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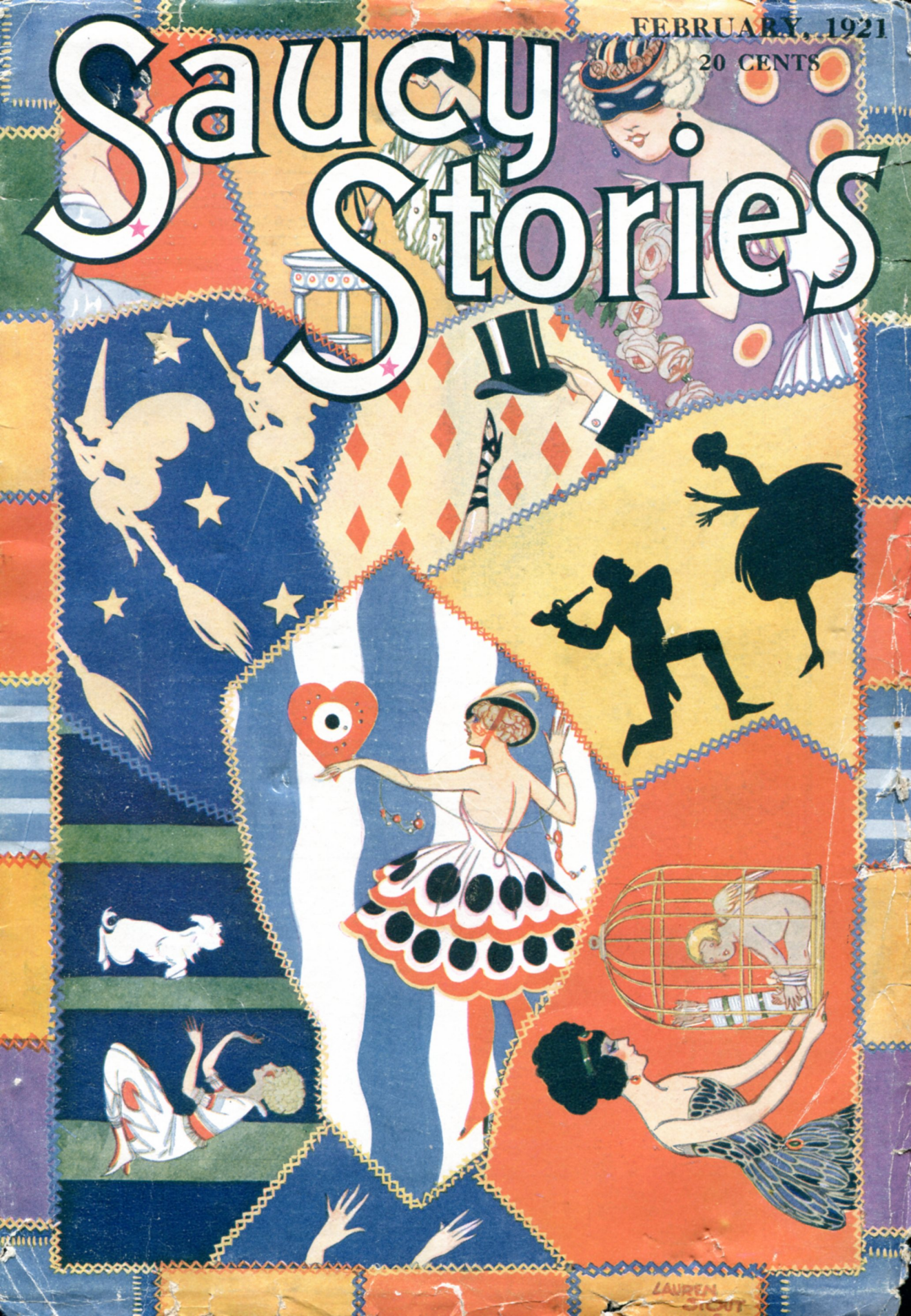
Saucy Stories



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FEBRUARY, 1921 VOL X, No. 1

Saucy Stories

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In the Affirmative

By Leslie Nelson Jennings

THERE'S a blush for *no*, and a blush for *yes*,
And a blush for *I don't dare*,
And there's one for a sweet defencelessness—
There's a blush that says *beware!*

The kiss that I had of the lips that said
You may, was a bit too tame;
The kiss of the miss who hung her head
Was hot as a flash of flame!

There's a blush for *yes*, and a blush for *no* . . .
Well, I kissed them none-the-less!
But the shy little mouse's murmured *oh!*
Was answer enough, I guess!

The Armored Eye

By T. F. Mitchell

I RETIRED to the privacy of my room to read the letter from Flossie. I took it out of its envelope and was just about to read it, when something, I don't know just what, prompted me to seize a button-hook, walk swiftly to the door and thrust it through the keyhole. It's a darn lucky thing my wife wears glasses.

The Puzzle Girl

By C. S. Montanye

CHAPTER I

YOUNG April and a day radiant with sunshine! David Ferran, turning into the Jackdaw, Polly Ann's popular Fifth Avenue tea-room, felt that on this day there were things in the world other than the designing of houses.

It was a day to make one forget the prosaic business of architecture. It was a day to inspire vague longings for the great world of outdoors—to kindle desires for singing streams and the spread of meadow.

David shrugged his shoulders as the entryway of the Jackdaw engulfed him. He found a table half way down the room and pulled out a chair. Had he known it, the complex machinery of Fate had begun to spin a web about him. Before another cycle of hours passed he was destined to be plunged into a turbid whirlpool of events. From it he would emerge triumphant, the cold hand of a girl within his own, the light of promise in her eyes and haggard face.

David picked up a hand-painted bill-of-fare. He invariably lunched at the tea-room. The Jackdaw was of no great dimensions and at this hour was comfortably filled. A pleasant buzz of conversation mingled with the muted clash of crockery; stenographer and employer faced each other across the Flemish tables, exchanging banter never permissible in business hours.

Everyone appeared complacently contented. Still, as David allowed his eyes to roam, he perceived there was at least one person in the Jackdaw that was neither part or parcel of the luncheon crowd.

She was a dark-haired girl seated at a table almost directly opposite him. She wore somber gray that seemed to be the reflection of a distress shadowing her wistful, hauntingly pretty face.

Her table held one other diner. This was a hawk-faced man in blue serge. David noticed that from time to time the man eyed the girl in gray with quick, sidelong glances. Once or twice he looked at a pigskin brief-case propped up against a chair beside her.

David could not explain why, but he was certain the man's interest was not entirely frank admiration for a pretty girl he had chanced to observe.

The girl made a shallow pretense of consuming what was placed before her. The effort, at best, was so half hearted as to attract any keen attention. That she harbored a secret agitation so poignant as to flutter her fingers and cause her to move restlessly, toe of one slipper nervously tapping the floor, was not to be doubted.

David was mystified. She was pretty, dainty and obviously refined. She was too young to be troubled by anything grim or dire. What, then, was the interest she aroused in the hawk-faced man who continued to regard her slyly?

David's thoughts were disturbed by the arrival of a man who took the chair opposite him. The newcomer was a swarthy, under-sized individual with a cruel cast of feature. He was Italian or Spanish and not at all the class of client Polly Ann welcomed. A furtive, cunning air hung about him, so pronounced

that David felt his brows draw together. He watched the man who, displaying scant interest in the menu of the day, dropped one hand to the table, bent forward and raked the room with a swinging, sweeping gaze.

He twisted and craned his neck until David heard him draw a sibilant breath. The brown hands of the man tightened on the edge of the table until his knuckles whitened. His black eyes, blazing with an inner fire, had leaped across the room, and fastened upon the figure of the girl in gray with such avid ferocity that David felt a strange thrill.

"May I have your order?"

A trim waitress appeared beside the table. Twice she repeated the inquiry before the man turned his head with a jerk.

"Anything—it does not matter—bring me anything."

The waitress lifted polite brows.

