultuous past of Irish. Irish had not seemed the sort of fellow who had an unhappy love-affair to dream of nights; he had seemed a particularly wholehearted young man.

"Well, yuh see," he said tentatively, "maybe I've got over it."

The bartender regarded him fixedly and unbelievingly. "You'll have quite a contract making Spikes swallow that," he remarked dryly.

"Oh, damn Spikes!" murmured Weary, with the fine recklessness of Irish in his tone.

At that moment a cowboy jangled in, caught sight of Weary's back, and fell upon him joyously, hailing him as Irish. Weary was very glad to see him, and listened assiduously for something that would give him a clue to the fellow's identity. In the meantime he called him "Say, old-timer," and "Cully." It had come to be a half-instituted point of honor to play the game through without blundering. He waved his hand hospitably toward the ribbed bottle, and told the stranger to "Throw it into yuh, old-timer—it's on me." And when Old-timer straightway began doing so, Weary leaned against the bar and wiped his forehead, and wondered who the dickens the fellow could be. In Dry Lake Irish had been—well, hilarious, and not accountable for any little peculiarities. In Sleepy Trail Weary was —perhaps he considered unfortunately —sober, and therefore obliged to feel his way carefully.

"Say! yuh want to keep your eyes peeled for Spikes Weber, Irish," remarked the unknown, after two drinks. "He's pawing up the earth whenever he hears your name called. He's sure anxious to see the sod packed down nice on top uh yuh."

"So I heard; his nibs here"—indicating the bartender—"has been wising me up a lot. When's the stage due tomorrow, old-timer?" Weary was getting a bit ashamed of addressing them both impartially in that manner, but it was the best he could do, not knowing the names men called them. In this instance he spoke to the bartender.

"Why, yuh going to pull out while your hide's whole?" bantered the cowboy, with the freedom which long acquaintance breeds.

"I've got business out uh town, and I want to be back time the stage pulls in."

"Well, Limpy's still holding the ribbons over them buckskins uh his, and he ain't varied five minutes in five years," responded the bartender. "So I guess yuh can look for him same old time."

Weary's eyes opened a bit wider, then drooped humorously. "Oh, all right," he murmured, as though thoroughly enlightened rather than being rather more in the dark than before. In the name of Irish he found it expedient to take another modest drink, and then excused himself with a "See yuh later, boys."

Ten miles nearer the railroad—which at that was not what even a Montanan would call close—he had that day established headquarters, and was holding a bunch of saddle-horses pending the arrival of help. He rode out on the trail thoughtfully, a bit surprised that he had not found the situation more amusing. To be taken for Irish was a joke, and to learn thereby of Irish's little romance ought to be funny; but it wasn't.

Weary wondered how Irish had got mixed up in a deal like that, which somehow did not seem to be in line with his character. And he wished, a bit vindictively, that this Spikes Weber *could* meet Irish. He rather thought that Spikes needed the chastening effects of such an encounter. Weary, while not in the least quarrelsome on his own account, was ever the stanch defender of a friend.

Just where another brown trail branched off and wandered away over a hill to the east, a woman rode out and met him face to face. She pulled up and gave a little cry that brought Weary involuntarily to a halt.

"You!" she exclaimed, in a tone that Weary felt he had no right to hear from any but his little schoolma'am. "But I knew you'd come back when you heard I—— Have—have you seen Spikes, Ira?"

Weary flushed embarrassment; this was no joke. "No," he stammered, in some doubt just how to proceed. "The fact is, you've made a little mistake. I'm not——"

"Oh, you needn't go on," she interrupted, and her voice, had Weary known it better, heralded the reckless pouring out of a woman's heart. "I know I've made a mistake, all right; you don't need to tell me that. And I suppose you want to tell me that you've got over—things; that you don't care any more. Maybe you don't, but it'll take a lot to make me believe it. Because you *did* care, Ira. You *cared,* all right enough." She laughed in the way that makes one very uncomfortable.

"And maybe you'll tell me that I didn't. But I did, and I do yet. I ain't ashamed to say it, if I did marry Spikes Weber just to spite you. That's all it was, and you'd have found it out if you hadn't gone off the way you did. I *hate* Spikes Weber. And he knows it, Ira. He knows I—care—for you, and he's making my life a hell. Oh, maybe I deserve it—but you won't—— Now you've come back, you can have it out with him; and I—I almost hope you'll kill him! I do, and I don't care if it is wicked. I—I don't care for anything much, but—you." She had big, soft-brown eyes, and a sweet, weak mouth, and she stopped and looked at Weary in a way that he could easily imagine would be irresistible—to a man who cared.

Weary felt that he was quite helpless. She had hurried out sentences that sealed his lips. He could not tell her now that she had made a mistake; that he was not Ira Mallory, but a perfect stranger. The only thing to do now was to carry the thing through as tactfully as possible, and get away as soon as he could. Playing he was Irish, he found, was not without its disadvantages.

"What particular brand of hell has he been making for you?" he asked her sympathetically.

"I wouldn't think, knowing Spikes as you do, you'd need to ask," she said impatiently. "The same old brand, I guess. He gets drunk, and then—— I told him right out, just after we were married, that I liked you the best, and he don't forget it; and he don't let me. He swears he'll shoot you on sight—as if that would do any good! He hates you, Ira." She laughed again unpleasantly.

Weary, sitting uneasily in the saddle looking at her, wondered if Irish really cared; or if, in Weary's place, he would have sat there so calmly and just looked at her. She was rather pretty, in a pink and white, weak way. He could easily imagine her marrying Spikes Weber for mere spite; what he could not imagine was Irish in love with her.

It seemed almost as if she caught a glimmer of his thoughts, for she reined closer, and her teeth were digging into her lower lip. "Well, aren't you going to *do* anything?" she demanded desperately. "You're here, and I've told you I—care. Are you going to leave me to bear Spikes' abuse always?"

"You married him," Weary remarked mildly, and a bit defensively. It seemed to him that loyalty to Irish impelled him, and the challenge in her voice jarred.

She tossed her head contemptuously. "It's nice to throw that at me. I might get back at you and say you loved me. You did, you know."

"And you married Spikes; what can *I* do about it?"

"What—can you—*do*—about it? Did you come back to ask me *that?*" There was a well-defined, white line around her mouth, and her eyes were growing ominously bright.

Weary did not like the look of her, nor the tone. He felt, somehow, glad that it was not Irish, but himself; Irish might have felt the thrall of old times, whatever they were, and have been tempted. His eyes, also, grew ominous, but his voice was very smooth. (Irish, too, had that trait of being quietest when he was most roused.)

"I came back on business; I will confess I didn't come to see you," he said. "I'm only a bone-headed cow-puncher, but even cow-punchers can play square. They don't, as a rule, step in between a man and his wife. You married Spikes, and, according to your own tell, you did it to spite me. So I say again, what can *I* do about it?"

She looked at him dazedly.

"Uh course," he went on gently, "I won't stand to see any man abuse his wife, or bandy her name or mine around the country. If I should happen to meet up with Spikes, there'll likely be some dust raised. And if I was you, and Spikes abused me, I'd quit him cold."

"Oh, I see," she said sharply, with an exaggeration of scorn. "You have got over it, then. There's some one else. I might have known a man can't be trusted to care for the same woman long. You ran after me and acted the fool, and kept on till you made me believe you really meant all you said——"

"And you married Spikes," Weary reiterated—ungenerously, perhaps; but it was the only card he held. There was no gainsaying that fact, it seemed. She had married Spikes in a fit of pique at Irish. Still, it was not well to remind her of it too often. In the next five minutes of tumultuous recrimination, Weary had cause to remember Congreve's opinion of a woman scorned, and he wondered, more than ever, if Irish had really cared. The girl—even now he did not know what name to call her—was showing a strain of coarse temper; the temper that must descend to personalities and the calling of unflattering names. Weary, not being that type of male human who can retort in kind, sat helpless and speechless the while she berated him. When at last he found opportunity for closing the interview and riding on, her anger-sharpened voice followed him shrewishly afar. Weary breathed deep relief when the distance swallowed it, and lifted his gray hat to wipe his beaded forehead.

"Mama mine!" he said fervently to Glory. "Irish was sure playing big luck when she *did* marry Spikes; and I don't wonder at the poor devil taking to drink. I would, too, if my little schoolma'am——"

At the ranch he hastened to make it quite plain that he was not Ira Mallory, but merely his cousin, Will Davidson. He was quite determined to put a stop to all this annoying mixing up of identities. And as for Spikes Weber, since meeting the woman Spikes claimed from him something very like sympathy; only Weary had no mind to stand calmly and hear Irish maligned by anybody.

Next day he rode again to Sleepy Trail to meet the stage, hoping fervently that he would get some word—and that favorable—from Chip. He was thinking, just then, a great deal about his own affairs, and not at all about the affairs of Irish. So that he was inside the saloon before he remembered that the bartender knew him for Irish.

The bartender nodded to him in friendly fashion, and jerked his head warningly toward a far corner, where two men sat half-heartedly playing seven-up. Weary looked, saw that both were strangers, and puzzled a minute over the mysterious gesture of the bartender. It did not occur to him, just then, that one of the men might be Spikes Weber.

The man who was facing him flipped the corners of the cards idly together, and glanced up; saw Weary standing there with an elbow on the bar looking at him, and pushed back his chair with an oath unmistakably warlike. Weary resettled his hat, and looked mildly surprised. The bartender moved out of range, and watched breathlessly.

"You —— —— ————!" swore Spikes Weber, coming truculently forward. He was of medium height, and stockily built, with the bull-neck and

little, deep-set eyes that go often with a nature quarrelsome.

Weary still leaned his elbow on the bar, and smiled at him tolerantly. "Feel bad anywhere?" he wanted to know, when the other was very close.

Spikes Weber, from very surprise, stopped and regarded Weary for a space before he began swearing again. Plainly, he had not expected just this attitude.

Weary waited, smothering a yawn, until the other finished a particularly pungent paragraph. "A good jolt uh brandy'll sometimes cure a bad case uh colic," he remarked. "Better have our friend here fix yuh up—but it'll be on you. I ain't paying for drinks just now."

Spikes snorted and began upon the pedigree and general character of Irish. Weary took his elbow off the bar, and his eyes lost their sunniness and became a hard blue, darker than was usual. It took a good deal to rouse Weary to the fighting point, and it is saying much for the tongue of Spikes that Weary was roused very thoroughly.

"That'll be about enough," he said sharply, cutting short a sentence from the other. "I kinda hated to start in and take yuh all to pieces—but yuh better saw off right there, or I can't be responsible——"

A gun-barrel caught the light menacingly, and Weary sprang like the pounce of a cat, and wrested the gun from the hand of Spikes. "Yuh would, eh?" he snarled, and tossed the gun upon the bar, where the bartender caught it as it slid along the smooth surface and put it out of reach.

After that, chairs went spinning out of the way, and glasses jingled to the impact of a body striking the floor with much force. Came the slapping sound of hammering fists and the scuffling of booted feet, together with the hard breathing of fighting men.

Spikes, on his back, looked up into the blazing eyes he thought were the eyes of Irish, and silently acknowledged defeat. But Weary would not let it go at that.

"Are yuh whipped to a finish, so that yuh don't want any more trouble with anybody?" he wanted to know.

Spikes hesitated but the fraction of a second before he growled a reluctant yes.

"Are yuh a low-down, lying sneak of a woman fighter, that ain't got nerve enough to stand up square to a ten-year-old boy?"

Spikes acknowledged that he was. Before the impromptu catechism was ended Spikes had acknowledged other and more humiliating things—to the delectation of the bartender, the stage-driver, and two or three men of leisure who were listening.

When Spikes had owned to being every unknowable thing that Weary could call to mind—and his imagination was never of the barren sort—Weary generously permitted him to get upon his feet and skulk out to where his horse was tied. After that, Weary gave his unruffled attention to the stage-driver, and discovered the unwelcome fact that there was no letter and no telegram for one William Davidson, who looked a bit glum when he heard it.

So he, too, went out and mounted his horse, and rode away to the ranch where waited the horses; and, as he went, he thought, for perhaps the first time in his life, some hard and unflattering things of Chip Bennett. He had never dreamed Chip would calmly overlook his needs and leave him in the lurch like this.

At the ranch, when he had unsaddled Glory and gone to the bunk-house, he discovered Irish, Pink, and Happy Jack wrangling amicably over whom a certain cross-eyed girl on the train had been looking at most of the time. Since each one claimed all the glances for himself, and since there seemed no possible way of settling the dispute, they gave over the attempt gladly when Weary appeared, and wanted to know, first thing, who or what had been gouging the hide off his face.

Weary, not aware until the moment that he was wounded, answered that he had done it shaving; at which the three hooted derision, and wanted to know

since when he had taken to shaving his nose. Weary smiled inscrutably, and began talking of something else until he had weaned them from the subject, and learned that they had bribed the stage-driver to let them off at this particular ranch; for the stage-driver knew Irish, and knew also that a man he had taken to be Irish was making this place his headquarters. The stage-driver was one of those male gossips who know everything.

When he could conveniently do so, Weary took Irish out of hearing of the others, and told him about Spikes Weber. Irish merely swore. After that, Weary told him about Spikes Weber's wife, in secret fear and with much tact, but in detail. Irish listened with never a word to say.

"I done what looked to me the best thing under the circumstances," Weary apologized at the last; "and I sure do hope I haven't mixed yuh up a bunch uh trouble. Mama mine! she's sure on the fight, though, and she's got a large, black opinion of yuh as a constant lover. If yuh want to square yourself with her, Irish, you've got a big contract."

"I don't want to square myself," Irish retorted, grinning a bit. "I did have it bad, I admit; but when she went and got tied up to Spikes, that cured me right off. Uh course, I was some sore over the deal for a while; but I made up my mind long ago that Spikes was the only one in the bunch that had any sympathy coming. If he's been acting up like you say, though, I change the verdict—there ain't anything coming to him but a big bunch uh trouble. I'm much obliged to yuh, Weary; you done me a good turn, and earnt a lot uh gratitude, which is yours for keeps. Wonder if supper ain't about due; I've the appetite of a billy-goat, if anybody should ask yuh."

At supper Irish was uncommonly silent, and did some things without thinking; such as pouring a generous stream of condensed cream into his coffee. Weary, knowing well that Irish drank his coffee without cream, watched him a bit closer than he would otherwise have done; Irish was the sort of man who does not always act by rule.

After supper Weary missed him quite suddenly, and went to the door of the bunk-house to see where he had gone. He did not see Irish, but on a hilltop, in the trail that led to Sleepy Trail, he saw a flurry of dust. Two minutes of watching saw it drift out of sight over the hill, which proved that the maker was traveling rapidly away from the ranch. Weary settled his hat down to his eyebrows, and went out to find the foreman.

The foreman, down at the stable, said that Irish had borrowed a horse from him, unsacked his saddle as if he were in a hurry about something, and had pulled out on a high lope. No, he had not told the foreman where he was headed for, and the foreman knew Irish too well to ask. Yes, now Weary spoke of it, Irish did have his gun buckled on him, which was a bit unusual; and he had headed for Sleepy Trail.

Weary waited for no further information. He threw his saddle on a horse that he knew could get out and drift, if need came; presently he, too, was chasing a brown dust-cloud over the hill toward Sleepy Trail.

At the place where the trail forked —the place where he had met the wife of Spikes—he saw from a distance another rider gallop out of the dusk and follow in the way that Irish had gone. Without other evidence than mere instinct, he knew the horseman for Spikes. When, farther along, the horseman left the trail and angled away down a narrow coulée, Weary rode a bit faster. He did not know the country very well, and was not sure of where that coulée led; but he knew the nature of a man like Spikes Weber, and his uneasiness was not lulled at the sight. He meant to overtake Irish, if he could; after that he had no plan.

When, however, he came to the place where Spikes had turned off, Weary turned off also, and followed down the coulée.

The coulée, Weary observed, was erratic in the matter of height, width, and general direction. Places there

were where the width dwindled until there was scant room for the cow-trail his horse conscientiously followed; places there were where the walls were easy slopes to climb, and others where the rocks hung a sheer hundred feet above him.