"Do you wish the regular lunch, sir?"

The foreigner made an impatient gesture.

"Yes, yes—the regular lunch!"

The waitress glided away and the man resumed his contemplation of the girl; twice he darted swift glances at the pigskin brief-case and drummed on the table top.

David lighted a cigarette. Some sort of drama was having an inception in Polly Ann's tea-room. What was it and in what way were the hawk-face and the swarthy man before him concerned? Indisputably both betrayed a burning interest in the puzzling girl in gray.

Suddenly she turned her head. For a moment her dark eyes wandered. She had evidently felt the magnetism of the man's stare.

In a watch-tick she saw the foreigner at David's table and stiffened to stone. Her red lips dropped apart, her breath grew uneven and rapid, and what color glowed in her smooth cheeks was drained away. With disconcerting rapidity she attained her feet, caught up her check in a quivering hand and turned to the door, hurrying down the center aisle with flying feet.

It was the next instant that David realized that she had forgotten the pigskin brief-case in her haste. It still reposed by the chair next to the one she had occupied. Immediately he stood up and crossed the aisle. The man with the hawk-face was leaning forward, staring after the girl who was passing through the doorway. David caught up the brief-case and a minute later was out on the pavement.

He was a trifle too late. A taxicab had moved away from the curb. Through its rear window David caught an impression of the girl's profile. The cab was swallowed up in the flood of traffic, leaving David acutely conscious of the brief-case in his hand.

"Damn!" he said fervently.

Events moved rapidly thereafter. The man with the hawk-face came out of the Jackdaw, to be joined by another man who stood at the curb, farther up the street. To him the wearer of blue serge spoke briskly in a cold, metallic voice:

"How did she go? Is she trailed? She was out like a shot."

"Taxi," the second man answered laconically. "Hall and Fielding grabbed the ark behind her. They won't lose her. Are you sure she's the gal from Oyster Point?"

"I am now. Come on, no use delaying here."

They jumped into a passing cab which vanished around the corner. David did not know it, but when the vehicle had left the avenue the second man got out and rounding the block, took up a station behind him and skilfully stuck at his heels until the evening hours.

"I believe you found that case?" a voice, spiced with a European accent, said at David's elbow.

The man resumed his contemplation of the girl; twice he darted swift glances at the pigskin brief-case.

He turned, to look into the face of the swarthy little man responsible for the girl's flight.

"You found the case in the restaurant. It does not belong to you. Please give it to me."

David smiled faintly.

"Does it belong to *you?*"

The eyes of the other were fired with black gleams.

"Yes! The case is mine! I want it."

David laughed.

"My friend," he said pleasantly, "you are lying. The case does not belong to you and I have not the slightest intention of giving it to you."

The other fell back a step or two.

"Gentleman," he said, with a change of tactics, "name your own price for the case. We will not argue about it. How much?"

David was moved to another laugh.

"The case is not for sale. I think you had better move on. I am very apt to become annoyed with you, and when I am annoyed with anybody I am not a pleasant person by any means."

The man thrust his dark face forward, untamed savagery in his eyes.

"You give me that case or I will call a policeman and have you arrested! We shall see!"

David pushed him gently but firmly from his path.

"Call *two* if you like—"

A corner distant he looked back over his shoulder. The foreigner was skulking after him. David turned into the building where his office was located and took an elevator. Whether or not he had eluded the man by the move he did not know.

On the seventh floor he admitted himself to his suite and handed the brief-case to his secretary with the instructions it should be locked up in the safe. Later, when he had the opportunity, he would examine it in the hope of finding a clue to its owner. Meantime, the rush of work confronting him demanded studied attention.

The opportunity to search the pigskin brief-case became possible in the middle hours of evening. In the privacy of his bachelor apartment, David rammed some shag into his pipe and picked up the case.

What mystery revolved about it? In what sinister manner was it mixed up with the girl in gray and the men of the Jackdaw?

The brief-case was practically new. It was of excellent material and evidently expensive. A brass lock held down the flap. There was no key to it, but it opened when David pressed it. He drew out some six pieces of music. Inspection proved that they were concert songs for soprano voice.

David frowned. It was not possible that the small foreigner had used bribes and threats to obtain the music. There must be something else. He laid the songs aside and delved deeper. His roving fingers touched crinkly tissue paper. He drew out something that felt hard to his touch, and eagerly tore away its paper shrouding.

Winking at him in the light of the table electrolier was a blue-white diamond necklace of superb brilliancy and sparkle!

For five minutes David fingered the stones. He turned to the music in quest of a possible written name, but found nothing. He picked up the brief-case again and examined it with scrupulous care. On the very inner side of the flap, printed in small letters were the words, *Count Nicolas Tarasova*—under the name was an address that read, *Hotel Bennington, N. Y. C.*

A faint gleam of light! David laid aside his pipe and searched his memory. Try as he might he had no recollection of ever having heard the name of Tarasova. Could it be that the foreigner of the Jackdaw was the Count himself? It

did not seem possible. The man appeared to be of anything but the nobility.

Replacing necklace and music in the brief-case, David laid it on the table. In the morning, he decided, he would go to the Hotel Bennington and ask information. He looked at his watch and helped himself to a cigarette.

The face of his Puzzle Girl, wistful and haunting, swam through his imagination. Whom would he discover her to be? Surely crime had not touched her with crimson fingers. Whoever or whatever she was, she had come by the necklace honestly. David was positive of that.

An hour later, with window elevated and curtains stirring in the night breeze, he sank into the abyss of a deep, untroubled slumber.

How long he slept David did not know, but it was some time in the cold hours before dawn that he awoke with a spasmodic start. He sat up, wide awake, every nerve alert. Something unexplainable had aroused him. He tilted his head forward and strained his ears.

Presently he remembered the open window in his living-room, the fire-escape landing it looked out on, the brief-case on the table where he had left it. He jumped out of bed and thrust his feet into slippers.

The bedroom opened into a small corridor that connected the front rooms of the apartment with those in the rear. David listened. No sound disturbed the heavy, unruffled silence.

He made his way along the corridor, brushed aside the portières of the living room and entered it. The pallid shine of waning stars crept through the open window. A clock ticked slowly and monotonously.

A few steps away from the threshold David halted. A crafty chill mounted the length of his spine. An uncanny, inner feeling that he was not alone became painfully apparent. In the dusky shadows some living thing was concealed, crouched to spring. He began edging toward the table in the drawer of which was a very dependable and new automatic revolver.

He was half way to the table when a bulky, muffled shape leaped forward out of the blackness.

Not entirely unprepared, David swung around to meet the attack, whipping out both fists with such rapidity that flesh and bone crunched under them. A grunt sounded.

Instinctively realizing that it was now his opponent's turn, David threw up his guard. A cruel heel was brought down with crushing force on the instep of his bare foot; at the same time a knee was driven into the pit of his abdomen and, his hands falling, his jaw was stung with the kick of a wicked blow that threw him a half-dozen feet across the room.

Sinking almost to his knees in an extreme agony of pain, David blundered against a chair and clung to it, setting his teeth against his lip to keep back the cry that would have emerged.

He heard the patter of feet, a mocking laugh and saw the shine of the jaded stars blotted out as his visitor climbed out on the fire-place and vanished.

Some minutes later David was able to switch on the electrolier. The pigskin brief-case with its diamond necklace had disappeared into the night. The table was bare. The mystery of the Jackdaw at noon had penetrated to his apartment in the gray hours of dawn.

CHAPTER II

Bag, music and necklace had disappeared, but the name and address David had found could not be filched from his mind. He breakfasted in his rooms, bruised from the morning's encounter

but not discouraged. He had every intention of seeing the thing through. He would lose no time in getting down to the Hotel Bennington and—

The tinkle of his front door-bell disturbed his thoughts. Opening the door David found the hawk-faced man in blue serge that he had last seen on the pavement in front of Polly Ann's tea-room.

"Mr. Ferran?"

The cold, metallic voice clashed on his ears like the ring of steel. David bowed.

"If you can spare just a minute, Mr. Ferran."

Ushering the stranger into his living-room, David indicated a chair. The man, emotionless and inflexible, came to the point without waste of time.

"You were at the Jackdaw yesterday, Mr. Ferran—about noon?"

David nodded.

"I was."

"And when you left you took with you a pigskin brief-case forgotten by its owner."

David looked at the man without replying.

"Perhaps," he ventured at length, "it might be a good idea for you to introduce yourself."

"My name," the caller said, "is John Steele. I am a Federal officer, winding up a case of some two years' duration."

Drawing back his coat he displayed for a moment his badge of office.

"In the interest of justice, I ask that you turn the brief-case over to me at once. It is important that I examine it."

David concealed a smile.

"You are," he said quietly, "a few hours too late."

Briefly he explained what had transpired. The man who called himself John Steele listened without comment. He looked at the window through which the intruder had entered and put on his hat.

"You will oblige me," he said in a more genial voice, "by not reporting the affair to the police. Say nothing and do nothing. Your caller will be taken care of."

At the door David drew a little breath.

"By the way," he murmured with assumed indifference, "I wonder if you know the young lady in gray who left the bag at the Jackdaw?"

Steele dropped the lids over his eyes.

"Yes, I happen to know the young lady in question. Very shortly I hope to know her even better. Thank you and —good day."

David returned to the living-room. Steele's statement haunted him. The words could mean only that he hoped to place the girl under arrest. David picked up his hat and let himself out. He knew the Hotel Bennington as a small, select hostelry in the upper Forties, situated half way between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

The morning was as warm and pleasant as yesterday had been. David decided to walk.

When he reached the hotel and went in, it was to find the usual confusion of before noon. Porters with the luggage of departing guests hustled about; maids in black and white pushed vacuum cleaners over yards of carpet. A squadron of window washers was at work, with pails and brushes.

David crossed the lobby, which was fairly spacious and adorned with marble columns. He saw that the clerk on duty was engaged in conversation with a man at his desk, and halted. Something familiar about the man the clerk spoke with caused David to stare. Then he saw a profile that he had looked upon no less than thirty minutes past, and closed his hands.

In some way John Steele had found the scent. Was he, too, in search of information concerning Count Nicolas Tarasova?

David determined to find out. Fortunately the Federal officer had his back turned to him. He located a marble pillar set to one side of the clerk's desk and edged toward it. Behind the column David found that by listening intently he could just hear what was being said.

"You say Tarasova left here in March?" Steele was questioning. "During what part of March?"

"The first week," the clerk replied. "I remember the day distinctly. But if you wish me to be positive I will have the bookkeeper look up the exact date."

"Never mind," Steele cut in. "Just answer me this: Did Tarasova leave with his wife, or did she leave before or after him?"

"The Countess left a few days before he did. I understand that she went back to France. The Count left with his secretary and his valet."

David saw Steele lift his brows.

"Secretary?"

"A Miss Diana Dysart—a very attractive young lady. I think she was studying for the stage. I recall that she took vocal lessons. She was very dark and good looking."

David felt his heart leap. The girl in gray, without question!

"One thing more," Steele said. "Have you any record that the Count left luggage here? Does mail come for him yet, and where do you forward it to?"

The clerk shook his head.

"We don't. He left no address of any kind. From the day he gave up his suite we never saw or heard anything further of him."

Steele murmured a word of thanks and moved away. David circled the marble pillar and allowed the Federal agent sufficient time to reach the street before he followed.

When he passed through the high doorway of the hotel he saw Steele stepping into one of the taxis at the curb. It moved toward Sixth Avenue. David promptly climbed into the first of the idle cabs and gave the chauffeur precise instructions.

"Follow the taxi ahead. Don't draw up too close but do not lose sight of it."

He settled back on the worn upholstery, leaning forward. The vehicle Steele had hired turned into Sixth Avenue and ran south.

David's pulse beat with anticipation. Steele was the only connecting link of the shadowy drama being played. He would stick to the man's heels until he learned something of importance—something that might give him an insight into what had occurred and was occurring.

In the upper Thirties Steele's taxi cut east. It crossed the ribbons of a number of avenues and delved into Tenement Land. A huddle of miserable brick flats, flaunting the wash of yesterday, raised tawdry heads. Gutter, curb and dirty sidewalk were crowded with push-carts and their frowsy customers. Small children played on the broken flags. It was a region of poverty and adversity unmasked and unashamed.

Close to Second Avenue Steele's cab stopped before a garage. David halted his own vehicle with a word to the driver and looked ahead through the windshield. He saw Steele alight and walk briskly into the garage. David meditated the next step.

"Look here," he said to the chauffeur, passing a bill through the window, "I want to find out what the tall man in blue serge, who just got out of the cab ahead, is doing in the garage. I can't go in myself for the reason that he knows me. Do you suppose you could wander in and find out what he is up to, without making him aware of it?"

The chauffeur, a product of Manhattan's streets, descended to the pavement.

"Sure I can. This here is Mike Brennan's garage. I know Mike well.

It will be a cinch to pick up an earful. Stick here, boss. I will be back right away."

He set off down the street, greeting a lounging mechanic in front of the garage, into which he stepped blithely. David looked at his watch. It was rapidly approaching the noon hour. He hoped something worth while would develop. Neglecting his business, without some reward, was not to his liking.

The passing of five minutes brought Steele out of the garage. He entered his taxi and drove off, wheeling into Second Avenue and turning north. A minute later his own chauffeur appeared. David saw from the expression on his face that his quest had not been altogether in vain.

"Boss," he was told, "your man stepped in to hire a touring-car off Mike. The car is to be ready at seven o'clock tonight. It's going up to a place in Connecticut what is called Oyster Point."

Oyster Point! Somewhere, sometime David had heard that name. He handed the chauffeur another bill and gave the Grand Central Terminal as his future destination.

Oyster Point—the name rankled in his mind. All at once David recalled where and when he had heard it. It was the name spoken to Steele by the man joining him outside of the Jackdaw the previous day.

At the giant railroad terminus David sought the information booth. In no great length of time he learned several interesting facts! Oyster Point was a fishing town in upper Connecticut, the station above Bridgewater; it was some two hours distant from the metropolis. The information clerk informed David that there was a four o'clock train from the station that was an express, stopping at Bridgewater; from there, a trolley might be taken to Oyster Point without loss of time.

David purchased a ticket for the express and retraced his steps back to Forty-second Street.

He lunched at the Jackdaw. It was hard to imagine that only yesterday the curtain had lifted on the drama into which he had stumbled. He looked around, almost ready to believe it was all a joke—that there was no Puzzle Girl to perplex and intrigue him, no elusive Count Tarasova, no cold, imperturbable John Steele, or small, skulking foreigner.

When he stopped at the desk of Polly Ann to settle for his check, the blonde, attractive proprietress of the tea-room favored him with a shadowy smile.

"Did you find Miss Dysart yesterday?" she asked placidly.

David's heart stood still.

"Miss D-Dysart—" he stammered.

Polly Ann inclined her coronet of spun-gold hair.

"I saw her come in carrying a briefcase and I saw you rush out, after her, with it. The inference was plain. Did you manage to catch her?"

David swallowed. An absurd desire to laugh assailed him. In a way it was ludicrous. He had grimly sought information in a furtive, secret manner, and the owner of the restaurant where he had lunched for the better part of two years knew and had known the identity of the girl!

"She was too quick for me," he confessed. Then, struck with an idea, he continued glibly: "I wish you'd tell me where to find her. I should like to return the case to her."

Polly Ann gave her attention to a departing patron.

"Miss Dysart," she resumed, when she had made the change, "at one time lunched here regularly. The reason you never encountered her was because she always came in after you had gone. She was formerly the secretary of a French Count, but she told me yesterday she had resigned and was back in town for

a few days. She is staying at the Green Gables on Madison Avenue."