One of the easy slopes came near throwing him off the trail of Spikes. He had climbed the slope, and Weary would have ridden by, only that he caught a brief glimpse of something on the hilltop; something that moved, and that looked like a horseman. Puzzled but persistent, Weary turned back where the slope was easiest, and climbed also. He did not know the country well enough to tell, in that come-and-go light made uncertain by drifting clouds, just where he was or where he would bring up; he only knew instinctively that where Spikes rode, trouble rode also apace.

Quite suddenly at the last came further knowledge. It was when, still following along a steeply sloping ridge that narrowed perceptibly, he looked down, down, and saw, winding brownly in the starlight, a trail that must be the trail he had left at the coulée head.

"Mama!" he ejaculated softly, and strained eyes under his hat-brim to glimpse the figure he knew rode before. Then, looking down again, he saw a horseman galloping rapidly toward the ridge, and pulled up short when he should have done the opposite —for it was then that seconds counted.

When the second glance showed the horseman to be Irish, Weary drove in his spurs and galloped forward. Ten leaps perhaps he made, when a rifle-shot came sharply ahead. He glanced down, and saw horse and rider lying, a big blotch of indefinable shape, in the trail. Weary drew his own gun and went on, his teeth set tight together. Now, when it was too late, he understood thoroughly the situation.

He came clattering out to the very point of the bluff just where it was highest, and where it crowded closest the trail a long hundred feet below. A man stood there on the very edge, with a rifle in his hands. He may have been crouching just before, but now he was standing erect, looking fixedly down at the dark heap in the trail, and his figure, alert yet unwatchful, was silhouetted sharply against the sky.

When Weary, gun at aim, charged furiously down upon him, he whirled, ready to give battle for his life; saw the man he supposed was lying down there dead in the trail, and started backward with a yell of pure terror. "Irish!" He toppled, threw the rifle from him in a single convulsive movement, and went backward, down and down——

Weary got off his horse and, gun still gripped firmly, walked to the edge and looked down. In his face, as revealed in the fitful moonlight, there was no pity, but a look of baffled vengeance. Down at the foot of the bluff the shadows lay deep and hid all they held, but out in the trail some one moved, rose up, and stood still a moment, his face turned upward to where stood Weary.

"Mama mine! Are yuh hurt, Irish?" Weary called anxiously down to him.

"Never touched me," came the answer from below. "He got my horse, damn him! and I just laid still and kept cases on what he'd do next. Come on down!"

Weary was already climbing down recklessly to where the shadows reached long arms up to him. It was not safe, in that uncertain light, but Weary was used to taking chances. Irish, standing still beside the dead horse, watched and listened to the rattle of small stones slithering to the bottom, and the clink of spur-chains upon the rocks.

Together the two went into the shadows and stood over a heap of something that had been a man.

"I never did kill a man," Weary remarked, touching the heap lightly with his foot. "But I sure would have, that time, if he hadn't dropped just before I cut loose on him."

Irish turned and looked at him. Standing so, one would have puzzled long to know them apart. "You've done a lot for me, Weary, this trip," Irish owned frankly. "I'm sure obliged."

Bubble on the Brain

By Benjamin Strever Kearns

The laughable results of the heroic efforts of an imaginative advertiser who was determined to move heaven and earth to pull off a business deal that had failed through a solitary condition that had apparently been unfulfilled

MORRIS SPEED, head of the big packing company of Morris Speed & Co., sat holding a letter in his hand. Ordinarily letters seldom reached the head of the firm, but this one his secretary considered of enough moment to have his personal attention. It read:

ALEXANDER TODD & CO.
Wholesale Distributers.
97 Canal Street, New York City.

To Morris Speed & Co., Union Stock-yards, Chicago, Ill.

DEAR SIRS: Yours of the 26th received. In replying to same, asking us to push your Bubble Soap in preference to Durbanks', I am sorry to say I am unable to do so. I must admit that Bubble Soap is a much superior article to Durbanks', but your lack of advertising the soap forces me to drop it in favor of Durbanks'.

The correspondence on this subject has already reached voluminous proportions, and I hope this decision will end the matter.

Very truly yours, ALEXANDER TODD.
Alexander Todd & Co.

New York City, June 29.

The longer Morris Speed held the letter before him the madder he became. Turning swiftly in his chair, he rang the bell for his secretary, who came hustling into the private office with rapid strides, the loud, ugly ring portending an angry superior.

"Rankins!" yelled the irate Speed to the secretary. "Send Scrubbs to me at once."

He wheeled around in his swivel-chair and took up the letter again.

Jonathan Scrubbs, right-hand man, advertising expert, and chief of everything connected with Morris Speed & Co., arrived on the scene, smiling. Nothing daunted Scrubbs—Scrubbs the imperturbable. Not even the irate, though dignified, Speed had ever upset his equanimity.

"Good morning, Speed," greeted Scrubbs, carelessly resting one of his legs on the desk, letting the other swing back and forth. "What's the trouble so early in the day? Sleep badly, eh?"

"Read this letter," said Speed, shoving the letter toward Scrubbs with a jerk.

Scrubbs read the letter with apparent unconcern until he reached the part of it that referred to lack of advertising. He slipped his leg from the desk, and straightened up to his five-feet-one, his stubby mustache bristling, his big, bushy eyebrows moving up and down in unison with his heavy breathing.

"Lack of advertising, eh?" bawled Scrubbs, unbuttoning his coat to breathe easier.

Scrubbs pulled himself together, finished reading the letter, and threw it on the desk.

"Humph!" A look of disgust spread over his features. "That man Todd has broke loose again. Well, that looks like a throw-down for Speed & Co.'s Bubble Soap, doesn't it?"

Scrubbs recovered quickly from his anger. It was the first time in his life that he had ever lost control of himself.

Not so with Speed. He grew worse.

"Not advertised enough? Bah! Morris Speed & Co. penurious in the advertising department? Bah!" The

usually dignified Speed brought his large fist down on the desk with such force that the telephone fell to the floor.

"Scrubbs, you're the man for this job. I want you to leave for New York as quickly as possible. I give you full authority to advertise Bubble Soap to the limit. Don't let an inch of advertising space escape you. Paste and tack the town with the glories of Bubble Soap. Take all the men necessary. Have the material shipped at once. Anything that we haven't got, get it. The whole affair is now in your hands. Make Todd & Co. sell our soap. Understand? *Make* 'em sell it. If you fail——"

He stopped for want of breath, and mopped his brow. The perspiration was trickling down to the tips of his side-whiskers.

"Well, if you fail"—his anger gradually subsiding—"I'll put an independent branch there. But don't fail. Understand?"

Repenting of his fiery temper, Speed swung round in his chair and began rummaging among the papers on his desk.

Scrubbs left the office saying he'd have Todd & Co. handling Bubble Soap in a week, or his name wasn't Jonathan Scrubbs.

Alexander Todd's mention of lack of advertising as a cause for discontinuing the handling of Bubble Soap struck Scrubbs' sore spot. He prided himself in this particular line, and revenge rankled in his breast as he walked out of the office.

Scrubbs was a man of action. He liked a fight—a business scrimmage. He had the reputation of selling Speed & Co.'s goods whether a firm wanted to buy or not.

The following four hours in the advertising department of Morris Speed & Co. were the liveliest in the annals of stock-yards—made so by Jonathan Scrubbs. A special train of five cars loaded with the choicest advertising literature, novelties, etc., to be pasted and tacked before the eyes of New York's millions, was on its way East.

Scrubbs had got together a staff of two hundred and fifty men known for their ability to paste, tack, or hang a sign—even on a millionaire's palatial residence—without incurring the owner's displeasure or a lawsuit therefrom.

It had been a fierce struggle between the trust and Morris Speed & Co. for a year to have Todd & Co. handle their goods. Rebates were given first by one firm and then the other, until it simmered down to a point where the manufacturers were next to giving their goods away. It was very desirable to Speed & Co. that Todd & Co. should handle their goods, as Todd & Co. not only controlled the trade in New York City, but the whole Eastern district, which meant thousands of dollars profit to the firm that won over Todd & Co.

Jonathan Scrubbs had plenty of time to map out a plan of campaign on the way East. When he alighted from the train he gave final instructions to the foreman of the paste-brush wielders, and started them off.

For three days and nights Scrubbs' brush brigade covered every available space with sheets, cards, and posters extolling the virtues of Bubble Soap. Scrubbs saw to it that the routes taken by Alexander Todd on his way home after his arduous day's work should be extra well littered.

"Lack of advertising, eh?" Scrubbs said, as he reviewed the finished work of his men from an automobile. "What will Todd say to that work of art?" His long finger indicated an enormous sign with letters ten feet high, situated in the most conspicuous section of the city. "Guess he'll see that one," he chuckled. "It's up to him now. Lack of advertising? Humph!"

Scrubbs squeezed his little form into the corner of the leather cushions, and gave the chauffeur orders to return to the hotel—"to await developments before making the next move," as he put it.

Since Scrubbs' arrival in town Alexander Todd did not enjoy his automobile trips from his residence in Vernon Park to his office every morning and

afternoon. The usual picturesqueness of the country and the beautiful panoramic views were somewhat disfigured with signs of all descriptions. Right and left, low and high, all that Todd could see was:

USE BUBBLE SOAP.

At first it rather amused Todd, but later it grew serious; for each day there were added hundreds of new tortures. The fences and vacant lots being filled with the offensive letters, there now appeared on the sidewalks, done in white chalk:

THERE'S SOAP FOR ALL—BUBBLE.

It seemed to Todd that there was nothing on earth to look at but Bubble Soap ads.

Todd thought a change of route to his office would be beneficial, and took the railroad. But there was no improvement in that direction. Scrubbs had not left an avenue of escape. On all sides his eyes fell upon such notices as these:

BUBBLE SOAP; NO DOPE.
IF IT'S BUBBLE IT'S GOOD.
CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS. DIRT IS NEVER NEXT TO BUBBLE SOAP.

In the street-cars, which he adopted as a means of shaking off the torturous signs, he was greeted with a leer from the pictured face of a bald-headed user of Bubble Soap. He shifted his eyes, and read this:

THE MAN UNDER THIS SIGN USES BUBBLE SOAP. WHY DON'T YOU?
USE BUBBLE SOAP.

Then he glanced nervously up to the top of the car, to see if he was sitting under one of the pesky signs. Sure enough he was!

Todd began to grow listless. Life ceased to be a pleasure.

Scrubbs, thinking it about time for a call on Todd, dropped in to see what effect his work was having. Todd was in bad humor.

"Good morning," said Scrubbs, as he entered the office, removing his hat and seating himself without being invited to do so.

"Good morning," returned Todd abruptly. "What can I do for you?"

"I called to talk over the matter about our Bubble——"

Todd started suddenly, heaved a sigh, and grew so nervous that Scrubbs stopped talking, but proceeded after he saw there was no immediate danger of Todd having an apoplectic fit.

"About our Bubble Soap," continued Todd. "Your reason for not handling it seems to be something more than insufficient advertising, Mr. Todd. The city looks to be thoroughly advertised to me. And there is no doubt about its superiority over other soaps. You admit that yourself. I called to see if you would not reconsider your last letter to our firm."

Todd turned on Scrubbs fiercely, his fiery red hair bristling up and his hands trembling with excitement.

"I say it isn't advertised thoroughly," bawled Todd. "And I mean it."

Todd unconsciously picked up a lead-pencil from his desk and began tapping it nervously. His eyes were riveted on the pencil; so were the eyes of Scrubbs. On it were the words:

USE BUBBLE SOAP.

Todd threw it guiltily to the floor. Grabbing up a blotter, hammering it on the desk excitedly, he began to utter something more about the lack of advertising. He sat staring at the blotter in a dazed manner; Scrubbs' eyes stared in the same direction. On the blotter in red letters on a white background was printed:

THERE IS NO DOPE IN BUBBLE SOAP.

Todd pushed it to one side and gleamed daggers at Scrubbs. Scrubbs sat silent, staring quizzically at Todd, who was now standing up and bordering on nervous prostration. His enormous frame seemed about to fall to the floor.

Scrubbs left the office quietly but quickly.

Alexander Todd was in a state of

frenzy. The idea of a man putting his obnoxious advertisement under his very nose was too much for Todd.

It enraged him still more when one of his clerks approached him with a handful of orders, demanding that Bubble Soap, instead of Durbanks', be shipped by customers.

"Bubble Soap be d——d!" shouted Todd, in a fury, as he slammed down the top of his roll-top desk, preparatory to going home, leaving the clerk standing dazed. "Will it never end? Will it never end?" he kept repeating as he fled from the office.

Todd reached home, after his usual torture of seeing nothing but Bubble Soap signs, in a state of collapse. One continuous streak of

USE BUBBLE SOAP

was all that Todd could see, no matter which way his tired eyes were focused, excepting at intervals, when he would catch a reminder in a poetic strain:

CLEANSES MAN AND BEAST, NORTH, SOUTH, WEST, AND EAST, BUBBLE SOAP.

Or this:

FOR THE SKIN, AT LAST THERE'S HOPE. BUY A CAKE OF BUBBLE SOAP.

Todd retired early but slept little. Bubbles appeared before his weary eyes by the millions. His dreams were of bubbles. Little children would rise before him and blow soap-bubbles in his very face. "Use Bubble Soap" he kept repeating until he thought he would go insane.

With the horrible nightmare clinging to him the greater part of the night, Todd arose for the day's work almost as exhausted as when he retired. He walked to the window to get a breath of fresh air, when he was staggered by a sign taking up the entire front of the beautiful, unoccupied mansion opposite him:

USE BUBBLE SOAP AND BE HAPPY.

Todd grew worse. Getting into his bath-robe hastily he went to the bath-room. The first thing he laid his hand on was a cake of Bubble Soap.

"Good Lord!" he cried, in despair. "Is there no hope for me? Everything is bubble! bubble! bubble!"

Picking up the innocent little cake of soap, he flung it through the window and made his toilet as rapidly as possible, and rushed down-stairs to the dining-room. The newspaper which Todd began to read as he seated himself at the table contained a half-page ad of Bubble Soap. He threw it to the floor and trampled it under his feet.

He commenced breakfast, but nothing tasted right to the hapless Todd. He raised his cup of coffee to his mouth. There was a bubble in the steaming Java. Todd put it down on the table as though it was a draft of poison. Grabbing a spoon, he punctured the bubble fiercely, upsetting the greater part of the coffee, and looked about him sheepishly to see if any one had noticed his strange action.

Todd spent a weary half-day at the office. He left at noon to attend the annual Tradesmen's League picnic. Todd was working for the nomination to Congress, and made much of this opportunity to spread his popularity, and at the same time give himself a vacation and rest from the soap ads. He lost no time in reaching the park.

The few hours at the picnic-grounds were the first real enjoyment Todd had had in a week. Even this was denied him, however, for the relentless Scrubbs was still after the tortured Todd.

Everything went smoothly until Todd was asked by a committee of picnickers to make a speech. He was in the midst of his address, which he expected would help his nomination, with hundreds of the picknickers as eager listeners. They were liberal in their applause, which pleased Todd immensely.

Suddenly from the sky there came sailing down at a rapid rate what appeared to be the body of a man. The crowd grew panic-stricken. The object was making direct for the rostrum on which Todd stood. The weird faces

in the crowd attracted Todd's attention. He looked up in the direction to which they were pointing just as the figure landed on the railing of the platform. Todd rushed to the object, and found it to be a dummy figure, thrown from a large balloon above, placarded:

The finder of this will be presented with two boxes of Bubble Soap if name and address be sent to Morris Speed & Co., Chicago.

Todd's frightened look grew to one of disgust. The crowd laughed heartily at what they thought a good joke.

Todd recovered from the shock quickly. He forced a smile as he turned toward the audience and was about to launch forth in another oratorical outburst, when there came floating gently down through the air toward the picnickers a thousand or more small, red, toy balloons.

One of them sailed gracefully toward Todd. On its side he read:

OUR CHOICE FOR CONGRESS, ALEXANDER TODD.

Todd's face was wreathed in smiles at the compliment paid him, but was suddenly clouded when the balloon reversed itself, and showed its other side, on which was:

USE BUBBLE SOAP.

Todd surveyed the crowd narrowly for a moment. His searching eyes met those of Scrubbs, who was standing close to the speaker's platform. The men stared at each other. There was anger depicted in Todd's eyes; triumph in the other's.

Todd jumped over the railing that surrounded the platform, and made a leap for Scrubbs, grabbed him by the coat-collar, and dragged his diminutive form back to the stand.

"Scrubbs!" yelled Todd, holding his Lilliputian form at arm's length and shaking him vigorously. Finally he flung Scrubbs into a chair, amid an avalanche of falling toy balloons, each one bearing the detestable soap ad, dropped from the big balloon above. "Sit down there, and don't move! Don't move an inch! Do you hear?"

The rough handling was unexpected by Scrubbs, and he made no attempt to move. He sat eying the infuriated Todd, wondering what was going to happen.

Todd drew forth from his inside coat pocket a slip of paper and a fountain pen, and wrote hastily for a minute. When he finished he handed the paper to Scrubbs.

A broad, happy smile lighted the small features of Scrubbs as he read:

NEW YORK, *July 6.*

I hereby contract to sell no other soap but Morris Speed & Co.'s Bubble Soap for the next ten years.

(Signed) ALEXANDER TODD,
Alexander Todd & Co.

"Is that what you want?" said Todd, scowling, his towering form shaking with excitement.

"That's it," replied Scrubbs, in a voice of triumph.

"Well," continued Todd, looking down at the victorious Scrubbs, "I'll give you the contract providing you call that band of tormenting bill-posters off——"

Todd turned from Scrubbs and looked out into the sea of laughing faces. The picknickers had by this time grown hilarious over the incident. Todd became infused with the good humor himself, and a smile spread over his rugged face as he wheeled around and faced Scrubbs.

"And, say, Scrubbs," continued Todd, stooping down to within three inches of Scrubbs' ear, whispering: "How would you like to stay in town a week or so and advertise my congressional boom?"

"At your service, Todd," smilingly answered Scrubbs.

"Not quite so strenuously as the soap, you know!" quickly added Todd, a frightened look spreading over his face.

"I understand," facetiously replied Scrubbs, proffering his hand. "Good day. I'll call at your office to-morrow."

"Good bub-bub-bub—— Good day I—I—mean," replied the confused Todd.

The Adventures of Felix Boyd

By Scott Campbell

Author of "Below the Dead Line," Etc.

XVII.—THE MAN WITH A BARROW

(A Complete Story)

THREE gendarmes, each clad in a dark uniform, each wearing a short sword, each an erect and soldierly man, unusually grave and austere just then, stood mutely guarding the body of a man lying on the ground.

A gruesome discovery to have been made in the early hours of a serene Sabbath morning!

The three gendarmes were nearly motionless—the solitary figure on the ground was entirely so. One of the officers had spread a dark cloak over it, not sufficient to completely cover it. From under the garment protruded a pair of extended arms, with the rigid white hands still clenched convulsively; also a pair of legs spasmodically drawn awry, with the toes of the patent-leather shoes pointing upward.

The gendarmes were awaiting the arrival of a detective from the prefecture of police, an officer commissioned to investigate such fatalities—the chugging noise of the auto-car in which he was approaching already could be heard.

It was purely by chance that the detective assigned this work was Monsieur Maurice Plaquet, with whom Mr. Felix Boyd had recently figured unofficially in two very important cases. It was equally by chance that Monsieur Plaquet, while on his way to the scene of this fatality, encountered both Felix Boyd and the Central Office man, who were enjoying an early morning ramble; yet Plaquet at once stopped to pick them up, having already learned that the genius of Boyd was something to bank on.

"I know only the victim's name—Picard Lacenaire—and that his corpse was found in the garden back of his house early this morning," Plaquet gravely explained, having briefly stated his mission. "We shall arrive there presently and learn more of the particulars. Gendarmes are now in charge, and they will make sure that nothing is disturbed, so haste on our part is not absolutely imperative."

It would be a blunder for any chronicler to omit from the memoirs of Mr. Felix Boyd the strange case in which he figured that May morning. Not alone because it was absolutely unique in character, presenting one of the most curious problems in the wide range of his experiences; but also because it enabled him—which was something more than chance—to render services of inestimable value to the foremost statesman in France, as well as to one of the most beautiful women it had ever been his privilege to meet.

"Do you know anything about the man himself—this Lacenaire?" inquired Boyd.

Monsieur Plaquet indulged in an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"Confidentially, my dear Boyd?"

"Certainly."

"I cannot speak well of him. Though we never have been able to put our finger upon any knavery he has committed, he is not favorably regarded at the prefecture of police."

"Isn't that a little strange?"

"Less so than superfically appears," returned Plaquet. "Lacenaire has been a smooth, oily fellow, with a remarkable genius for crafty work, for ferreting out unsavory intrigues, and securing tangible evidence of them, by the sale of which to his unfortunate victims, or to any of their foes who willingly paid more liberally, he has emerged from obscurity among the lower classes and amassed a considerable fortune."

"Humph!" ejaculated Boyd, upon whose thin, clean-cut face a censorious frown had settled. "I judge, Plaquet, that this fellow was an infernal blackmailer."

"Others have formed the same opinion. I have heard that his superb residence, the Maison de Navarre, which he has occupied for the past two years, was wrested in this scurrilous way from its former owner, the Duke De Morney, who sacrificed it to this gluttonous spider in order to shield the name of a too indiscreet German princess. Mark me, my dear Boyd, this is hearsay only —and I repeat it confidentially."

"You may rely upon my discretion," Boyd replied. "Could not this rascal be detected in any of his knavish schemes?"

"Not easily. He has been a veritable genius for keeping his skirts clear of his own muck-rake. From his victims, moreover, nothing at all could be learned. Having of necessity purchased his silence, naturally their own lips would be rigidly sealed."

"Yes, very naturally," Boyd dryly admitted.

"I doubt if there is a man in Paris more feared than this same Lacenaire, be he dead or alive. Even if dead, mind you, he may have left behind him some of the fruits of his evil efforts."

"Such as what?" growled Coleman, who was listening.

"Indiscreet letters purloined by servants secretly in his employ," replied Plaquet. "Political documents secured through the agency of treacherous clerks willing to steal for money. Evidence of family skeletons, closeted for years, very likely, yet which this rascal may have obtained some inkling of, enabling him to secure proofs which——"

"If he has been murdered, as reported," interposed Boyd, "he in turn may have been the victim of one whom he has wronged."

"Or one whom he had it in his power to wrong," Plaquet pointedly added.

"True."

"Yes, yes, I have thought of that. I should say so, indeed!"

Boyd glanced furtively at him. He did not quite fancy his tone, and even less the look on the face of the young French detective.

"You have some such person in mind?" he inquired, with affected indifference.

Plaquet quickly shook his head.

"No, no, not I," he rejoined. "I know only what I have told you, save that Lacenaire is said to have kept himself well guarded against foes bent upon private revenge. His caution should have been doubled of late, moreover, since he soon is to marry no less lovely and distinguished a girl than Mademoiselle Clarisse, the daughter of our president."

"President!" echoed Boyd, with brows quickly lifted. "Surely, Plaquet, you do not refer to the president of France?"

"Does that surprise you, eh? Well, well, I refer to none other."

"Lacenaire to marry his daughter!"

"It has been reported and not denied —significant, eh? Lacenaire has been remodeling the rear of his superb residence, moreover, in anticipation of the event. *Pardieu!* it would be well for Mademoiselle Clarisse, in my opinion, if the man is dead," Plaquet dryly added, with an intonation Boyd was quick to notice. "No more, gentlemen. Here is the house."

Boyd surveyed with rather grim interest the place they had approached. The magnificence of many of the private residences of Paris is one of the chief features of the city. That at the entrance to which the auto-car was slowing down was a handsome Renaissance building, occupying an extensive park and garden, the rear grounds of

which reached to the south bank of the Seine. The superb house was set well back from the avenue on which it fronted, from which the estate was separated by a massive iron palisade. The broad windows of the ornamented façade were heavily draped with rich lace curtains, and Boyd rightly inferred that the entire interior was furnished with an elegance corresponding with the external beauties at once observable.

The news of the crime, if such it was, had not spread. There was no throng of morbidly curious spectators lined up at the fence, or gathered near the heavy iron gate. The latter was opened by a servant, who evidently had been stationed there with instructions to admit the detective. He glanced a bit doubtfully at Boyd and Jimmie Coleman, but offered no objection when Plaquet signed for them to enter.

The gate clanged noisily behind them. Plaquet led the way along a gravel drive to the east of the house, passing under a huge porte-cochère at the side entrance, and the three presently came in view of the rear park and garden, the waiting gendarmes, the motionless figure near them, and the glistening sweep of the sunlit Seine fully a hundred yards away.

The customary beauty of the scene, however, was marred by the work then being done, of which Plaquet had spoken. A quantity of lumber, huge blocks of cut stone, barrels of lime and cement, a bed partly filled with mortar, several piles of brown sand, along with no end of refuse from demolished walls —these covered much of the ground immediately back of the great mansion, portions of the rear wall of which had been removed, and in part reconstructed. Yet sections of the wall and foundation still were incomplete, with heaps of earth and refuse near-by. Through a breach in the foundation wall, as well as through several cellar windows that had been removed, the obscure interior of a vast basement was dimly revealed, also obstructed with dirt and rubbish and heavy shoring-timbers.

Boyd took in with a glance the features mentioned, and was vaguely impressed with the magnitude of the work. Yet he still was dwelling grimly upon the disclosures made by Plaquet. He wondered at the marriage of this Lacenaire to so distinguished a girl as the daughter of the president of the French republic. He already surmised that there might be something back of such an alliance, something under the surface, which possibly had given rise to the crime discovered that morning. He felt sure that Plaquet entertained the same misgivings, despite his politic denial and a probability that he would, until in possession of absolute proofs against the guilty, suppress any disclosures implicating the foremost statesman in France.

Boyd followed him without speaking, and heard his few inquiries addressed to the gendarmes. It appeared that the body of Lacenaire had been discovered about six o'clock by one of the servants, who had given the alarm and hastened to notify the police of that *arrondisscment,* officers having been quickly sent to take charge. Plaquet remarked that he would begin his investigation by questioning the servants, yet he briefly lingered to raise the cloak from the corpse and look at the upturned face.

It was that of a man nearly fifty, a broad, smoothly shaven face, with a square jaw and chin, a prominent nose, and a low brow, the paleness of which now was accentuated by a short, thick crop of coal-black hair. Though the features were convulsed and distorted, one could easily read the hard lines still unobliterated about the broad, drawn mouth; and Boyd quickly noticed that the gray lips of the dead man, as well as the edges of his nostrils, were flecked with dry blood.

"A violent death—very violent!" he quietly remarked, at Plaquet's elbow. "His face still expresses the awful fear and horror of which he last was conscious."

"At the moment of his death?"

"Precisely. I would not wish to die as this man died."

"The face is repulsive." Plaquet

dropped the cloak, then quickly added: "We presently will look deeper into this. I first must question the servants. Come with me, gentlemen, if you wish."

Both Boyd and Coleman followed him into the house. There the testimony of the several servants, together with the ravages committed in the handsomely furnished library of the dwelling, seemed to establish beyond any reasonable doubt the motive for the crime and the identity of the criminal.

It appeared that one of the servants was missing, a man named Pierre Gevrol, who recently had been employed by Lacenaire as a private secretary. Yet it was known that Gevrol had retired early to his chamber the previous evening.

Some hours later, or about midnight, two female servants occupying a rear attic room had been awakened by three affrighted shrieks in quick succession from some quarter out of doors. Neither woman had arisen to look from the window, however, and, upon hearing no further disturbance, they had concluded that the cries were those of some night brawlers on or near the river. Yet when they arose to dress at six o'clock that morning, they had observed the body of Lacenaire lying on the ground several rods back of the house.

An alarm had been quickly spread and the household aroused. It then was found that Lacenaire had not occupied his bed, though he was known to have gone to his chamber, and that he still was fully dressed as when at dinner the previous evening. It also was discovered that a side door of the house was open, that Gevrol was missing, and that a safe and two desks in the library had been forcibly opened, and that most of their contents were strewn broadcast over the floor. Of Pierre Gevrol, however, or where he previously had lived, none of the servants could give Plaquet any information, the man having been an entire stranger to all.

Such was the story told by the several servants, whom Plaquet at once had summoned into the library and hurriedly questioned. It was obvious that he quickly had formed a theory in explanation of the crime.

"*Pardieu!* it's very simple," he declared, after dismissing the servants and warning none to leave the house without permission. "Robbery was the motive, and Gevrol the criminal."

"Sure thing," growled Jimmie Coleman, with a nod of grim approval. "It's plain on the face of it."

"Lacenaire blindly employed a professional thief, one who probably imposed forged recommendations upon him. Gevrol has been here only three weeks, we are told, and he evidently has been awaiting a favorable night for this robbery."

"That's about the size of it, Plaquet."

"He may have had confederates, whom he quietly admitted to aid him," Plaquet glibly continued. "Lacenaire must have heard the rascals at work here. He came down from his chamber to see what was wrong, and the thieves evidently fled. Lacenaire must have followed them out of the side door to the rear of the house, where an encounter occurred, resulting in his death."

"Yes, yes, that's the case in a nutshell," Coleman again assented. "It is as simple as two times two. Are we right, Felix?"

Mr. Felix Boyd had not spoken since entering the room. Though an attentive listener, he apparently had heard but little of the testimony of the several servants. In a quiet way, moving about at times with an air inviting no attention, with scarce a change of expression on his grave, white face, he had been mutely looking into the evidence the room presented. Now he surprised his two companions by curtly replying with a sharp glance at each:

"Far from right, Jimmie! You're both wrong—egregiously wrong!"

"Wrong—impossible!" cried Plaquet, staring. "Why do you say that?"

The eyes of Felix Boyd took on a sharper gleam. Never doubting his own discernment and deductions, he was habitually quick to resent the doubts

and opposition of others. Coleman was very well aware of this, and he was not much surprised at the curtness with which Boyd responded.

"I say to you only what the evidence here says to me," he quickly answered. "You have eyes with which to see it, Plaquet, and brains with which to read it."

Plaquet frowned slightly, and gazed at the littered floor, strewn with letters, documents, and papers; at the open safe, nearly rifled of its contents; at the two library desks, the drawers of which had been pulled out and emptied, while the back of one had been broken and wrenched from the sides, in an obvious attempt to discover any secret drawer that it might contain.

The asperity of Boyd, together with his startling declaration, served to intensify the scene, and had a diverting effect. Neither of the three men heard the light footsteps in an adjoining parlor, nor the faint rustle of moving skirts; nor did either notice that a gloved hand momentarily grasped the folds of a heavy portière that hung across the broad doorway between the two rooms. Yet the hand was withdrawn almost instantly—but there was no sound of retreating steps.

A girl remained, listening, at the drawn portière. She was pale and agitated. Her lips were trembling nervously. Her glistening blue eyes reflected unspeakable distress and suppressed excitement. With ears strained, with hands pressed to her breast, with breathing hushed, she stood alone there, a vision of loveliness in dark-blue velvet, a girl still under twenty, the age of daring impulses and desperate resolves—a girl with a face and figure to have inspired the genius of a Raphael or a Correggio.

"But, my dear Boyd," Plaquet presently protested, "I fail to see why you assert——"

"Faugh!" Boyd quickly interrupted him, pointing at the open safe. "That is not the work of a professional burglar, Plaquet, as you have inferred. It is not the work of an ordinary thief, who had craftily imposed upon Lacenaire and won his confidence. You see only that the interior drawers of the safe have been forcibly pried open. You fail to see, Plaquet, that the main door of the safe was not forced, that it must have been opened by some person informed of the combination."

"Unless left open by Lacenaire himself," put in Coleman.

"That's not at all likely, Jimmie."

"Yet even that must have been the work of Gevrol," insisted Plaquet. "If Lacenaire employed him as a private secretary, he naturally would have trusted him with the combination."

"With the combination—yes!" Boyd curtly admitted. "But not with the keys of the inner drawers. This evidence admits of only one deduction—Lacenaire employed Gevrol upon work making it necessary for him to have access to parts of the safe, but not to the private drawers."

"There's something in that," declared Coleman.

"Yet plainly enough, Jimmie, only the contents of these drawers were of special interest to Gevrol, for last night he made a final desperate attempt to open and examine them."

"Why do you say a final attempt?" demanded Plaquet. "There is no evidence of any previous one."

"You are wrong."

"Wrong again, eh?"