David thanked her and made for the street. At last something definite, something concrete, something to work on. He knew that the Green Gables was a better-class lodging-house across town. It was only a dozen blocks away.

On feet spurred and winged with a gathering excitement, David made his way to the Green Gables. The place was a series of old-fashioned private dwellings that had been connected and remodeled into one large, long building. He was admitted by a colored boy and asked his business. A telephone on a table was handed him; he was directed to call the office of the Gables, located in the end house of the row.

"I wish," he said, when a voice answered him, "to speak with Miss Dysart."

There was pause.

"Just a miunte, please," the voice said.

David's hands tightened on the rubber receiver. Perhaps the adventure was running out like sand through an inverted hour-glass; perhaps Miss Dysart, his Puzzle Girl, would prove to be no different from ten thousand of her sisters, each striving for independence in colorless ways; perhaps, too, she might explain the necklace and the swarthy little man of the tea-room, and in explaining rid the affair of its mystery and prove it to be something vastly different from melodrama.

The voice in the receiver spoke again.

"I am sorry," it said, "but Miss Dysart is no longer a guest here. She left an hour ago with a Mr. Steele."

CHAPTER III

TWILIGHT was slowly gathering when the rocking trolley David had taken at Bridgewater arrived at Oyster Point. The combination pilot and conductor gave him directions how to get down to the Point, ran the trolley into a weather-beaten shed and departed in quest of dinner.

David set off down the road pointed out to him. It curved to the east. The Sound was not far distant. As he trudged along, damp, salty air blew against his face. Far at sea a siren sounded like the voice of a melancholy ghost. The heavens were dark and unadorned by the first stars of evening. It appeared that rain before morning was possible.

The road was narrow and dusty. In the purple twilight it unwound like a spool of black ribbon. As David passed along it, he wondered if his pilgrimage was not the errand of a fool.

John Steele had found Diana Dysart. It was reasonable to assume the Federal officer's contemplated motor trip might now be cancelled. The nest of the mystery might well be discovered empty.

And yet David was certain that Oyster Point figured largely in the affair. This fishing hamlet *must* yield enlightening facts.

All at once lights twinkled ahead in the gloom. The air became damper, and heavy with the salt reek. The road crossed a wooden bridge, over a sleeping canal, and ended in a pathway of broken clam and oyster shells. A stretch of beach, fringed by waving sedge grass sprang up; over it the Sound was visible—a black expanse of restless water, churned into white-caps by a stiffening wind.

David endeavored to obtain bearings. To the north lay the sandy arm of the Point, curving out into the Sound and making a small harbor in which fishing smacks, sail and motor-boats with hatches covered, lay at anchor. To the south was the light punctured bulk of a large building, resembling a medieval castle or château, sprawling to the water's edge. A half mile away from

it a number of lighted windows hinted of the presence of a fisherman's rest or hotel.

David walked up the beach. When he drew near the lights he found that they glimmered in the first-floor windows of an inn, time-worn and weather-beaten. He ascended to a sagging veranda. On one side of the inn was the termination of a cement road, coming in from the south. An automobile road, David concluded, built over the marshes. He looked at it with mounting interest. If John Steele came, it would be over this road.

David opened the front door of the building and stepped into the dining-room. In the lamplight, a girl with red hair was setting a number of bare, wooden tables. The cheerful aroma of cooking seeped into the room.

The girl looked at David with a friendly smile, heard his requirements, and raised her voice:

"Oh, pa! Someone here to see you!"

A door in the rear of the dining-room banged open and a man in rubber hip-boots came through it. The girl indicated David with a nod.

"Gentleman wants dinner and a room for the night, pop."

The keeper of the inn looked David over with something that might have been a faint suspicion.

"Just going to stay for tonight, are you?"

When David told him that was his intention, the other fingered a beard-rusty, aggressive chin.

"Hm-m—well, I guess I can fix you up. Dinner'll be ready in about fifteen minutes. Go upstairs if you want to get washed. You'll find the sittin'-room across the hall. The New Yawk papers just came in."

It was after David had removed the stains of travel and had located the "sittin'-room" that he was struck with an idea. He made his way back to the dining-room where the red-headed girl was filling a huge pewter pitcher from a water cooler.

"I wonder," David said, "if you happen to know a young girl whose name is Diana Dysart? I believe she comes from Oyster Point."

The girl looked thoughtful. She shook her head slowly.

"Nope. I never heard of no one by that name and I know everybody around the Point excepting them what come up in the summer."

David was about to turn away when she arranged some glasses, filled them and continued:

"Maybe the lady you are looking for is over at the Castle. The Count has always got people coming and going. Now that I think of it, I remember I did see a young lady over there last week. I saw her in one of the Count's boats. She could handle it, too, believe me!"

David gripped the back of the chair.

"Count?"

The girl with the red hair giggled.

"Sounds funny, don't it—a real, live Count in a place like this? Tarasova is his name. He came up here about three weeks ago and hired the Castle. I guess you must have seen the place—it's just back yonder a way. The State road runs along one side of its wall. A millionaire built it a long time ago but he never lived in it and it has been for rent for more'n six years. Then the Count come along and hired it. I guess he has money, too. He built a big wireless station on the roof. The folks around here says that he gets messages from ships hundreds of miles out at sea. Do you know the Count?"

"Perhaps, if you describe him—" David hinted.

The girl wiped her hands on a faded blue apron.

"He is a tall man with black hair. He always carries a cane and he walks with

sort of a limp. I don't know much about him but I guess he's afraid of getting robbed or something because he always has dogs running loose around the Castle. Folks around here are mighty curious, but no one ever found out very much about him. He's sly, the Count is."

Save for two bare-armed fishermen David was a solitary diner. He ate abstractedly. Once more he had chanced across information sufficient to kindle fresh hope. He had made no mistake in coming to the Point. His Puzzle Girl was mixed up in some way with Tarasova. And Steele was coming. The combination should prove advantageous.

David began to be reasonably sure that at last he had made some progress and stood in a fair way of getting to the bottom of the mystery.

When he went outside he found that the wind had increased. It came in from the southeast, blowing in buffeting gusts that bent the sedge-grass double.

David pulled his cap over his eyes and set out toward the residence of Count Tarasova. It was some ten minutes distant from the inn, lying between highway and beach. It was an estate of architectural dignity. Back of a high brick wall the Castle rose, turreted and lofty. It covered several acres of land and boasted a grove of beech trees at its farther end.

David skirted the brick wall, seeking an opening he did not find. He noticed that only one window in the building showed a light, and that one was guarded by a jealous blind. It was an ideal location for anyone who wished concealment. In this isolated spot anything might transpire and no man would be the wiser.

Half way along the wall David stopped and lifted his head quickly. High above the foremost turret of the Castle blue electric sparks had begun to vibrate. Wireless!

David listened to the crackling intonations, thrilled. The apparatus was either receiving or casting a message into the wilderness of the night. For five minutes without ceasing the blue sparks glinted. Then, as abruptly as it had begun, it grew silent and the window in which the solitary light shone turned black. The occupant of the room had plunged the light out.

David drew a breath. Something was brewing of which it was impossible to get an inkling. He rammed his hands deep into his pockets and felt impatience consuming him. The enigma was not unlike the wall of the Castle he circled. Try as he might, he could find no loophole, no opening through which he might look to see what was going on beyond him.

Over the wall a door banged open and a dog barked.

"Down, boy!" someone exclaimed in English tinged with a French accent. "'Bring the lantern, Pierre. Where is that Alf? *Mon Dieu!* He is never to be found when needed!"

The dog growled throatily. Over the top of the wall David caught the glimmer of the rays of the lantern. A desire to see who it was that spoke became irresistible. He looked at his surroundings. Close to him grew a giant oak with thick, low-hanging branches. As he sighted it, David read the solution of the problem. He caught the lower branches of the tree and drew himself up to a vantage point where, hidden by the foliage, he could observe without being detected.

Below him was a paved inclosure that resembled a courtyard. Two men stood at some distance from an entryway into the Castle. One, a tall, dark man of military bearing was Count Nicolas Tarasova himself, if David was to judge by the cane he leaned upon heavily. He

wore a light ulster and rested one hand on the head of a huge hound that he was in the act of releasing from a clinking chain.

The man beside the Count, David recognized even in the uncertain radiance of the lantern. He was the small, swarthy foreigner of the Jackdaw—the man who had endeavored to possess himself of the pigskin briefcase.

Hardly had David scrutinized the pair when a brass-bound door in the Castle opened and another man joined the Count and his confederate.

The newcomer was a burly individual, clad in cap, sweater, soiled duck trousers and rubber sneakers. When he drew into the yellow circle of lantern light David saw that his ugly face was decorated with a black eye. There was something strangely familiar about the fellow. Unless he was very much mistaken, the man was his guest of early morning.

The black eye, David appraised with distinct approval. Though he had been bested, to find that his marauder had not escaped unmarked, gave him a feeling of savage satisfaction.

"So it is you, Alf," Tarasova said. "I have been inquiring for you. There is much to be done. A telephone call from New York came in. *Sacré!* Some friends of ours have left town in a motor. There will be work for you to do."

The man gave a twist to his cap.

"I've been down on the dock," he replied sullenly, "You told me to fill the *Ghost's* tanks. Well, I've been doing it."

The Count raised a hand to his spiked mustache.

"Exactly. She must now be ready for her little trip, *oui?* The *Arcania* has wired Fire Island. I picked up the message. She will be on time. Come inside, I will instruct you in what you must do when the car from the city arrives."

The three went into the Castle, the Count limping heavily. David waited until the door closed, and climbed out of the tree. The conversation he had picked up was vivid in mind. A new lead had been supplied, in Tarasova's reference to the *Arcania*. The liner was the fastest vessel of the Black Star fleet. It plied between Cherbourg and New York.

From the way Tarasova had spoken it sounded very much as if it was his intention to meet the incoming ocean greyhound. Instead of clearing up, the tangle had become more complicated.

Thoughtfully, David returned to the inn.

He had almost reached the sagging veranda when the twin headlights of an approaching motor spotted the highway. David darted into the obscurity of the veranda's far end. The car drew up even with the inn with motor panting. Brakes whined and figures alighted.

The front door of the tavern opened. The innkeeper came out on the porch and went as far as the steps. The metallic voice of John Steele sounded:

"Is that you, Kling? We are here at last." A pause, then: "This way, Miss Dysart."

David opened his mouth in amazement. The girl he had firmly believed to be under arrest ascended the steps beside the Federal officer. Revealed in the light streaming out of the open doorway, David saw that she wore a long, dark cape and a chic turban. Two other men followed up the stairs but David did not recognize them.

"Anybody here, Kling?" Steele asked.

"Only a young guy staying overnight."

"What is his name?"

Kling shrugged.

"Don't know—I forgot to ask him. He's all right, Mr. Steele. I can always

spot them what don't mind other people's business. Come in. Dinner's waitin' for you. I got some news, too."

The party entered the inn and the door closed. As crafty as any miscreant, David drew himself up on the porch. Finding a tear in the shade of one dining-room window, he flattened his nose against the glass. Steele and his party were not occupying the room inside. He waited a few minutes before going in himself.

The girl with the red hair had removed the last dish from the table and was turning out the dining-room lights, one by one.

"You have visitors, I see," David remarked pleasantly. "I thought it was a trifle early in the season for guests."

The girl moved her shoulders indifferently.

"They're some people up from the city. Steele, one o' the men, hired a motor-boat from pop. Funny doings, I call it. What's he bringing a woman up here for, this late at night? It don't look respectable to me. Pa's queer in some ways. He knows a lot more than he tells me. I guess he thinks it's none of my business."

"Where have they gone?" David inquired smoothly.

The girl extinguished the last lamp but one and jerked her thumb over her shoulder.

"Back in the dining-room where pa and I eat, down at the end of the hall. Well, I'll say good night. I get up at five o'clock and when night comes along I'm dog-tired. Why don't you go in the sittin'-room and read the papers? There is not much doing up here at this time of the year. Good night."

She retreated with a yawn and a smile. In the small drab sitting-room of the inn, David lighted a cigarette and dropped down on a horse-hair sofa. He ached with a desire for action. He wanted to tear away the obscuring veil and solve the mystery. To sit at ease while only a few feet distant was the dark-eyed girl of the Jackdaw, was maddening.

David drew away his cigarette and went to the door. It opened into a corridor that was long, narrow and straight. A kerosene lamp on an iron bracket gave what wan illumination there was. At the very end of the hall sounded the murmur of conversation.

David compressed reflective lips. Did he dare listen at the door of Kling's dining-room? It seemed that he was fated always to overhear conversations from which he learned nothing. Still, there was always the chance, and it was time wasted to idle about and expect developments that never came.

The corridor was roughly carpeted. His feet made no noise as he traversed it. It twisted to the left at its end, affording a temporary refuge if David's presence became known. He moved silently to the door of Kling's dining-room and found that he could hear perfectly what was being said within.

"The question is," John Steele was saying, "whether or not your boat will make faster time than Tarasova's? There must be no possible chance for him to slip through my fingers at the final minute. Too many times he has stolen away. Tonight must be the definite ending of it."

"I'll guarantee this here boat," Kling said. "As soon as I got your wire I took the Ford and went over to the yards. This little boat ain't as large as the Count's *Ghost* but she's got stuff in her that's built for speed. Wait and see!"

"The Count is clever," Diana Dysart murmured in a low, musical voice. "And Pierre is an excellent sailor. He seems to know everything about a motor-boat that is to be known."

Kling chuckled.

"Is that so? Well, he will have to sail

his silly head off if he wants to outfoot us. I'll take you through and back and bet you half of hell I sail rings around the *Ghost* either way! What time does the *Arcania* pass Montauk Light?"

"Sometime close to midnight," Steele answered.

"There is no chance for the Count," one of the other men remarked. "We will grab him with the stuff, hands down. The only thing that worries me is that he will get suspicious and won't make a try for it. Mike Brennan told me there were *two* people asking information about where the car was going. One was a chauffeur of a taxi and the other was a wop. Mike said that if he had been around nobody would have gotten the dope on it. Some mechanic had to shoot off his mouth. I wouldn't be surprised if Tarasova expected us."

"I think I will have a look at that boat of yours, Kling. Will you wait here, Miss Dysart? Fielding, you and Hall bring the valise from the car," Steele said suddenly.

There came the scrape of chairs being pushed back on a wooden floor. David swiftly rounded the bend in the corridor. He was not too soon, for he had barely gotten out of sight when Kling came out of the dining-room followed by Steele and his two companions. Footfalls dwindled down the hall and a door opened and slammed shut.

The inn grew quiet. The wind played about the eaves and rattled the ancient shutters. David sat down on the lower step of a stairway that emptied into the corridor's bend and meditated gloomily. So far as he could see, he would be obliged to sit and continue to cool his heels. Indubitably the last act of the drama was to be staged at sea. He knew of no possible method he could use to wedge his way into it.

Far better, he told himself moodily, that he had washed his hands of the affair after the brief-case had been stolen. All that he had to show for his trouble was time wasted and several bruises.

"I'm an idiot!" he said, with fervent disgust.

His ruminations were swept away by the sudden sound of a scuffle and a smothered, choked-off scream. Followed the fall of an overturned chair and another cry, this time faint and muffled.

On his feet in a flash, David ran into the corridor. The noise of combat emanated from Kling's dining-room. He anticipated that the door would be locked, but it opened with such smooth ease, when he grasped the china knob, that he was tumbled headlong into the room and fell sprawling over the fallen chair before he could check his rush.

The dining-room was small and furnished in the mode of twenty years back. Its single window was wide open, admitting the sweep of the salt wind. Of the girl John Steele had left to await his return there was no visible trace.