"Surely, surely," insisted Boyd, with augmented earnestness. "This Gevrol was not a common thief. He had no confederates. He was not seeking articles of intrinsic value. Ever since his advent to this house, Plaquet, he has been searching for something of far greater value to him than money, securities, or jewels, which you have inferred were his quest. You should easily guess what he really was after, Plaquet, since you know of the base character and rascally projects of Lacenaire."

"*Sacré!*" Plaquet forcibly muttered, with countenance changing. "You think that he was after letters, documents, or——"

"Or something of the kind—something that threatened his reputation and

him," Boyd again interrupted. "Only welfare, or those of one most dear to the hope of preserving life, honor, or love could have led this man to venture doing what he has done. Gevrol has been engaged for days, Plaquet, in this secret and finally desperate search."

"Why do you say that?" cried Plaquet perplexedly. "How do you know that?"

Boyd laughed a bit derisively, a laugh not pleasant to hear. His detective genius was piqued. His hunter's instinct was let loose, that heritage of past ages which still is strong in mankind. There is no hunt so baffling, complex, and interesting as a hunt after a man; and it is this instinct of the hunter and the character of the quarry, far more than the profits and legal ends to be attained, that produce the very superior detective.

II.

The eavesdropper had not stirred. Mute, motionless, scarce breathing, with her lithe and graceful figure bowed near the portière, she continued to listen. Her white face reflected her dismay at what she heard. It was as if each word of Boyd's vigorous argument, each point brought out by his incisive reasoning, was like a knife-thrust in her heart. Twice she was impelled to cast aside the portière and silence him; yet each impulse was resisted, and each left her more ghastly and dismayed.

In response to Plaquet's eager questions, Felix Boyd quickly drew him nearer one of the walls and farther from the two side windows.

"You ask how I know that Gevrol has been engaged for days in a secret search here," he said quickly. "Observe the polished wainscot on the lower part of this wall. Where the light from the windows is reflected from it, Plaquet, you may detect on each narrow panel a small round spot, a faint defacement of the varnish, as if each board had been lightly struck with a hammer. Can you see them, eh?"

"Yes, yes, now that you point them out," cried Plaquet. "Yet they are barely discernible."

"Why, why, of course," assented Boyd, with an odd curl of his lip. "What more would you expect? Would any sane man, engaged in cautiously sounding the wainscot in search of some secret concealment, have marred the panels in a way to be easily detected? No, no, never, Plaquet."

"You think Gevrol did that?"

"I know that he did."

"Why so sure? It may have been the work of another, and done long ago."

"That might be true, Plaquet, were it not for other work recently done here with the same design."

"Other work?"

"Notice in this corner, where the carpet meets the wall, the tacks have recently been drawn out and replaced," Boyd quickly explained, drawing Plaquet to a crouching posture on the floor. "Note that there is no dust close about them. You will find the same evidence in other corners of the room. I discovered it while you were interrogating the servants. The carpet has recently been lifted in places, Plaquet, in a search for some secret concealment under the floor."

"But how do you know that it was so recently done?"

"That is perfectly plain. Between the edge of the carpet and the wall there is no collection of dust and lint, which should gather within a few days, at least. Plainly, moreover, the carpet has not been taken up and beaten for many months. Do you see the point, Plaquet?"

"Yes, yes, there is no refuting it. *Pardieu,* my dear Boyd, your craft amazes me."

Boyd arose with a laugh, less unpleasant than before, for the interest and admiration of Plaquet were more acceptable than his doubtful inquiries.

"I will convince you of something more," he quickly continued. "I will prove not only that Gevrol was the culprit, not only that he has been secretly searching this room when Lacenaire and the servants were absent, but also

that he failed to find in the safe drawers the object of his search."

"You can do that, eh?"

"The evidence here proclaims it," said Boyd, with a wave of his hand. "Gevrol had failed to find, either back of the wainscot or under the carpet, the hidden object he was seeking. Last night he made a more desperate attempt, Plaquet, and forced open the inner drawers of the safe. In those, also, he failed to find what he sought."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he then proceeded to force the drawers of these two desks," Boyd pointedly answered. "Notice this one, Plaquet, which he drew out from the wall in order to break through the back of it. He was trying to locate—ah, just as I thought! Here on the inner side is a hidden spring, and here on the floor is a secret drawer, which, plainly enough, Gevrol had reason to believe existed, and which he finally discovered."

"By thunder!" Coleman grimly exclaimed, as Boyd dove back of the desk and picked up the empty drawer. "You've hit the nail on the head, Felix, for a thousand."

"It was in this, Jimmie, that Gevrol found what he sought—and something more!"

"Something more?"

"If you want evidence of that, Plaquet, behold the charred remnants of burned papers in the fireplace. They indicate that Gevrol was not half a bad fellow. He not only found, in this secret hiding-place in which Lacenaire kept his levers for evil, the special object he was seeking, but also much that he inferred threatened others. They have reason to thank him for his work of destruction. Yes, yes, Plaquet, he found what he sought, and made off with it—shall I tell you how I know that?"

"If you please, my dear Boyd." Plaquet spoke with the humility of a man who felt himself addressing one vastly his superior.

"For two reasons, Plaquet," Boyd explained. "Only a man in desperate straits would have attempted what Gevrol has accomplished. Such a man, failing to have found what he sought, and unexpectedly discovered at his work by Lacenaire, as appears most probable—such a man, Plaquet, would have compelled the miscreant to give up the article desired, or he would have murdered him on the spot. There would have been no mediate course. That Gevrol has fled is a sufficient proof that he carried away what he had been seeking, and if——"

"Wait!" Plaquet excitedly interrupted. "You have set me on just the right track. Lacenaire must have discovered Gevrol as he was departing. He pursued him from the house, overtaking him in the garden, and there Gevrol must have slain him."

"That now appears to be the case," Boyd quickly admitted. "We should find further evidence of it outside. Come, come, we will see. The corpse of Lacenaire should reveal how the deed was done, and who——"

"Gentlemen, pardon!"

Now the interruption came from the girl who had been listening. She had swept aside the portière and stepped into the room. If Felix Boyd could have seen her during the several minutes in which he had been stating the results of his discernment and deductions, he would have known why her features were so drawn, why her cheeks were as white as the knot of lace at her pulsing throat.

Coleman caught his breath when he beheld her, and Felix Boyd drew back a step in surprise. Plaquet at once bowed very low, however, saying in accents of mingled amazement, sympathy, and profound respect:

"Mademoiselle Clarisse—you here!"

The girl drew up her lithe, slender figure and steadied herself with an effort.

"Word was sent to me by the servants, Monsieur Plaquet," she replied, with her gaze fixed upon him. "I was here when you arrived, yet have not felt it wise to intrude before. I judge that you now are investigating this dreadful affair."

The voice of mademoiselle was steady

now, but it was icily cold, and Plaquet bowed low again, not presuming to introduce his companions.

"Yes, mademoiselle," he said gravely. "I was on the point of going out to examine the body of——"

The girl interrupted him, still with that cold voice and steady stare.

"Let me not detain you, Monsieur Plaquet. Proceed without needless delay, I entreat you, that the body may be removed to the house. I shall await your consent with impatience."

"I will waste not a moment, mademoiselle. I will go at once."

Plaquet bowed once more, then hastened from the room. The Central Office man strode after him, passing into the hall, and Felix Boyd was about to follow. Before he had reached the door, however, the girl darted across the room and grasped his arm, her face transfigured, her eyes aglow with indescribable light.

"Wait—I must see you alone!" she whispered, with suppressed intensity. "I have been to your hotel, only to find you absent. I then came here, leaving word for you to follow, but I did not dream that you would come with Plaquet. I must have help—such help as you can give me. Yet we must not be overheard. I'll make sure of that—wait till I make sure!"

One less self-possessed than Felix Boyd would have been dumfounded. This unexpected move of Clarisse, her violent agitation, her frantic whispers, her words of hurried explanation and appeal, her obvious alarm, excitement, and distress—these combined, not to stagger Boyd, but to convince him that his earlier impressions were correct, that there was more in this case than appeared on the surface. He saw, too, that his professional services were unexpectedly required in some great emergency, a fact alone sufficient to steady his every nerve and call into play the strongest part of his nature.

Mademoiselle Clarisse had darted away, to peer first into the parlor and then into the hall, the door of which she closed, after briefly listening. When she hastened back to Boyd, she found him in a position from which he could watch the parlor, and she read in his face that he already grasped the general character of the situation.

She came and stood before him, crying softly, excitedly:

"Haste is imperative. I am a stranger to you. My name——"

"I already know it."

"My father——"

"He is the president of France."

"You can serve him in a way——"

"You have only to command me."

"Monsieur——"

"Hush!" Boyd's hand closed firmly around her wrist and steadied her. "The service before the thanks, mademoiselle. I judge that your father was in some way threatened by this man Lacenaire."

"Yes."

"Why this appeal to me? Why has he not employed the French police?"

"It was a matter that could not be confided even to the secret police."

"Political?"

"Yes."

"You have been to my hotel, you said. Was that with your father's sanction?"

"Yes, yes! Pray let me explain," pleaded Clarisse. "Every instant is of value. If you——"

"Stop a moment," Boyd interrupted, with his face grown even more grave. "I will not become involved in any political affair. Before taking any step in this matter, mademoiselle, I must know the whole truth."

"You shall—only the truth can save us!"

"State it, then, as briefly as possible."

"It may be told with a breath," whispered Clarisse, in renewed agitation. "This Lacenaire was a miscreant—a fiend—a devil! He was a spider, hideous and horrible, with a web constantly spread for new victims. He lived by blackmail, by the ruin of——"

"Come to the point, mademoiselle, if time is of value."

"I will—you are right. Three months ago Lacenaire in some way got possession of a secret document of immense political significance, the publication of which would irretrievably ruin

my father and seriously affect the Liberal party, of which he is the head. This document, the precise nature of which I cannot disclose, was stolen from my father's private vault in the state department——"

"Is the thief known?"

"Alas, no! The theft is a mystery. The loss of the document has been suppressed—the welfare of France depended upon it. Two months ago, however, Lacenaire secretly informed my father that it was in his possession, that it would be restored to him on two conditions—a heavy payment in cash and my own hand in marriage!"

"Humph!" muttered Boyd. "A rascal, indeed!"

"I must not dwell upon details," Clarisse went on, in frantic whispers. "Lacenaire threatened an immediate publication of the document if his conditions were opposed, and the situation left no alternative. The cash payment was made to insure the temporary silence of this knave, and my marriage with him was agreed upon. In order to gain time, however, with a design to secretly take steps to recover the document, the date of the marriage was made as remote as possible."

"Ah, I see," muttered Boyd. "Gevrol was in your father's employ."

"Precisely," nodded Clarisse. "Yet his name is Deverge, not Gevrol. He is a young man to whom I already was betrothed, and to whom the desperate situation was confided. Feeling sure that the document was concealed in this house, Deverge suggested a plan by which to recover it. In disguise, and with the aid of friends who had influence upon Lacenaire——"

"I understand—he obtained employment here under the name of Gevrol," Boyd now interrupted. "What more? What occurred here last night?"

"You already have deduced that—and, alas! you have imparted your suspicions to Plaquet," Clarisse hurriedly rejoined. "Your deductions from the evidence here are absolutely correct. I have heard all, listening at the portière, and the situation that now involves Deverge, as well as——"

"Stop a moment," Boyd checked her again. "Did he recover the document?"

"Yes."

"Where is it now?"

"Restored to my father, thank God! But the death of Lacenaire——"

"Did he discover Deverge at work here?"

"Not until he was about to depart, when he at once guessed the truth. He pursued Deverge from the house and into the garden, where Deverge eluded him in the darkness and hastened to my home. There he remained until this morning, when we received the startling news that Lacenaire had been found dead, murdered in his garden."

"Ah, now I see the point," muttered Boyd, with brows knitting. "Your lover, Deverge, who has taken these chances for your sake and your father's, knows nothing about this murder."

"Absolutely nothing."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I would stake my life upon it."

"You have questioned him about what occurred here?"

"Yes. We thoroughly discussed the situation before I left home—Deverge, my father, and myself."

"Deverge eluded Lacenaire in the garden, I think you said?"

"Yes."

"Did he see or hear any third person there?"

"He did not. I asked him that question."

"It must have been nearly midnight when he left here?"

"He heard the clocks strike twelve just as he left the garden, climbing over the west wall."

"I see—I see!" said Boyd, with grave deliberation. "It now is Deverge who is threatened, instead of your father."

"We all are threatened, all are desperately involved," moaned Clarisse, in piteous agitation. "Heaven help us! do you not see? It is known to others that Deverge was here. His identity can be easily established by the police. It can be proved that he committed these breaks, that he destroyed other papers and letters which he discovered, that he fled from this house to-night, that Lace-

naire must have seen him and followed him out of doors—merciful heavens! did not Plaquet declare that you had set him on the right track?"

"Yes, yes, I see!"

"Deverge will be accused of the murder. A denial will avail him nothing against this incriminating evidence. The whole truth will come out, must come out, in the investigation that will follow, and the nature of the stolen document must be revealed. This is inevitable unless you—it was for this that I sought you—unless you can prove the innocence of Deverge by establishing the identity of the real assassin. Unless you can do this we are lost. The arrest of Deverge will be inevitable. The disclosures that must follow will bring utter ruin upon——"

"Stop a bit!" said Boyd.

The hands of Clarisse, from which she had stripped her long gloves, now were twined about his arm in piteous entreaty; her pathetic face was raised appealingly to his.

An unusual paleness had, in fact, settled upon his own features. He looked grim and austere, while a threatening fire deep down in his frowning eyes told how deeply he was moved. Boyd now saw what he had done, in how far he had set Plaquet on the track of a man who, if innocent of the murder, was entirely justified in the other steps that he had taken. Boyd fully realized, too, how vain would be any appeal to the French police without a disclosure of the whole truth, which was the one most serious thing to be averted. He stared down for a moment at the upturned face and pleading eyes of the girl confronting him.

"This business here, the theft apparently committed," he said abruptly—"can Deverge be got out of this scrape, providing the assassin of Lacenaire is found?"

"Yes, easily," cried Clarisse. "We discussed that before I left home, before I hastened to your hotel. The police will wink at the lesser crime, already knowing Lacenaire's reputation and——"

"Enough of that, if it be so," Boyd quickly interrupted. "But at whose suggestion have you appealed to me? Your father's, your lover's, or——"

"My own!" admitted Clarisse, yet her gaze dropped and a wave of red surged over her cheeks.

"What impelled you to this?" asked Boyd, and his frown was vanishing.

She looked up at him with swimming eyes.

"I resolved to appeal to you in person," she murmured, with feeling, "because I know what you have accomplished during your brief stay in Paris. I should be less than a woman if I could not appreciate the generous service you rendered the unfortunate Madame Valdroski. France already is eternally indebted to you for the speedy recovery of the stolen Venus de Milo. And now—oh, Mr. Boyd, the love of a French girl, the integrity of a French statesman depend upon——"

"Here goes, then, to preserve both!" Boyd interrupted her in a way that thrilled her from head to foot.

"Monsieur——"

"Hush! Time, indeed, is of value. I will give you my services—yet I can give you no hope. I have set Plaquet on the right track—to turn him from it may not prove easy. If you would know more, mademoiselle, await my return."

The girl held out her hands, would have uttered a word of thanks, a cry of gratitude—but Felix Boyd was vanishing into the hall.

III.

Boyd found the gendarmes still waiting, and both Plaquet and Jimmie Coleman were bending above the lifeless body on the ground.

"Well, well, Jimmie, what do you make of it?" he asked bluntly, as he approached.

Coleman looked up with a growl.

"Blessed if I know!" he tersely answered. "It beats me, Felix."

"Beats you?"

"The man's dead, all right; but there's not a wound on him worth

speaking of, or that would have killed a kid."

"These slashes in his coat were made with a sharp knife," put in Plaquet. "And here are spots of blood on the coat——"

"Not his blood," growled Coleman curtly. "There's not a sign of a wound in that locality, from which the blood could have come, nor any indication that——"

"Stop a bit, Jimmie. Let me have a look."

Coleman drew away and Boyd dropped to his knee beside the dead man. He found in the dark house-coat worn by Lacenaire several clean-cut slashes, as if attempts had been made merely to gash the cloth. These were in front, and just above the waist, while near to them were several dark-red stains. Yet in no instance had the blade of the weapon wounded the man.