David picked himself up and leaned out of the window. From the roadway came the sound of a throbbing engine. He saw a shadowy figure that seemed to be carrying another, struggling futilely. Significance of what Tarasova had said to the man he called Alf shot through David's mind. The Count had given instructions to abduct Diana Dysart!

In an eye-wink David had scrambled across the window's sill.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID dropped down on a heap of old clamshells and ran forward, narrowly escaping another fall over the front wheel of a bicycle that had been left standing against a wing of the inn. He reached the roadway in time to see the car jump away, engine rumbling.

Quivering with impotent anger, David rushed back to the inn. He pounced up-

on the bicycle that had almost tripped him and wheeled it out from its concealment. Inspection proved that the tires were inflated and that it was evidently new and in good condition. He mounted it and pedalled out on the highway. Down the State road the red tail-light of the abductor's machine winked like a scarlet firefly.

David bent low over the handle-bars, calling upon all the energy at his command. He glided past the black wall of the Castle Tarasova, came upon a slight incline and with both wheels humming flew down it, wind-blurred eyes fixed as best they could on the small, guiding tail-light.

The owner of the bicycle had kept it in good repair. It was a fairly large-geared machine and well lubricated. Under the pressure of David's efforts and the smooth incline, it gathered gradual momentum until it flashed along with the speed of a motorcycle. David clung desperately to the handle-bars and kept his head lowered to the rocking force of the wind.

At the end of the first half mile he grew aware that the motor he pursued was rapidly drawing away from him. He had hoped only to keep it in sight and not to overtake it, but even this seemed vain. Try as he might, the tail-light grew smaller and smaller.

Mechanically David rode on, legs beginning to rebel at the unaccustomed strain put upon them. Another half mile, and instead of growing smaller the light remained stationary. Then, as he darted around a turn in the road, his heart leaped. The car had stopped!

David applied the brake on the bicycle, bearing heavily on the pedals to check its speed. With tires thrumming on the cement of the highway the bicycle bore down on the standing automobile.

The man in sweater, cap and soiled duck trousers was silhouetted against the curtain of nightfall in the glare of the headlights. He had removed the radiator cap and was pouring water obtained from a roadside ditch into it, from a small pail.

With nimble agility David threw himself off the bicycle and, without prearranged method of attack, hurled himself at the kidnapper.

The man saw him coming and threw the bucket at him. It whistled past David's head but did not stop his onslaught. Burning with a blind rage that gave him almost superhuman strength, David unleashed a vicious right hook. He allowed for the movement of the other's head. It caught the man between the eyes and threw him against the fenders. Before he could rally, David had countered with his left to such good advantage that his enemy slumped to his knees without having struck a blow in return.

Under ordinary circumstances David would have known compassion. But the Alf who had visited him at his apartment and had stooped to trickery to vanquish him, must be conquered to such a degree that further interference would be impossible.

Blessing his knowledge of fisticuffs obtained at a gymnasium frequented during the winter months, David stepped forward to finish his man. A pounding right to the jaw and a vigorous, neatly timed, short arm punch to the abdomen completed his task.

With a faint moan his adversary collapsed and fell sprawling into the roadside ditch from which he had drawn the water.

Breathless, David rested for a minute against the warm radiator. His hands were bruised and his knuckles were raw. He steadied himself, brute exultation flooding him. The red haze before his eyes evaporated and once more the world grew level and steady under his feet.

Wiping his face with the sleeve of his

coat he climbed to the running-board of the car. It was an open motor of familiar lines. Unless he was very much mistaken, it was the car John Steele had hired from the garage in the Thirties.

It was feasible for him to believe that Tarasova's tool had ridden to the inn on the bicycle, left the wheel there and spirited the girl away in the automobile.

Diana Dysart lay back against the cushions of the rear seat. Her wrists and ankles had been hastily bound together and a bandanna knotted across the lower portions of her face. Above the gag her eyes, clear and unfrightened, glowed like dusky stars. They seemed to be pleading with David to release her.

Keenly aware that his enemy in the ditch might return to consciousness at any minute and wage further warfare, David found and opened his pocket-knife. He hacked away the girl's bonds and unknotted the handkerchief about her jaws. She sat up and flexed her arms.

"Quickly! Do you know anything about automobiles? I must get back to Kling's Inn at once—"

David smiled to himself. She, of course, had no way of knowing who he was or the part he was playing in her own drama. He told her he would do his best, replaced the radiator cap, started the motor, turned the car and started away without another glance at the man, misshapen and motionless, in the ditch.

Conscious of the pale blur of her piquant face, reflected in the wind-shield, David drove the car back up the incline.

At last, Fate had been kind to him. He felt a warm happiness surging through him. When he stopped the car at the inn, the girl jumped out and ran up the steps. She used a rust-encrusted knocker with such good effect that the door opened and Kling's red-headed daughter, fantastic in a wool kimono as brilliant as her hair, appeared, rubbing sleepy eyes.

When she saw who had disturbed her, the girl's mouth hung open.

"For land's sake!" she stuttered. "Pop and Mr. Steele thought someone had swiped the auto and took you off in it!"

"Have they gone?" Diana Dysart snapped.

The girl with the red hair laughed.

"Ten minutes ago—all of them! Steele sent one of his friends to look for you. I heard him say that he was afraid Tarasova had gotten hold of you—"

Not waiting to hear the remainder of it, Diana Dysart descended the veranda steps. Beside the machine she bowed her head as if in deep thought. David had an impression of her enchanting profile, of the midnight darkness of her dark hair and the long lashes that fringed her expressive eyes.

She raised her head quickly.

"You have helped me so very much. I—I am deeply in your debt. Could—might I ask your help again—"

David dropped his hand over hers.

"Command me!" he begged.

She disengaged her fingers and consulted the watch on one slim wrist.

"If you will follow me, please—"

She set off down the beach, crossing the bridge over the sleepy canal and making her way down a plank pathway through the sedge-grass. As she walked, free-limbed and rapidly, she tried to furnish David with some sort of an explanation.

"You see, I am trying to aid a Federal officer in making an arrest. It must sound dreadfully like the movies when I say that he is after a French Count who has long been defying the law. I came up here tonight from New York. The Federal agent I speak of wants me to be present at a rendezvous out at sea. He expects the Count to await the passing of an ocean liner. He wants

me to make positive identification when the arrest is made."

They crossed another bridge and moved down a sand slope, leading out on a number of rickety boat-houses and landing piers.

"There is a very fast motor-boat here," the girl explained, "belonging to a fisherman who lives in Bridgewater. I intend to borrow it and use it to get out to the rendezvous. With your assistance I am sure I can do so in time. If you know anything at all about engines you will aid me greatly."

David told her he owned a motor-boat himself and, while not an exper , believed he could manage to render some help.

She selected one of the piers, made her way along the elevated runway and stepped into a dory tethered to the end of the float. He picked up a pair of oars, fitted them into their locks and pushed off. She gave him directions and he rowed across the inlet.

David's warm happiness enveloped him like a garment. The adventure was well worth its initial disappointments. Later, would come a full explanation. Enough for the present that Fortune had been kind to him, that his Puzzle Girl was inches only away from him, confident of his helpful assistance.

Their destination proved to be a seaworthy motor-boat that was a cabin cruiser. David, as he had told her, knew something about boats. He divined instantly that this craft had been built for speed. The name displayed in letters of brass on the stern was *Anitra*. It was a boat anyone might be proud to possess.

When David backed water and held the dory as steady as possible, Diana Dysart grasped the running rail and drew herself gracefully up to the *Anitra's* small afterdeck.

For a minute she stood with face to the sea. The wind modelled her cape sleekly to her body. David thought of a Viking woman as he moored the dory to a bobbing buoy and scrambled into the bow of the *Anitra*. He disengaged the mooring hook and let it splash. As soon as this happened, the liberated motor-boat began to drift sluggishly shoreward.

The girl, her brief moment of retrospection over, lost no fur her time. She spoke to David and took the wheel. In quick turn he inspected the gauge on the sixty-gallon gasoline tank, located the battery switch and closed the circuit.

Sliding the hatch cover aside, David leaned over the open engine-pit. He quickly solved the problem of the controlling levers and accelerated the ignition, opening the throttle.

The *Anitra* got under way with a celerity that told David he had not erred when he had judged it to be a hing of powerful speed. Before its engines were warm it had picked up to fourteen miles an hour with an amazing rapidity. The girl at the helm swung it in a wide arc as it gathered momentum and, keeping well off from the arm of the Point, headed toward the open Sound.

Excitement began to tingle within David. The black waters and the blacker sky, the twinkle of illuminated chart and compass, the rush of the wind and the sting of the spray engendered a supreme contentment. He was no longer David Ferran the New York architect. Here, tending the engines of a purloined motor-boat, he was a buccaneer of the seventeenth century—Black Bart reincarnated.

Off the end of Oyster Point the tide was incoming. Its buffeting strength taxed the *Anitra* to the utmost. The girl crouched over the wheel, eyes strained into the dim distance. She appeared to have perfect confidence in both the craft and herself.

A mile out the ploughing was better. Now and then a gas-buoy flickered like

a phantom spirit. A Sound steamer passed with a faraway echo of music.

At the end of the third mile David sighted the starboard light of some boat that was not far removed from them. He watched it speculatively. Was it Tarasova's speedy *Ghost,* or the boat Kling had hired for John Steele?

Something seemed to tell David that before the finish came there would be events to reckon with that would require all of his intelligence, strength and ingenuity.

The Sound crossed, the choppy Atlantic greeted them with slapping waves. David looked at the gasoline tanks dubiously. Would their contents hold out? He gazed south. The lighthouse at Montauk Point was a tiny finger of light, beckoning to the greyhounds that ran the trackless lanes of the ocean.

The stability of the *Anitra* surprised him. It took a sturdy boat to weather conditions such as they wallowed in. He felt that he would like to shake the hands of its designer and builder.

They found a long, comparatively smooth run of sea beyond Duck Island. It caught the *Anitra* squarely on the beam. A wave, before the girl could breast it, smashed against the port flanks and soaked David with a cold, drenching shower.

Their speed gradually decreased and he became aware that the first leg of the cruise was over. Aft the lee of the island the squabbling wind-squalls passed far overhead.

Diana Dysart raised herself and searched the dark horizon with inquisitive eyes. Presently she lifted her hand and indicated to David the riding-light he had first noticed miles back. From its position it seemed that the boat had likewise relinquished its speed and was lying in wait for passing prey.

"The *Ghost!*" Diana Dysart cried. "Its reflector is broken. I know it well. It is the Count's boat!"

David shivered. What had become of Steele and his assistants? Had the unforeseen occurred, and had Tarasova put the Federal officer to rout?

David was vaguely troubled. He was armed with nothing save his two fists. And experience had taught him that the Count and his confederates were unscrupulous villains who overlooked no trick or subterfuge that might bring victory.

The hand of the girl fell on his arm and tightened. She pointed to the northeast. Against the smug of the night, a mile or two distant, a towering, light-punctured bulk was creeping out of the murk.

David's heart thumped. The *Arcania,* by every indication! Diana Dysart seemed to catch his excitement. She grew stiffly still and bent over the wheel, staring transfixed.

The riding-light of the second motor-boat began to move again. Those aboard it had likewise sighted the vessel and were stirring themselves. David waited some command from his skipper but none was forthcoming. The girl's intention seemed to be to play a waiting game. And, whatever the tenseness of the situation, she displayed no impatience or restlessness.

The shape of the oncoming Black Star liner grew larger and larger. Its course was not more than a half mile beyond their lurking station. Already crossing this space was the light of the second motor-boat.

As she saw it, Diana Dysart lost her preoccupied air. She gave a number of brisk orders to David, who opened the throttle again, hanging over the engines to detect a discordant note in their smooth, powerful hum.

Now, the ship standing out before them took on distinct proportions. There was no mistaking the *Arcania* in

the sweep of deck and huge, rakish funnels, powdered with the jewels of live coals boiling up from the stoke-rooms down decks. Quite clearly, David was able to determine the location of salon and forward deck.

The *Anitra,* rushing toward it, turned in the swinging trough of the sea and headed on a parallel slant with the liner. With a dull roar, similar to that of a dozen trains passing through the same tunnel, the *Arcania* drew even with them.

Watching breathlessly with every nerve taut, David suddenly saw that on the stern end of the uppermost deck an electric torch was speaking its mute language in nervous, fitful flashes.

A signal!

He saw that Diana Dysart had observed the gleams. She called something to him that was lost in the thunder of the passing liner. The *Arcania* swung away leaving a frothy, treacherous wake that raked the *Anitra* from stem to stern. Something small and square that gave out a blue-phosphorescent glow fell out of the sky, struck the choppy sea and blazed up for a brief minute.

Instantly the white beam of a searchlight on the second motor-boat was brought to bear directly on the object David knew had been thrown from the *Arcania's* upper deck.

A man, armed with a boat hook, had crept to the bow of the pirate craft. The searchlight silvered him. David's hands closed. It was Count Tarasova, who had accurately located that which had been consigned to the sea. Even as David looked the Count drew the object in.

But as he did so there came the wind-blown echoes of a shot, and the searchlight was extinguished with the fairy tinkle of shattered glass!

CHAPTER V

Of what followed, David had only a confused conception. The shot that had plunged out Tarasova's searchlight was followed by a brisk fusillade of shots. Leaping spurts of orange and blue flame splashed across the darkness.

David's heart beat again. John Steele had neither been tricked nor outwitted. With hooded riding-lights he had crept to the rendezvous, arriving at the moment when he was most needed.

The exchange of shots over, the *Ghost* broke cover at a sharp angle. With engines firing like machine guns, it came about and made for the faraway mainland. At once, Steele's boat, distinguished by lights suddenly uncovered, took up the pursuit.

David saw that the intention of the Federal officer was to block Tarasova's run to the windward and force him to round Duck Island.

David sensed the fact Steele had recognized their presence and was counting upon their aid. The Count was between them. The man Pierre would have to be an austere skipper to wriggle out of the closing net and escape.

It was evident that Diana Dysart was quick to recognize Steele's method of attack. Changing their course slightly, she drove the *Anitra* to the fullest extent of its power, rushing with locomotive speed toward the *Ghost.*

The Count, finding himself hampered and shut in, elected to make the island his destination. His motor-boat pointed its bows toward the Sound and ocean-washed blur. For some minutes it lay so low on the water that it remained unseen in the bowl of darkness.

Crouching over the engines, David coaxed every pulse-beat of power from them. He was wet to the skin and numb with the cold. But an inner excitement fired him. He forgot everything save that the curtain was slowly descending on his riddle-drama.

The beat of waves on a sandy shore advised him of a journey nearly com-

plete. Tarasova's run to the island was almost over. With Steele hugging the starboard flank and the *Anitra* rapidly closing the gap, his skipper plunged toward the island shore.

Leaving the engine-pit, David picked a way to the side of the girl. In a brace of minutes they would enter the crashing mountains of off-shore waves and his assistance would be required.

Diana Dysart raised a white face to him. She, too, knew it was the journey's end. David threw an arm about her—waiting. With express speed they climbed the gray back of a swollen comber, poised for a split second on its seething summit and crashed with dizzy and sickening haste into a bubbling pit walled by green waters.

As they began their descent, David's arm about the waist of the girl grew rigid. He wondered grimly if she could swim, and how long they possibly could keep afloat in the angry surf. Then something struck him with stunning force and tore him from the waist of the motor-boat. Instantly, firm deck left his feet and he was pitched into the maelstrom.