"Humph!" muttered Boyd perplexedly. "These are curious, indeed."

"He may have died of fright, or heart-disease," said Plaquet; "yet it appears plain that he had an encounter with—what's that? Is his watch broken?"

"Yes."

Boyd had drawn from Lacenaire's vest pocket a heavy gold watch. As he snapped it open, the crystal fell in tinkling fragments into the palm of his hand. He glanced at the face, and saw that the works must have been damaged, for the watch had stopped.

"Precisely twelve, Plaquet," he added, showing it to the latter. "Just about the time we decided that Gevrol departed, and precisely the time the two servants heard the shrieks."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Coleman. "That fixes the exact time of the crime, all right."

Plaquet still was vainly searching for a wound on the dead man. "The watch was broken in a struggle with his assailant," he impatiently declared. "Gevrol may have been wounded with his own weapon while vainly attempting to use it. That might explain these blood-stains. Lacenaire certainly had a desperate struggle with him, or with some man, for his coat is streaked with dirt, exactly as if a pair of powerful arms, in soiled sleeves, had grasped him around the body."

"Soiled sleeves, eh?" echoed Boyd. "Such a man should not have been Gevrol, Plaquet."

"He may have been a confederate. I still suspect that he had one."

"Possibly."

"You may see for yourself, by slightly turning Lacenaire's body, that these dirt-streaks run entirely around him. The ground about here, moreover, plainly shows that there was a desperate conflict."

"The devil!"

Felix Boyd muttered the last inaudibly. With a glance at the dead man's face, at the blood flecking his lips and nostrils, Boyd had abruptly risen to his feet.

"What now?" Coleman was startled by his looks.

Boyd did not answer him. His lips were drawn, his cheeks had gone strangely white. He stared at the ground for a moment, then glanced at the house, then toward the rear grounds and the glistening Seine.

In all directions the ground was covered with loose earth, sand, and dirt, occasioned by the masonry work then in progress. A portion of the rear wall of the estate had been taken down for the admission of wagons and drays from the *quai* skirting the river, by which were brought in the huge blocks of stone and other materials used by the masons.

"You look as if you'd received your death notice," snarled Coleman irritably. "What the devil are you looking for?"

"A wheelbarrow," said Boyd, without a change of countenance. "You don't see one about here, do you?"

"No," snapped Coleman. "Why a wheelbarrow?"

"Because one has been used here." Boyd came out of his brief, indescribable absorption with startling abruptness. Pointing to the ground near-by, he added rapidly: "Note the prints left by heavy boots, Jimmie. Surely not

those of Gevrol, nor of Lacenaire. The wearer darted about here in great haste and excitement—see the depth of the impressions and the many directions in which they point, and all are within a dozen feet of the body. There, too, some yards away, something appears to have been dragged over the loose sand. A desperate conflict, eh? I think——"

"What in thunder do you think?—that's the question!" Coleman churlishly cried. "At what are you driving?"

"Come this way, Jimmie. You, too, Plaquet, if you like."

The gendarmes stared in amazement, and one smiled a bit contemptuously. The perplexity of Felix Boyd appeared to have been dispelled. He had spoken hurriedly, excitedly, still strangely pale and grave. Followed by his two companions, he hastened toward the rear grounds, until he reached a spot some thirty feet away, where a single deep line in the loose earth had caught his eye.

"Here you see it, Jimmie, the track left by the wheel of a barrow," he cried.

"Well, well, what of it?"

"Where it crosses the wagon-tracks left yesterday afternoon, Jimmie, note that it obliterates them. Plainly, then, a barrow was used here yesterday evening."

"Suppose it was," growled Coleman impatiently. "One of the workmen may have been wheeling it. What can an infernal barrow have to do with the case?"

"More than you think," retorted Boyd, with his restless eyes still searching the ground. "Note here, Jimmie, the same imprints of broad boots that we saw near the body. They mingle with the track left by the barrow's wheel, plainly showing that the wearer of the boots was pushing the barrow."

"But what if he was, my dear Boyd?" cried Plaquet perplexedly. "I can see nothing in this, and we appear to waste time. Tell me——"

Boyd, still strangely white and frowning, interrupted him with a gesture of insuperable impatience.

"You tell me," he cried, "why the man whose boots left these imprints was pushing a barrow here last night, and why he was darting madly around Lacenaire at precisely twelve o'clock, and I will tell you——"

"Oh, by thunder!" Coleman interrupted him with an impulsive shout. "I now see the point, Felix."

Upon Plaquet, too, there seemed suddenly to dawn a great light.

"If you finally see it, Jimmie, don't delay me," said Boyd, with caustic dryness. "Note that these imprints point toward the broad gap in the rear wall. The man was wheeling the barrow out of these grounds—yes, by Jove! and here he began running. Note the greater length of his stride, and that his heels hardly touched the ground."

"No doubt of it—not a shadow of doubt. Yet——"

"Stop a bit!" Boyd abruptly halted and drew himself up to gaze sharply about. "The fellow must have entered the grounds, since he was leaving them. We should be able to find—ah, there we have it. This way, Jimmie, for a moment."

He darted twenty yards to one side while he spoke, and there, running in an opposite direction, or toward the house of Lacenaire, Boyd paused at the same indubitable tracks left by a man and a barrow.

"Here we have it, Jimmie," he cried. "This is the course taken by the fellow when he entered. He was a bit drunk, judging by the zigzag line he traveled. He departed much more directly. Something had sobered him, take my word for that. This way he went, and —ha! here's the very thing, Jimmie!"

"What now?" cried Coleman. "What have you found?"

Boyd pointed to a large block of cut stone lying near an excavation some two feet deep in the surrounding gravel. The hole was partly filled with refuse and rocks, and near the edge of it was a sharp, angular indenture in the ground, at which Boyd laughed with a sort of delirious excitement, for which the Central Office man could by no

means account—not so much as dreaming its occasion.

"In the darkness, Jimmie, the man ran his barrow against this block of stone," said Boyd, while he pointed. "Something he was wheeling, evidently a box or trunk, was forcibly thrown out—note where one corner of it struck in the gravel. Doubtless, too, it pitched violently down among those rocks—ha! I am right."

Boyd had shrunk back a step with a startling gasp and shudder.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" cried Coleman half-angrily. "You appear——"

"Don't interfere—don't check me, Jimmie," Boyd sharply interrupted. "Come with me. I must see if the fellow took the box away with him, providing there is evidence to be found. This way, both of you."

There was, in fact, no checking Felix Boyd on such an occasion as this. With the eagerness, energy, and impatience habitual to him at such times, there now was mingled a nervous apprehension that greatly puzzled the Central Office man; while as for Plaquet, he was being treated to a sample of American detective work that quite awed and silenced him.

With both at his heels, however, Boyd ran back to the impressions originally discovered, and began to follow them toward the broad gap in the rear wall of the grounds. They led him through the gap, and then were lost on the hard pavements of the *quai* skirting the river.

"Humph!" Boyd ejaculated, halting. "It's my impression that the fellow strayed in here by accident or mistake, in the darkness. He may have been so drunk that he could not see well, or was not familiar with his way, or—well, well, we've lost him. Stop a bit! he may have——"

Without waiting to express what he had in mind, Boyd darted over to the walled bank of the stream to peer over the edge, and there another exultant cry broke from him. Twenty feet to one side, lodged amid some piles and stonework, there floated in the water a faded old chest, evidently a seaman's chest, which had been dumped into the river and lodged as stated, instead of floating away, as might reasonably have been expected.

Reaching down amid the piles until he could grasp a rusty iron handle in one end of the chest, Boyd quickly drew it to the wall and began to examine it, again watched with wide eyes by his surprised companions.

"Empty—just as I thought!" he quickly exclaimed, without a glance at them. "It's a sailor's chest, Jimmie, of foreign make. There's no telling—hold up! Here's a name burned in the front. It's barely discernible—ah, I have it. X. Matteos—a Greek name. It may be Xavier, or Ximenes, or the devil knows what—it does not matter! Note the brass clasps to secure the cover, Jimmie. They might snap loose under a violent blow. And see—auger-holes in the bottom. Possibly vents for airing his clothing. This completes the chain of——"

He broke off abruptly and started to his feet, leaving the chest lying on the wall. Turning to Plaquet, he quickly added, with enigmatical significance:

"If you wish to know more after this infernal racket is ended, Plaquet—the few precise details I may be unable to give you—look up X. Matteos, Greek sailor, signed aboard some vessel now in the Seine, and possibly he will tell you—yet I'm not sure, God knows, that I would care to hear what he would tell you!"

"But, my dear Boyd, please explain what you mean by all this——"

"Faugh! There is no time—not a moment now to be lost. We are booked for a mix-up to try the stoutest nerves. Come with me, both of you."

The curt voice of the speaker, the shining eyes, the white face—these silenced and awed Plaquet.

Jimmie Coleman, even, was perplexed and a bit dismayed.

Yet both men followed Felix Boyd when he returned to the grounds and hastened toward the house of Lacenaire. As he approached the dead man he glanced again at the soiled streaks

around the prostrate figure, then at the loose sand covering the ground between the body and the house. And when he spoke, Coleman again saw an irrepressible shudder pass through him, and his voice sounded strangely hoarse.

"Looks as if something had been dragged over this sand—eh, Jimmie?" he cried. "It's the trail left by—we must see! We must see!" He wheeled sharply to the gendarmes, and added: "Lend me your swords, two of them, please. One for you, Jimmie. I'll feel easier with it in your hand than in one of—well, well, I know the stuff you're made of! Now follow me, every man of you, and be ready with your weapons."

"God above!" gasped Coleman, half-chilled. "Say at least, Felix, against what you would lead us."

Boyd turned and curtly mentioned a creature the name of which sent the color from every cheek.

"You know the nature of such reptiles," he quickly added. "They run to cover amid rocks and stones, or into dark holes, or—come, come, follow me, Jimmie, and be alert!"

Before the last was said, Boyd was striding toward the rear wall of the house, toward the break in the foundation wall, and the dim basement within. Despite the nerve-racking prospect, Coleman, Plaquet, and the three gendarmes were at his heels. Every man of them was exceedingly pale—yet these were men who would have faced without trepidation a maniac or a mad dog.

When he came to the refuse-covered declivity leading into the basement, Boyd stepped more quietly, and signed for his companions to do likewise. In a moment, with Coleman close behind him, he reached the floor of the cellar, into which he cautiously advanced, peering sharply this way and that.

Presently he halted, and Coleman said through his teeth:

"God! I heard something from that direction."

He pointed to the right, where a pile of rocks and stones still remained on the basement floor.

"As if something moved?" queried Boyd.

"Yes."

"Send a bullet that way, Jimmie. We'll see what it brings forth. We must locate the creature, let come what may. Be ready, Plaquet, and you fellows. Steady, Jimmie!"

The Central Office man drew his revolver with his left hand and fired—he held a gendarme's sword in his right.

The report of the weapon broke like a crash of thunder through the confines of the place.

The white smoke curled upward, and was lost amid cobweb-festooned beams overhead.

There was half a minute of silence—of strained eyes, ears, and nerves.

"Try again, Jimmie," whispered Boyd. "Aim a little more to the right."

Bang!

Now the desired end was attained. The smoke scarce had cleared away when there came from Felix Boyd a shriek that rang like the top note of a calliope through the cellar.

"Look out! To the left, Jimmie! This way for me! Get at him!"

The hiss of glittering blades sweeping through the air, the horrible convulsions of a huge, writhing, hideous body; the yells of men frantic for a moment—and in ten seconds all was over!

Jimmie Coleman staggered back and sank ghastly white on a block of stone.

Mr. Felix Boyd cast down a gory weapon, sprang up the acclivity leading from the cellar, then darted around to the side door, and entered the house.

Mademoiselle Clarisse, a vision of loveliness in blue velvet, yet as white as marble, stood trembling in the hall, with her hands pressed to her breast.

Felix Boyd approached her with a bow, saying with curious quietude and complacency:

"I have the honor, mademoiselle, to have served you successfully. Seal your lips and leave me to seal those of Plaquet. I have discovered—what killed Lacenaire!"

"Killed by one of his own species, Jimmie, that's about the size of it," said

Felix Boyd, while the two were dressing for lunch that day. "Fantastic—that's the word!"

"Ugh! I should say as much," growled Coleman, with a shudder.

"Yes, yes, infernally fantastic, Jimmie. I don't fancy such an affair, nor such an opponent."

"Nor I, Felix. Good twenty feet long, wasn't he? How the dickens do you suppose it all came about?"

Boyd turned from the mirror, at which he was knotting his cravat, and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"I reckon the precise details may never be known, Jimmie," he replied thoughtfully. "It's odd that Matteos, despite that he intended no evil, has scurried out of Paris at the top of his speed."

"I guess you're right; poor devil."

"Plaquet has informed me, however, that he has located the vessel on which the Greek sailor was signed. She arrived only a day or two ago from South America, it appears, where Matteos had obtained the infernal boa-constrictor and brought it over here in his chest. One of the crew gave Plaquet this information."

"Ah, I see."

"Last night, it appears, Matteos resolved to remove the chest to the lodgings of an acquaintance, hoping to be able to sell the creature. Instead of employing a team, however, he undertook to transport it in a barrow. Not being very familiar with the way, and a bit dazed by drink, he strayed through that gap in the wall back of Lacenaire's estate. Doubtless he then was even more confused, and attempted to make his way through the grounds and reach the avenue in front."

"Yes, yes, very likely."

"In so doing, Jimmie, he ran against the block of stone and upset his chest so violently that the cover sprang open, the clasps being none of the best, and the boa-constrictor escaped. Probably the creature was more or less excited and enraged by being disturbed in moving, and it must have writhed away very quickly, heading by chance toward the very spot where Lacenaire was at that moment seeking for his recreant private secretary."

"You're sizing it up about right, Felix, I reckon," nodded Coleman.

"The shrieks of Lacenaire tell us what followed. The huge snake encountered him and probably crushed his life out in a jiffy. Yet Matteos must have pursued the creature and attempted to save the life of the man, for the slashes in Lacenaire's coat indicate that the Greek tried to cut the hideous creature without wounding the man. Probably the combat was a hopeless one, the peril too great for the sailor, and when Matteos saw that Lacenaire was dead, and that it would be utterly impossible to overcome the boa-constrictor and return it to the chest, terror drove the fellow to immediate flight. He trucked the chest out of the grounds, however, and dumped it into the Seine, probably thinking it would float away, and the exact truth would not be discovered. He may have sent the barrow after it, for all we know, and it may have sunk."

"It probably would, Felix."

"This being Sunday," added Boyd, "there were no workmen there to discover the reptile, luckily for them. I began to suspect the truth when Plaquet called my attention to the dirt-streaks encircling Lacenaire's body. I also had noticed the blood about his lips and nostrils, indicating a congestion. His broken watch, too, was a pointer."

"You've eyes worth having, Felix."

"I was a bit perplexed until I discovered the barrow-tracks, however, and could see no barrow in the grounds. After that I gradually ran down the whole business. When I made sure that Matteos had not removed his repulsive captive, I was led by the trail in the sand, to which I called your attention, to judge that the habit of the reptile had taken him into the cellar. Well, well, we slaughtered him, all right, Jimmie, but I want no more of the like in mine, if you please."

"Nor do I," growled the Central Office man, with a grim head-shake. "Such an affair is too infernally uncanny."

The Outsider

By Charles Steinfort Pearson
Author of "The Race-course War," Etc.

There is always considerable speculation about the "dark horse"—the outsider of the race-track. In Mr. Pearson's spirited story he tells of a dark horse whose owner was also an outsider in an affair of the heart

IT was just beginning to grow light when the two Detheridges, Dick and Sam, and Jockey Moffett, restraining the fiery colt Rupert with difficulty, moved over toward the track. No one else was in sight; the immense bare grand stand was a shapeless mass in the gray light of early morning.

They were glad there was no interloper, for they intended giving their horse a secret test of his fitness to win the Maturity race for two-year-olds exclusively. It was by winning the Maturity they hoped to replenish their treasury, depleted by the bad luck of the rest of the season. Of course, if the real speed of their colt should become known, odds would be correspondingly lowered.

The brothers took their station at the "finish" opposite the judges' stand, facing it. Back of them and to one side was the deserted paddock, with maple-trees at regular intervals along the fence, separating it from the track.

Dick Detheridge, the elder of the brothers, was in the act of giving the jockey instructions, when a sudden rustling in the heavy-foliaged maple nearest at hand caused him to break off abruptly.

"What was that?" he asked sharply.

"It was a bird flying out from his roosting-place, I expect," said Sam carelessly. "It's all right, Dick."

But Dick Detheridge was not convinced.

For a moment he glanced inquiringly at the tree, took several steps toward it, halting underneath.

"Who is up there?" he demanded.

Sam and Moffett were so astounded they simply stared.

"I'll give you just one minute to come down," called out Dick menacingly. He held his split-second watch in his hand.

For fully thirty seconds there was silence, followed by such a flurry of leaves and branches that the nervous young thoroughbred snorted and started away in alarm. The figure of a man dropped out of the tree to the ground.

Dick Detheridge took a step closer, and gazed at the man's face. It was that of a negro, sullen and glowering.

"It's you, is it, Hanson?" asked Dick.

The man assumed an attitude of nonchalance.

"I guess you know me, Mr. Detheridge." His tone was strongly impudent.

"I know you, and I know the man you work for better, or worse, than I do you," was Detheridge's instant reply. "I know him to be a so-called tipster, stealer of honest men's secrets, a scoundrel, who was former book-maker and turf sharp, and was ruled off by his fellows and the turf officials for failing to make good his bets. He hasn't got the nerve to come around spying out his promised good things himself, so he pays you to do it. You have been hanging around to see what my colt could do—hiding in the tall grass, eh? I'll make you take to the tall timber."

"I guess I got de right fo' to climb trees if I wanter," Hanson growled, and added with a grin: "I was jest goin' ter see if de almanac was right about de sunrise, by dis yere t'ing in my hand, see? Dat ain't no hangin' offense, I guess."

Detheridge was at him in an instant. In vain the tout, who was a larger man than Dick, strove to prevent the latter from gaining possession of the watch, which was Detheridge's intention. Detheridge was strong physically, and quicker than the other.

They were still struggling when Sam started to his brother's assistance.

It was not needed, for, with an exclamation, Dick had broken away, the watch held triumphantly in his left hand.

"You won't be able to tell even such an easy thing as the time of day with this from now on, much less keep tabs on early morning work-outs." And he hurled the watch to the ground.

As Hanson sprang forward with a cry of rage, Detheridge raised his foot, and sent the heavy shoe-heel crunching down on the expensive timepiece. Then giving it a kick toward the negro with the toe of his shoe, he said: "Now, take it with my compliments to its owner, your employer, and tell him——"

He did not finish the sentence, for the tout, roused to a terrible pitch of anger by the ruthless destruction of the object by which he made his nefarious living, had torn a picket off the fence, and was advancing toward him.

"Look out, Dick. Don't let him hit you," was Sam's warning.

"By Moses, I make yo' pay for dat!" Hanson was saying.

It was well Detheridge had conceived the idea of bringing along a weapon.

Before Hanson had reached half-way to him, Dick's revolver was out, and covered the negro's breast.

Hanson was no fool, and the look in the eyes back of the revolver brought him to an abrupt stop.

"You've got no business inside any race-course, Hanson," Detheridge stated coolly, the muzzle of his revolver not wavering a hair's breadth. "Your employer and you have been warned repeatedly to keep out of every race-course enclosure under penalty of imprisonment. If I had time, I'd march you to an officer of the law and have you locked up. As it is, I'm going to see that you leave this place immediately."

Without turning his head, he said: "Sam, while I'm marching this miscreant off the ground, you give our colt the morning exercise he needs. Understand? Get over that fence, Hanson, and start for the gate," he commanded.

The tout gave a snort of impotent rage and indignation, but begged permission to pick up the remains of the watch.

After a glance at the wreck, and one full of deepest malevolence at Detheridge, he obeyed the command to start.

Mumbling and protesting, he walked to the entrance gate, hurried along by Detheridge, who was anxious to return to the scene of the colt's speed trial.

At the gate Dick halted.

"Now clear out and don't return," he told the turf-spy. "If I ever catch you hanging about here again it will go harder with you than it has this time."

Hanson gulped once or twice, then turned to look at Detheridge, and his face was savage.

Slipping his hand in his pocket, he took out the battered watch. Shaking it at the young owner, his face working with fury, he snapped out:

"I'll get even wid yo' for dis yere, ef I hef ter go to jail fo' it. I gives yo' fair warnin'!"

Detheridge did not deem it worth while to reply, but hurried back to where he had left his brother and Moffett. He was in time to see the colt dash past the finish, and the jockey pull him up.

"Let me have a look at the clock, Sam," he told his brother.

Sam held out the watch to him, his eyes gleaming.

Dick gave an exclamation of astonishment. "Are you sure you caught him right, at the start?" he questioned.

"No doubt of it whatever. How about it, Moffett?"—to the jockey who

had dismounted and had come up to them.

"I believe that colt went faster this morning than any horse I ever rode; honest, I never went so fast before, Mr. Detheridge," the jockey said earnestly. "What was the time?"

Dick Detheridge did not seem to hear at first, and it was only when Moffett repeated the question that he replied equivocally: "It was so fast we've got a winner and a record-breaker, if he keeps as good to the day of the race, Harry."

Then, after a pause, a new idea seemed to strike him. "It will be a great disappointment to the Golden Star Stable to lose the race," he said, "but I suppose it can't be helped."

When he had spoken of the Golden Star Stable, he was not thinking of the racing establishment itself, or the racers, but the owner.

For the owner of the Golden Star Stable—rather an unusual circumstance—was a woman. More than that, she was a young woman, and still further, she was pretty and sweet. Not at all was Natalie Leighton the sort of woman one would expect to find the proprietor of a racing-stable, whose colors had flashed to the front in former years in some of the foremost "classic events" of the turf.

The father of Miss Leighton had been the originator of the Golden Star Stable, so called because the jockey's white jacket had the emblem in front and back. His sudden death had caused the expected rumor that there would be a dispersal sale of the Leighton thoroughbreds; but when the trainer, Matt Hearn, grizzled and gray and long-faced at the prospect of parting with his pets "in a bunch," as he said, visited the young woman to see about arrangements for the sale, he was astounded.

"Why should we sell them, Matt?" she asked. "We don't need the money, do we?"

"Why, no, it's not that, Miss Natalie," he declared, a sudden hope coming into his eyes.

"Oh, I couldn't bear the thought of selling them, Matt," she said earnestly. "Father was so fond of them all. I believe if he knew, he would like me to keep them. And keep them we will, Matt."

So it was settled, and from that time Miss Leighton was as much at home in the paddock as in the grand parterre of the opera, and equally admired in both. A tall girl, with regular features, a mass of light hair, she had a kind word for every one.

The first big event for which, under the new mistress, any Leighton horse was eligible was the Maturity. Also, although nearly every big race had been set down to the credit of the Golden Star Stable at one time or another, the Maturity hitherto had eluded the fleetest thoroughbreds of that establishment. It was the girl's highest ambition to win the race. She and Matt Hearn both believed that their nominee, Mad Anthony, certain to be the overwhelming favorite, as he was the colt of "class," would win.

Although a comparative newcomer on the Eastern turf, Detheridge was well acquainted with Miss Leighton. It was easy to win Natalie Leighton's friendship, in spite of the rather overbearing manners of her usual escort, Sidney Mapleson, a wealthy bachelor, who had been a friend of her father, and—as he strove to impress upon her—a highly esteemed one, too.

The girl had scores of admirers, men of wealth and fashion, but doubtless owing to her kindness of disposition, and the fact that Mapleson had been her father's friend, it led her to allow him almost to monopolize her.

Her acquaintance with Dick Detheridge was due at first wholly to an act of daring on Dick's part. The crack colt Mad Anthony was the medium.

It was in the early part of the season, when the Leighton racer first showed his wonderful speed and proved the appropriateness of his name, that the occurrence took place. On this occasion Mad Anthony was ridden by Frisbee, a light-weight stable-lad, scarcely more than a child. While ready to start for the post, the fractious

black colt suddenly reached out his long neck and seized the boy's leg in his strong teeth.

Those near-by heard the boy's yell. When men would have run to the rider's assistance, the ferocious brute, infuriated by excitement, showed such a savage front, ears flattened, eyes gleaming, that all but Detheridge were deterred. Frisbee, terror-stricken, groaning with pain, was forced to remain in the saddle, afraid to move.

Detheridge started fearlessly for the horse's head. Cleverly he dodged one forefoot aimed at him, and when the ugly head with the terrible teeth was stuck at him, he administered such a direct, powerful blow with his fist on the nostril that the colt was staggered. A second later he had his hand over both nostrils with a grip of steel, choking the life out of the would-be "maneater."

"Slip down, Frisbee. Don't be afraid. I won't let him hurt you," Detheridge ordered.

Frisbee obeyed, whimpering, trembling, and prepared to make a run for it on his wounded foot.

No sooner had the jockey reached the ground than Detheridge loosened his grip, swung heavily with the right to the vulnerable part of the colt's head, and paying no more attention to the brute, turned and lifted Frisbee in his arms.

Mad Anthony did not need attention. He had found his master in Detheridge. The colt simply snorted and trotted away, glad to be able to breathe freely again, as Detheridge bore the little rider tenderly over to the jockey quarters.

Miss Leighton and Mapleson, who had been inspecting the colt before he left the paddock, saw the whole occurrence. Although Mapleson poohpoohed the affair, saying that if he had been near enough, he would have done the same, Natalie gave him small credit.

"I remember father once speaking of a Detheridge who was interested in racing down South. I also recall that he said Mr. Detheridge was one of the finest sportsman and the most perfect gentleman he had ever met. This must be his son," she concluded, as if to herself.

By roundabout means she ascertained that Dick was the impoverished son of the man her father had known.

The happening had made a deep impression on Natalie Leighton. To others who had witnessed it the affair was recalled only by the sight of Mad Anthony wearing a muzzle "next time out," and always afterward.

Little Frisbee was a favorite with Natalie, and she took occasion to thank Detheridge personally for what he had done. He passed it off as a mere incident.

After her thanks had been tendered, the girl's bright eyes followed the tall, handsome young horseman about the paddock. Perhaps it was unconsciously that she said something further complimentary. At any rate, Mapleson's ears, attuned to anything which might prove to his advantage, or disadvantage, caught the utterance.

"Oh, Detheridge is a good enough sort of chap, but he's rough," he exclaimed.

Miss Leighton flushed.

"I saw nothing whatever rough about the way in which he handled poor little Artie, Mr. Mapleson," she declared positively.

Miss Leighton's friendship for her jockey's rescuer ever afterward was made manifest on more than one occasion. Twice she hunted out Detheridge in the paddock, when it happened they had horses in the same race, and made him acquainted with her stable secrets. "I wouldn't advise you to bet on your entry to-day, Mr. Detheridge," she said sweetly, the first time. "Hearn tells me Daredevil can't lose."

"Thank you, Miss Leighton, but I have confidence in my own representative," Detheridge had replied, rather ungraciously.

Daredevil had won, as she had said.

The second time she proffered the advice, Dick's brother, who was in hearing, suggested that it had better be heeded.

But Dick demurred. "I don't think

it's a good plan to take advice against your own convictions, Miss Leighton," he said apologetically.

Then Detheridge made a wager of just double the amount he had intended originally, and lost every cent of it, the Golden Star again rising the first on the horizon at the finish.

At least twice the Leighton horses had been "scratched" just before the races in which they had been entered, when Hearn himself, who was exceedingly friendly with the brothers, had assured Sam of each candidate's fitness. On both occasions the withdrawals happened when the Detheridge horses were in the same race.

"What made you scratch Dragoman to-day?" Sam asked, the first time. "Yesterday you thought sure he'd win, Matt."

"Orders from headquarters," was Hearn's mysterious answer, accompanied by something of a grimace.

Once Sam had come across his brother cutting something from a paper which made much of the doings of the "horsy" set in society. Somewhat curious, he had ascertained the date of the mutilated paper, and secured another. In it he had found a capital portrait of Miss Leighton, with this inscription underneath it:

America's Foremost Woman Owner and Racer of Thoroughbreds; a Favorite in Society.

After this Miss Leighton saw fit to bestow her interest elsewhere, and the Detheridges saw little of her up to the time they had the trial of their colt with such exhilarating result, though Matt Hearn was in constant communication with them. Matt had confided to them how well Mad Anthony was doing. (Miss Leighton well could afford to allow her stable secrets to become public property.) Detheridge, in return for the old trainer's confidence, told him that they believed they had a chance with Rupert.

What Detheridge did not tell him was that they were so hard pressed for cash they did not know where they could get the money to make a wager. Two or three days before the Maturity was to be run, Dick Detheridge said in a matter-of-fact tone to Hearn:

"I'm thinking of selling Advance Courier, Matt. What will you give me for him?"

Irishlike, Hearn's reply was a question:

"What do yez want to get rid av him for?"

"For four thousand dollars," was Detheridge's answer, with a wink.

Hearn was a good friend of the Detheridges, but, as he said, he did not "put it beyond anny man to do the other man where nather was blind in a horse trade." Long dealing in horseflesh had made him suspicious.

"Better keep him in yer stable, Dick. Ye're better acquainted wid him than anny wan else," he said.

Dick was disappointed, for Advance Courier certainly was worth four thousand if he was worth a dollar.

"We'll have to be satisfied with a 'pike' bet of a hundred or so, and what the purse will bring," he declared to his brother that evening. "And we had such a fine opportunity to make a fortune."

This conversation occurred at night. The morning after, bright and early, Hearn appeared at the stable.

"I'm the man wid the halter to-day, Dick," he announced. "Advance Courier will carry the Golden Star in future. I've made out a check for the dough. You see, I got to thinkin' it over in bed, an' says I, 'It's a bargain. I'll buy him on me own responsibility.' Here is the paper."

The remaining days passed quickly. The Detheridges managed to have their colt step three furlongs without exciting suspicion, and the result of that performance brought joy to their hearts. The only thing the brothers could foresee to prevent the colt winning the race was the extreme nervousness with which he was afflicted. They told themselves, however, that their horse had outgrown this to a great extent, and they took every means to allay it.

When they shut the door on Rupert the night before the Maturity, they were

certain that he was fit to race for a kingdom. He appeared quiet, and inclined to rest easily.

Some time after Dick had retired, but while he was little more than dozing, he imagined he heard a commotion in one of the stalls. For some time he hovered between sleeping and waking, then he sat up in bed and listened intently.

To his ears came the snorting of a terror-stricken horse, the sound of nervous hoofs against the side of a stall. A second longer he waited. Then he heard a plunging and clattering which told him plainly something was wrong in one of the stalls.

His first thought was for Rupert, naturally. When he crept up to the door of the stall in which the commotion was taking place, he saw the figure of a man emerge and pause a moment at sight of him.

The man's eyes were more used to the darkness than his own, but, as he stepped the brief interval and turned to dash across the intervening space of the yard, Detheridge recognized the interloper.

"You, Hanson! Stay where you are. I've got you covered. Don't run!" he yelled.

The man snarled out a curse. Instead of running, he halted a moment and raised his hand.

"Here is some of your own medicine, Dandy Dick," he cried out hoarsely.

The object he held was a revolver, and, as the red jet of flame leaped from its muzzle, a bullet passed so close to Detheridge's head he felt it fan his hair.

An exclamation of rage escaped him, and he fired in turn. He heard a click of the other's revolver as the hammer failed to explode a cartridge.

"Don't stir, or I'll kill you!" Dick hurled at him.

The tout's answer was a swift leap to one side; then he began to run in a zigzag, puzzling fashion. The light, too, was uncertain, and, though Detheridge fired again, he knew he had missed.

As he followed he saw the dim figure disappear over the high fence around the track. Hanson had escaped.

Quickly Dick returned to Rupert's stall, to find his brother and Moffett there, the latter with a stable-lantern. In a few words he told them what had happened.

"I'm almost afraid to go inside," declared Sam. Dick himself was silent. Together they entered the stall. Dick lifted the lantern high up, and they held their breath.

What they saw was Rupert, in such a state of terror that he was covered with sweat, as if he had just finished a race, standing trembling in a corner. The colt, always apprehensive in the presence of strangers, had been driven to the utmost pitch of nervousness by the appearance of the intruder in his stall.

It was some time before Rupert would allow a hand to be placed upon him. Finally Dick was able to make an examination. No injury appeared to have been inflicted on the racer. Dick went so far as to smell the colt's breath, to ascertain if by any possibility the thoroughbred had been drugged. Such had not been the case, he was sure.

"I understand it now," he said. "Hanson slipped in here, not knowing Rupert's disposition, thinking he'd find a sleepy, tractable, two-year-old, that could be fondled after a little stay, and then could be given a dose which would put him out of the race to-morrow. He couldn't get near Rupert. For once his nervousness saved him. I imagine Hanson was glad to get out, once he was in. It was a lucky escape for both."

By degrees the colt was calmed, and after a rubbing down appeared to suffer no bad consequences, though he was still alarmed at the slightest sound or unguarded movement.

"I wish it hadn't happened, and I hope it won't have any effect on his race to-morrow. Oh, yes, I shall place the wager just the same," he said, in response to his brother's question. "You must go to the city and get the money, Sam."

Detheridge did not have much sleep that night, for he was worrying over

the weather. If the track was anything but fast, he knew Rupert could not win.

Morning broke bright and clear. A careful inspection of the thoroughbred showed that he apparently was as good as ever. As the races were to begin at the same track, they would be saved the necessity of taking Rupert any distance.

It was long before race time that Detheridge gave the jockey his orders.

"I want you to get off first and stay there until the finish, Moffett—that's all," he said.

Sam remained around the stable until the last moment when he could safely start for town and return with the money from the bank.

"Don't fail to get back in time," Dick counseled him.

Dick did not see the first three races run, but remained with his candidate. He read in the papers that his horse was not regarded even as a possible winner. Mad Anthony was picked by nearly all of the newspaper handicappers to win.

"The less said about my horse the greater the odds will be," Dick told himself, as he watched the careful preparation of his representative.

He could not understand his brother's long stay in the city. As the time grew nearer for the start of the race, he became restless. When it was almost four o'clock, the hour set for the race, and Sam was still missing, he was greatly worried. The horse was taken over to the paddock and put in his stall, but still no trace of the brother.

Detheridge's face began to show traces of anxiety. Leaving Moffett, already in his colors—gray jacket, scarlet cap, sleeves, and braces—he made a dash for the betting-ring, to see the quotations on his horse.

Eleven colts of highest class were carded to start. The first slate he saw held Mad Anthony favorite at fours. His eye traveled down the row of figures. Rupert was at thirty to one. As Detheridge watched, the man rubbed the odds opposite Rupert's name and wrote "40."

Forty to one! "A fortune to one," he repeated unconsciously, and hurried back to the paddock, hoping to see his brother hunting for him, his hands full of yellow bills. No sign of Sam. He looked about him disconsolately.

Over to one side an admiring group was gathered about the favorite, who, in spite of the muzzle which disfigured his handsome head, looked fit to carry all the money bet on him.

"Oh, Mr. Detheridge, one moment, please," he heard some one say to him, and saw Natalie Leighton emerge from the group, smiling at him. By her side was Mapleson, looking by no means friendly.

"Do you think you will win to-day, Mr. Detheridge?" she asked, as Mapleson returned his curt nod with one still more frigid.

"I hope so, at least, Miss Leighton," he said.

"Rupert's the outsider in the betting," he overheard Mapleson assert.

By this time she had come closer, leaving her escort.

"I want you to tell me honestly if you think your horse stands a show of winning to-day—I desire to know for a very particular reason," she said. "Won't you tell me?"

Her manner was so earnest, her tone so impressive, that Detheridge felt impelled to meet her earnestness with all of which he himself was capable.

"Miss Leighton, I'm certain that my horse has worked faster trials than any to start in the race," he said, so quietly no one could hear him but herself. "I intend to wager a large amount on his chances. I'm telling you what I should no one else."

"Thank you," she said simply, and walked away, without joining Mapleson.

Detheridge saw her approach her jockey Frisbee, and, taking him to one side, say something to him. They both glanced in his direction.

Only a few minutes were left, and still more anxiously he looked around for Sam. Pacing restlessly up and down in front of the stall he waited, hoping against hope seemingly, for the brother did not come.

The saddling-bell sounded—no sign of the absent one. Detheridge fidgeted, and strove to calm himself by walking up and down. There was the bugle, the call to the post! Detheridge was so wrought up he jumped, and glanced around for his brother. He did not see him.

Rupert was slightly nervous, but, taken altogether, Detheridge did not believe it would interfere with his chances.

"Don't forget what I told you about getting off well, Moffett; you were lucky in getting such a good position at the post," were the last words Dick told the jockey.

Moffett had drawn No. 2, only one horse being between him and the coveted inside place, next the rail.

"What's the price against my horse, Atkinson?" he asked an acquaintance, just from the betting-ring.

"Oh! he's the outsider. I saw one hundred to one against him in some books. Looks good, though, I must say. Are you 'on' heavy?"

Detheridge muttered something unintelligible, and remained in the paddock fretting and chafing, still trusting that Sam would come.

One moment longer he waited, then plunged through the paddock gate, across the track, and down the infield, from where he could get a better view of the race. Owing to the immense attendance, the crowd had been allowed to go on the infield. The inside rail was lined three and four deep with spectators as far up as midway of the field stand.

Detheridge, inwardly groaning at the idea of a fortune wasted, suddenly was swayed by an electric thrill. A cloud of dust in the chute had signaled that the racers were off. The crowd gave its customary roar.

Which one was that thundering out of the chute, lengths ahead of the second? What racer was moving along so easily, devouring the space so wondrously he appeared a marvelous machine made for speed alone?

Rupert! Of course it was Rupert.

"Rupert, Rupert!" he yelled. Men standing near him took up the call.

"Why, it's a runaway!" "A walkover!" "The long shot wins!" So they yelled.

"Look at your horse, Detheridge; look at your horse!" a man cried, running up to him breathlessly.

"Good Lord, man! he'll break a record. Did you bet much on him, Detheridge? Did you? He was a hundred to one!"

To this one and the others he turned a deaf ear alike. For him there was nothing but a slim chestnut colt, which still was drawing away from the others, as they had covered a half-mile of the three-quarters.

Moffett had obeyed injunctions, and luck was with him. Was it? Not a cent had he bet, he remembered.

Straight as an arrow from the bow thundered the light colt down the track. Not one of the other ten could overtake him now—where was Mad Anthony?

Detheridge shifted his glasses from the flashing Rupert's shining satin to where they rested on the Golden Star. Mad Anthony? Why, he was in third place. Where was the speed of which Hearn had been so vainglorious?

Now the chestnut colt had drawn away still farther from The Assyrian, the second horse, a length ahead of Mad Anthony, then came Alert.

Past the farther end of the field stand Rupert sped. Now he had reached the foremost of the crowd lining the rail; seemed a winner beyond the shadow of a doubt.

An exclamation, followed by a groan, burst from the lips of Detheridge. The cheering broke off. Silence followed.

A man standing so close to the rail he almost could touch the horse and rider as they passed had leaned over, had swung his hat almost in the face of the oncoming leading racer.

Rupert had bolted! As Detheridge, mad fury in his face, fought his way through the crowd in endeavor—vain endeavor it proved—to identify the miscreant, the colt had swerved to one side, despite Moffett's attempt to keep him straight, plunging clear across the track,

where he was kicking and bucking in wild effort to unseat his rider.

As through a mist Detheridge caught a glimpse of The Assyrian sweeping by. Frisbee seemed suddenly to arouse. At his urging, Mad Anthony took on a wonderful burst of speed. In a few strides he had swept by The Assyrian, and Detheridge saw the Golden Star lead by a length at the finish.

Moffett, the tears coursing down his cheeks, finally got Rupert under control, and rode slowly toward the judges' stand. Detheridge followed.

Scarcely had the horses reached there, after "weighing in," when Sam Detheridge, panting, exhibiting signs of tremendous excitement, hurried in at the gate. Spying his brother, he rushed over to him.

"Don't tell me the race is run, Dick," he exclaimed. "Don't tell me Rupert won without a cent of ours bet on him! Don't blame me. There was a fire in the building next to the bank. I tried my best to get in—nobody allowed inside fire-lines — not my fault," he gasped.

"Don't worry, Sam; the race is run and won, but not by Rupert," said Dick steadily.

"You don't mean to tell me that Rupert lost?" blurted out Sam, incredulous.

The brother said nothing — only nodded his head sadly and walked away.

Hearn came up to where Dick was standing.

"It was a bad thing fer you, but a moighty good wan fer us that Rupert didn't run straight," he said.

"Then you realize that Rupert could have beaten Mad Anthony, do you, Matt?" he asked.

Hearn looked at him curiously a moment.

"I'll tell ye somethin', sorr, though I shouldn't," he said. "Miss Leighton it wuz as give Frisbee orders—ye see, she could trust him in anything where ye were concerned—not to bate yer horse, if he saw Rupert had a chanct to win——"

"What do you mean, Matt?" asked Detheridge sharply, his face flushing.

"Just what I sez, Dick. Also, couldn't ye guess who it wuz as induced me to buy Advance Courier, when I happened to mention to Miss Natalie ye wanted to sell him?"

Detheridge turned on his heel, muttering something about thanking Miss Leighton, adding: "If I can find her alone."

Strange to say, she was alone when Detheridge, showing no sign of discomfiture, discovered her. She did not give him the opportunity to speak, but forestalled him.

"Believe me when I say it was no little disappointment when your horse failed to win, Mr. Detheridge," she said. "It was a great pity. Seriously, I think he was by far the best horse—much faster than mine, the favorite," she added sweetly.

"But the favorite won, and my horse was the outsider, Miss Leighton. It all came out as it should."

She thought a little.

"And yet the outsider, the one considered the outsider, not infrequently is the one which—in reality, it is only public opinion, often wholly wrong, which installs the favorite, when, as is often the case——"

She was becoming hopelessly confused. Her face was coloring; she looked appealingly at Detheridge through eyes which were on the point of tears.

Now it was Detheridge's turn to begin where she had left off. Under the whip of his love and hope, the spur of her encouragement, he forced himself on, knowing that the goal was in sight.

"Natalie!" he gasped. "You are referring to me—not Rupert—as the outsider! Natalie! Natalie! Did you mean what you said, dearest?"

Her eyes, dropped at first, were raised bravely to his.

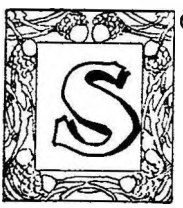
"To me you never were the outsider. Do you understand that now, Dick?" she answered softly.

The One-lunger

By Charles Kroth Moser

Author of "The Man Without a Soul," Etc.

Which tells how an Eastern tenderfoot, togged out in custom-made clothes and brandishing a pearl-handled gun, is initiated into the mysteries of the real West. Incidentally a new light is thrown on the old three-shell game



O you're the new tenderfoot what the boys have been a-coddlin' some?" And the speaker looked down at the Easterner, his big features extended in a wide grin.

"Perhaps I am. Why?" the little, fair chap in the opera-bouffe clothes asked calmly.

Arizona Jim Grimes' grin burst out into a roar of merriment. They were crooking elbows over the bar of the Pinogrande Hotel; half a dozen or so other miners were partaking with them and enjoying the sight of the giant of the camp "baiting" the pallid little tenderfoot. Now his great hairy red hand came down on the slender chap's back with a force that bent his bones.

"Why, you amoosin' little insec', they was a-tellin' me as how you was a man! Just kiddin' me, I reckon. Now, you couldn't be one of them chorus-gals from the Floradora Sextet like, could you?"

The smaller man shook off, with a haughty movement, the paw that weighted down his back. His mild eyes, so genial before, seemed to cool and solidify until they were like tiny pools covered with clear ice.

"I prefer no more of that language, Mr. Grimes. You will kindly discontinue it. If you do not, you may learn very quickly whether I'm a man or a chorus-girl." The voice was even, well modulated, and the accent a trifle overcultured.

The giant, with his head towering a foot above the other's cold eyes, laughed again. The idea seemed to amuse him immensely. The other men in the place shared his merriment, but subdued it more. They seemed to be sorry for the little man. But Arizona Jim hadn't had so much fun in many a day; it was lonesome up there in the tunnel above the Bluerock Mine's buildings.

"Well, you durned little toad, what could you do?"

"This." From the crimson sash around his waist the tenderfoot suddenly drew a glittering, pearl-handled revolver of the latest and most approved Eastern fashion. He thrust its delicate, slender muzzle close to the big man's face and said, the slight trembling in his voice but accentuating its determination:

"Now, my friend, you give me any more of that, and I'll shoot a hole through you."

Arizona Jim's jaw dropped open, and his laughter stopped. He studied the little Easterner and his little Eastern gun for fully two seconds; then he recovered his speech.

"Stranger," he drawled, with funereal solemnity, "if you was to shoot me with that thing, an' I'd ever find it out—stranger, I'd pull your nose for you!"

The crowd of miners standing about shouted with joy, and the face of the pale little stranger went red as a turnip beet. Arizona Jim stood still, gravely looking down the barrel of the pistol, as though it were only a wooden one to shoot paper caps in. The little Easterner suddenly quivered with rage at

the insult. He lowered his weapon, then flung it crashing through the glass window and fairly tore off his coat.

"Now, then, blast you!" he yelled, "you just throw your gun away, and I'll fight you man to man!"

"Your left lung is a goner, and the right one is beginning to show signs of peevishness. What you'd best do is get out West somewhere, where it's high and dry, and rough it. Forget the graces of civilized society, and live the life of the mountains, the mines, or the stock-ranch for a while." This was the doctor's advice, and Mr. Pinkney Hallowell, of Back Bay, Boston, gathered together the remains of his consumptive self and hied himself away to Pinogrande, the rough mining-camp which rambles around the bottom of a cañon in the high Sierras.

Being well read in the light literature of the day, Mr. Hallowell had superior knowledge of life as it ought to be in the wild and woolly West, and so, before starting therefor, he thoroughly equipped himself for it. He bought a huge Stetson-made sombrero on Tremont Street and a broad Mexican hand-carved leather band for it. Next he had an ornate pair of chaperros made to order from a design he saw on a dime-novel cover, and his sister made him a gorgeous, wide, silken sash, riotously crimson in color and decorated on the ends with a long fringe; it went so well with his corn-flower hair and light-blue eyes, his sister said. Pinkney winced at this, but he said nothing to hurt her feelings.

One of the "fellows" gave Pinkney an elegant pair of high-topped boots and another persuaded him of the necessity of large, jingling, silver spurs; Pinkney protested that there were no stock-ranches in Pinogrande, but the "good old chap" assured him that spurs were a part of the native costume, anyhow, and Mr. Hallowell gave in. Lastly, his cousin Clarice, who adored Pinkney and his fat bank-account, presented him with a silver-mounted, pearl-handled revolver that was just too lovely for anything. It was the proper thing, the dealer told her, and Pinkney was really delighted with it. As for himself, he had purchased two huge, blue-nosed, ugly-looking Colt revolvers of the type the books said they used out West, but Pinkney found them much too heavy to carry around, so he threw them in the bottom of his trunk; he had an idea the writers exaggerated the size of a Westerner's armament, anyhow.

So thus fearfully and wonderfully garmented, "Pinkney" arrived one evening late in summer at Pinogrande. On the little jerkwater train that climbs up the slopes from Placerville he had found opportunity to slip out of his traveling-togs and into his new raiment; it bothered him a little to see no one else so elaborately rigged out—though he did see a number of homely, weather-battered sombreros—but Pinkney made up his mind that since he had the things he was going to wear them. In consequence, when the group that had gathered on the hotel porch caught sight of him, it gasped first—then guffawed. Later it passed around a few remarks that Pinkney did not hear. He admitted to himself as he went upstairs to his rude room, unveneered with any of the luxurious appointments of civilization, that his new clothes were probably a mistake—but he said to himself that he was going to wear them, anyhow. He knew they were the correct thing for this sort of life, whether these people did or not.

Pinogrande was a town with ideas of its own; it never worried about the ideas of other towns, and never borrowed any. It had an idea, for instance, that the saloon was the greatest institution in human society, and it therefore licensed about one hundred and forty, which was nearly half the entire number of Pinogrande's houses. To write about Pinogrande and leave out the saloon would be like writing about a Quaker settlement and leaving out the "Meetin'-house." The saloon was clubhouse, polling-place, town council-room—any and every rendezvous for the public of the crude mining-camp.

Pinogrande also had its own idea of manhood. He who could swallow his

three fingers of raw redeye all day without whining, who had sand enough to shoot at his enemy on sight whether he could hit him or not, who took off his chapeau in the presence of a woman without regard to her condition, color, or station in life but just because she was a woman, who could beat a gambler at his own game—such an one was a *real* man. Pinogrande acknowledged him joyously and with pride in its possession of such a citizen. Pinogrande detested dogs and Chinamen and greasers or Mexicans. There was only one thing in the world lower than a greaser. That was a "quitter."

The above-mentioned ideas were imparted to Pinkney by the adept youth behind the hotel bar during the early morning of Pinkney's first day in Pinogrande. This adept youth, Fitzpatrick by name—Fitz for short—being kindly disposed, also touched mildly on certain pet aversions that Pinogrande indulged toward fragile men with cornflower hair in general and toward "one-lungers" in particular. Pinkney did not seem frightened enough; so Fitz then hinted delicately that certain very sensitive individuals in town, with notoriously agile trigger-fingers, might find the Bostonian's picturesque costume offensive. Perhaps it would be better to discard.

"Well, I purchased the rig to wear out here," objected Pinkney. "I like it, and it becomes my figure; I wish to wear it, and I think I shall."

Fitz opened his eyes to their widest, then he smiled. "Say, you ain't so worse! Mebbe you will. Anyways, it's up to you."

Before Pinkney had been in town two days the talk went around among the boys that "that there dude from Boston what sasheyed 'round in all them glad rags wasn't no such a coyote as he looked." He had a wad of money, and, not having much else to do but spend it, he treated the boys generously. More than that, the young club-bred Easterner could carry around his load of fire-water as well as the best of them. Besides, he stood all their chaffing good-humoredly, but showed up every day in the same gala attire that excited their ridicule.

It was Tuolumne Lou, a buxom, aggressive lady, of uncertain age, and who conducted the Grub Stake restaurant, who changed his name for him. Her own cognomen had attached itself to her immediately upon her arrival from the sister county. When she heard of Pinkney's birthplace, she immediately associated it with his consumption-incarnadined cheeks and hailed him as "Boston Pinks." Thereafter, as long as he dwelt in Pinogrande, Mr. Pinkney Hallowell was known as Boston Pinks.

And Boston Pinks became popular, despite the fact that he continued to wear the twenty-dollar Stetson-made sombrero of Tremont Street, the chapperos, the sash, the high boots, and the spurs which had never stung a bronco's hide. He was a good fellow. The boys accepted him as one of them and Tuolumne Lou declared he had the most perfected manners of any gentleman in town. And the boys thought Tuolumne Lou ought to know—for her restaurant paid dividends like a goldmine, and there were scores of strapping young fellows every week trying to persuade her to change her name for a better one. Women were lamentably scarce in Pinogrande, and femininity of the right sort was at a premium. Tuolumne Lou was the right sort, and when she declared the same for Boston Pinks it was straightway true.

But there was Arizona Jim Grimes. A better man of his sort never wore a blue-flannel shirt; but Jim was such a tremendous specimen himself, and so fearless of spirit, that he doubted the courage and merit of other men not built on the same lines—until they proved it.

The day Jim met Boston Pinks in the bar of the hotel he had been piloted thither to meet the marvel from the East by Percy Sneath. Sneath was a slim, wiry young man, of fastidious dress and white-smooth hands, with long, dexterous fingers. To the casual eye of man he had no visible means of support—but he could play a rattling good game of draw-poker.

"An' this here kid from th' effete East can skin th' pasteboards for fair," he told Grimes, as they approached the gathering. "He ain't been here no time, but he's sure cottoned some to our ways; all except them fool riggin's he packs aroun'. Talk about playin' his hand! Say, I had three big, juicy aces the other day, 'fore th' draw, too, an' durned if he didn't play a bobtail flush so strong I laid 'em down! Now, what do you think of that?"

It was upon the strength of such a recommendation that Arizona expected to see something unusual about the Easterner when they met. And the sight of little Boston Pinks in his Boston cut clothes was too much for Arizona's wonted gravity of demeanor. His sneers but half-expressed his contempt.

But when Pinks ripped off his coat and offered to fight a man twice his size with bare fists, big Grimes stopped jeering. Pinkney squared off with his hands clenched, furious with rage and preparing for a rush. The other men looked on in astonishment. But Jim stepped away.

"Hold on, pard. I quit right now. I don't want to fight with no man what's as good a man as you are. I takes back them former asseverations with pleasure. Let's shake."

They shook. Pinkney, as genial as ever, would hear nothing more about it, and from that moment the little tenderfoot and the big, hairy miner were sworn friends. They paired together after that, and sometimes took Percy Sneath into the firm; between them they managed to make Pinogrande a lively places at times.

Under the tutelage of Arizona Jim and Sneath, Pinkney soon made such progress in his knowledge of the ways of the country that he finally doffed his Tremont Street habiliments, and took to wearing the more conventional costume of his associates—and to carrying around with him a man's-sized shooting-iron.

With the curiosity of his kind—the gimlet-eyed New England kind, with the protuberant nose—Boston Pinks was always on the lookout for adventure; he said he wanted to get "educated." And the sharpers of the camp undertook to liberally supply him with an "education." It was not surprising, therefore, that the guileless young tenderfoot should have fallen like a ripe pippin into the luring wiles of Mr. Murray la Moine's fascinating game.

Mr. Murray la Moine was a smooth, persuasive gentleman, who earned his daily fodder by the clever manipulation of a tiny rubber pellet called a "pea" and three walnut shells. At the suggestion of the chief of police he had given up his residence in San Francisco for the sake of his health, and had pitched his tents and his layout in Pinogrande, where the area of his operations did not promise to be so confining. He set up his simple layout just outside the town limits at the head of the trail that runs to Rubicon, and for a while did a rushing business with all the suckers that went that way. The modus operandi of the pea-and-sheller was simplicity itself; he spread a piece of green oilcloth over a dry-goods box and laid out the pea and the three shells on it. The whole game consisted in his placing the pea under one of the shells and betting the guileless man in the street that he couldn't guess which shell the pea was under. Being an expert at his own game Mr. La Moine nearly always won; when he didn't it was one of his "cappers" who was allowed to win in order to decoy the others.

In time the "wise guys" of Pinogrande came to know that the pea-and-sheller's game was a cinch—for Mr. La Moine. And they avoided it carefully. That was before the coming of Boston Pinks. For which reason he had been an inhabitant of the town some little time before he steered himself in the direction of the layout.

One Sunday morning Pinogrande was idling about its holiday business in a very desultory fashion when Pinkney came out of the hotel. He had had rather a bad night of it with Arizona Jim and Percy until the wee sma' hours, and the spell of the occasion was still upon him. Pinkney wanted

more trouble. He sauntered out around the landscape looking for it, and just at a moment when he was in the frame of mind for bucking anything from an old-fashioned brigine to the Almighty Powers he butted into Murray la Moine and his layout.

"I'll bet I can wipe your game off the box," he said daringly to La Moine. "Let's see how you do it."

"Why, sure," said Murray, smiling invitingly. "Step right up and help yourself. It ought to be easy for you, sir. Now, see! Here's the pea; I place it under this shell, the other two are over here. Now, with the tips of my fingers I move the three shells gently, 'round and 'round, over the oil-cloth. Watch 'em carefully; do you notice the pea slip out and roll under this other shell? That's right. Now, keep your eye peeled again. You know where the pea is now, eh? Watch me move 'em, slick-like you know—but simple—like that! Now, I'll bet you fifty you can't pick the shell the pea's under."

Pinkney "picked." The pea wasn't there. He picked again; still the pea was in hiding. The sharper manipulated the shells again; Pinkney caught a glimpse of the elastic little pellet squeezed out from one shell under the edge of another. He was sure La Moine did not know he saw it; he kept his eye glued to the bit of walnut under which he had seen the pea disappear. La Moine did not even bring that one close to the other two in his shuffling them over the cloth. Pinkney was sure this time. He backed his judgment with another fifty.

The pea wasn't where he thought it was. Smilingly the gambler lifted another shell; the pea seemed to look up and wink wickedly at Pinkney.

"You're a bad guesser," said the sharper. "Try again; you'll sure get on to it presently."

Boston Pinks tried again and again. Twice he won; fourteen times the agile La Moine pocketed his fifty dollars. When Pinkney lost the sixteenth bet he threw up his hands; he was cleaned out.

"I'm all in," he said, turning to go away. "You've cleaned me out; but if you'll wait an hour till I can go back to the hotel, I'll bring up a sack full of dust and put your infernal little old one-horse layout on the bum. Will you wait?"

"Will I wait? Pardner, you're the real thing when it comes to being a sport; I'll wait for you to my dying day. Bring your pile right along and get your money back; you'll sure have better luck next time."

Pinkney darted off to the hotel bar.

"Say, Fitz, where's the old man? I want him to get me a thousand bucks out of the safe in a hurry."

Percy Sneath and Arizona Jim were sitting at a little table playing pinochle for their several morning's mornings.

"What's up, Pinks? You ain't bought 'nother salt lead, has you?" asked Arizona banteringly.

"Not this trip. But that smart Aleck with the pea and shells has just cleaned me out of six hundred as easy as taking candy from an infant, and I'm going back to break his bankroll if I have to do it with a stick of dynamite." Then he told them the story. Jim and Sneath heard him with astonishment, punctuated with whoops of laughter.

"Why, you durn fool," jeered Sneath, "don't you know when you're trimmed? You easy mark, you good thing, you tenderfoot what needs a wet-nurse! That La Moine sure skinned you some. Couldn't you see he was palmin' the pea on you?"

"What's 'palming the pea'?"

"Oh, you pudd'nhead! Don't you savvy that you couldn't pick 'em none? *'cause there wa'n't no pea under any of 'em.* Every time he moved them shells 'round an' round he just flicked that pea out with his finger an' stuck it behind his ear. *That's* where th' pea was."

The trio sat as a Ways and Means Committee until after sixth drink time, palavering as to the best method for Pinkney to get his money back, and also "get the goods" on the gambler. Finally, toward noon, the tenderfoot had an idea; it amounted to an inspira-

tion. The culture of his Boston brains was not for nothing.

"Come along, you fellows," he said, gathering up the bankroll the proprietor had unearthed from the safe for him. "Watch me; I'll show this town if I'm easy."

Backed by Big Jim and Percy, Boston Pinks strode back to the layout at the head of Rubicon trail with the wad of bills in his hand and a grim determination in his heart.

"Ah, I sure am glad to see you, pardner," Murray la Moine called out as the trio elbowed their way through the shoal of suckers. "I had near given you up. But you ain't no quitter, I can see that. Shall we try our pleasant little pastime again?"

"Certainly. That's what I'm here for. I'm no quitter. And, by the way, you seem to be a bit game yourself. Now, what do you say to raising the stakes and making it a thousand a throw?"

"Pretty strong playing, isn't it?" asked the sharper, a little suspiciously.

"Oh, well, if you want to squeal like a quitter, I'll——"

"Not me, pardner. The thousand goes. Produce the goods, and I'll cover it."

Instantly Pinkney shoved his bills on the oilcloth, and Murray placed a like amount in gold-coin, bills, and estimated gold grains in the rough to cover it. The throng of cappers and loungers gathered in close to the table to see the play.

Murray began the manipulation of the shells.

"I pick this one," Boston Pinks said, laying his finger carelessly on the middle shell. La Moine gave a broad grin and stretched out his hand, as if to lift it up and show Pinkney the error of his ways.

"Hold on!" Pinkney flung out, so suddenly and sharp that the flimflammer looked up quickly; he jerked himself back in a mighty hurry. He found himself looking down the yawning throat of Pinkney's gun.

"Hands up!" commanded the tenderfoot, and Murray zealously reached for the clouds; he even stood on tiptoe trying to get his hands high enough.

"You've been playing this game all alone, my friend," Pinkney observed calmly. "Now, I'm going to take a hand myself. You keep yours roosting high! I just want to see if that pea isn't exactly where my money says it is."

He raised the shell on the right and displayed the clean oilcloth under it.

"You can see for yourself the pea isn't there," he said to Murray. Then he lifted up the shell on the left side.

"And unless you're blinder than you were a moment ago, you can likewise see that the pea isn't here."

La Moine nodded his head helplessly.

"Ah, all right. Now, my friend, if the pea is neither under the right-side shell nor the left-side shell, then I have a hunch"—and Pinkney looked confidentially at the big blue-nosed .45-caliber Colt he was holding—"I have a hunch, I say—don't move those mitts! - that the pea has just *got* to be under the middle shell. Are my deductions correct?"

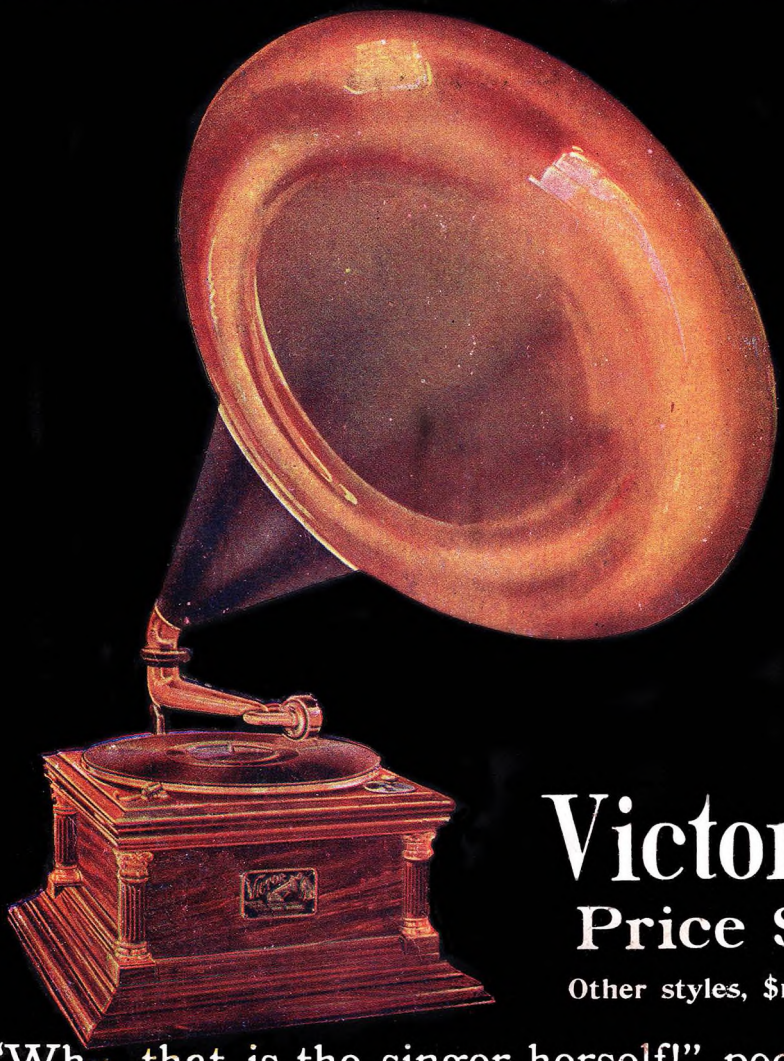
The flimflammer was so taken aback that for a second he could only keep nodding his head. Then he managed to say:

"You sure are."

"Right," said Pinkney pleasantly. "Then I have won the bet, and there is really no use wasting time to lift up the other shell. He picked up the gold, the bank-notes, and the gold-dust and crammed it all into his pockets by the handful. He took another glance at La Moine.

"I think I've played enough for today." Then he coolly shoved his gun into its holster, and, taking an arm of Percy and Arizona Jim, he sauntered back toward the hotel without so much as a backward glance at the discomfited sharper. The three friends spoke no word until they reached the hotel. Then, as they stood at the bar, Arizona remarked:

"I've seen a lot of tenderfoots, but you sure had 'em all beat from th' start. But for an ornery little, flimsy-skinned one-linger you're sure a marvel."



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