Overpowering though its force was, it did not break the hold of the arm linked about Diana Dysart. He clung to her madly, seeming to sink for miles, revolving with the fantastic gyrations of a pinwheel. He became dimly aware that the girl beside him was struggling as desperately as he was. Dreamlike, he thrilled at her courage. She was magnificent.

Buffeted, bruised and shaken they emerged from the pit to be caught by a second wave. This picked them up in relentless hands and threw them a hundred yards toward a stretch of welcoming beach. Their dash over and the surf receding, David felt his feet touch sandy bottom.

Still clinging to his burden he wrenched himself from shoulder-deep water, staggered up a shelving incline and toppled over, face downward, on a beach.

Minutes—or years—later, he sat up. His gasps, searing his lungs like tongues of fire, gave way to rattling breathing. His trembling ceased, and by degrees he regained control over arms and limbs sorely taxed.

Diana Dysart was sprawled out at his feet. Her eyes were open and she smiled faintly as he peered down at her. After another span of minutes she pulled herself up, with a supreme effort, her dark eyes thronged with questions. He understood their meaning and searched the shore line.

There was no sign of either the *Ghost* or John Steele's boat. What had become of pursuer and pursued? Had both come to grief in the surf they themselves had escaped from by such a narrow margin?

As if in answer to David's question, somewhere down the beach a revolver barked savagely. A galvanizing thrill, that seemed to bring back a portion of his lost strength, leaped through him. He lifted himself to one knee, supporting himself with both hands. A round crystal moon came out from behind sinister clouds and painted the beach with a pallid glare.

David waited. The revolver spoke again—this time closer.

Unsteadily he attained his feet. Down the stretch of sand two running figures came into sight. David fell back against the ledge of a dune. Again the revolver flashed, some yards back of the first figure, and something whistled past. They were only a little way off.

David was able to see and recognize, in the moonlight, the limping, stumbling figure of the Count Tarasova.

As if he knew that the last card had been played, the man struggled gamely to escape the clutching hand of the law at his heels. What course he contem-

plated employing, David could not guess. He waited until the Count came up to the dune and, throwing himself out, dropped like a football player at Tarasova's feet.

The Count bounded into him, reeled, and fell heavily.

The next instant the pursuer had reached the scene. Steele, a smoking automatic in one hand, pounced on his prey like a descending hawk. With amazing rapidity he had deftly frisked the fallen nobleman, rolled him over and snapped manacles on his wrists.

Then he jerked him to his feet and laughed with cold satisfaction.

"At last! A long chase but a clean sweep at the end of it! Tarasova, I've got you and your plunder!"

The Count smiled stiffly and bowed.

"Monsieur, you are admirable! England, France and America—it was a stern pursuit!"

David turned away. Presently Steele would be taking his captives back to the Point. A few minutes only remained to him, and in that time he must learn the explanation that would clear away the last of the fog.

Diana Dysart was where he had left her, her exhaustion almost at an end. Some color had crept into her cheeks. She shivered with the chill of the night air.

"The Count?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"Steele has him."

Her lips parted.

"I am so glad!"

Rapidly David informed her of the part he had played and begged the explanation that would set a crown upon all that he had endured.

"It is not a long story," she said, when he finished his recital. "Tarasova is the head of a criminal organization in Paris. Their plunder is smuggled into this country and disposed of. Steele has been trying to catch the Count for months. But Tarasova was crafty."

"But your part in the affair?" David cried.

A wistful smile edged her lips.

"My part? It was not very much, I am afraid. Last summer I went to Paris to study music. I ran out of funds. Tarasova advertised for a secretary and offered a substantial salary. I took the position and he came to America early last winter. I never dreamed that my employer was a criminal until he hired the Castle at Oyster Point. It was there that I learned by chance who and what he was, and about the jewels. His agents would bring them over from abroad. The Count would meet the ship at sea and the loot would be thrown to him."

David saw the bobbing lights of lanterns advancing up the beach and knew that Steele was sending for them to take them back to the mainland.

"And the pigskin brief-case—"

"When I found out what the Count was, I got in touch with the Federal authorities. I was forced to leave the Castle because the Count suspected me. I took my brief-case, never knowing that in it had been hidden the necklace, and just got away in time. Steele had wired me at Bridgewater to meet him at the Jackdaw. I had never seen him, although I had often heard the Count speak of him. It seems that Steele wanted to make certain of me and so did not make his presence known at once in the tea-room. While there, I suddenly saw Pierre and knew my life was in danger. I was so startled that I acted like a silly little fool. What happened after that you already know. I —I guess that is all except that I am dreadfully cold—and I can never thank you enough—"

The lanterns were drawing nearer. David picked up her small, cold hand.

"What little I have done," he murmured, feeling her fingers tighten over

his, "is only one-half of what I would like to do! From the minute I saw you in the Jackdaw something told me we were not only destined to be friends but to—"

The lanterns of Steele's party were nearly upon them. The girl lifted her face. David touched her fingers with his lips.

"Some time," he said in a low voice, "some day, I will finish the sentence."

Looking deep into her eyes he knew she had heard and understood.

I Sympathize With Murderers

By John Hamilton

I SYMPATHIZE with murderers.
Once someone set a plate of molasses taffy on my favorite chair.
Once a pretty girl said to me: "You're not so old!"
Once the most beautiful woman in the room flirted with the butler.
Once my wife trimmed her own hat.
Once I took a woman to a ball game.
The boy next door plays a ukulele.
I sympathize with murderers.

Those Enduring Young Charms

By Weare Holbrook

ADELE VANETTE, *née* Minnie Strauss, paused in front of the crinkly pier-glass in the hall and tilted her Gainsborough hat so that its sweeping brim shadowed her eyes in a flattering manner. Gently she cuffed a too-precise ringlet of hair at her temple.

Black brows and lashes gave the lie to her golden hair, but as she told Tessie Trevelyan, "It doesn't matter what color your hair is, as long as it's your own"—and Adèle had paid good money for most of hers.

Adèle was no chit of a girl. She had passed thirty at a gallop, run by forty without a break, and was now sneaking up on forty-five, apparently in fair condition. But she had to watch her every angle. Powder slapped on too recklessly tended to lodge in crevices on her face or gullies in her neck; a strong light from above made her look like "Act III —Twenty Years Later."

That was why she scanned herself anxiously in the pier-glass and gave her hat an extra tilt as she descended the creaking stairs to the lobby of the hotel.

"So they got married, and started on their honeymoon. And the first . . . " The traveling salesman paused in his narrative and chivalrously waited until Adèle had passed by.

Adèle was deliberate in her going. She stood with her hand on the door for a minute, as if uncertain. Then she opened it and sauntered out on the veranda.

"Who was that?" demanded the traveling salesman.

The pimply day-clerk took on a sophisticated air.

"Her? Why, that's Adèle," he replied familiarly.

"Adèle howmuch?"

"Vanette. She's an actress with the stock company that's been playin' here."

"Adèle Vanette! So *that's* her, eh? Well, I declare—I'd always heard of Adèle Vanette, but I never expected to see her in Pella, Arizona. Hm-m. The lady must be hard up. Wonder how old she is now?"

"I should say about thirty," affirmed the day-clerk knowingly.

"Thirty, my eye!" the drummer jeered. "Why, sonny, I can remember when I was a kid I collected picture-cards of her. They used to give 'em away with cigarettes, like coupons. I can see that Adèle Vanette card yet—her in kind of thick-looking tights, and her waist so small it worried you, and little frizzy bangs on her forehead. Never a week would go by without some story about her in the papers: how she'd flirted with a dook, or lost her diamonds or something. For a year she was the belle of Broadway, New York. Them young millionaires used to fight for the chance to go bicycle-riding with her, Sunday afternoons. They say seven of them proposed to her in one week, and she turned 'em all down because she wanted to devote herself to her art. Hah! Look where her art's brought her—Pella, Arizona."

It was just as well that Adèle could not hear these comments—all too true—upon her rosy past. The present was quite bad enough, and mocking memories would have made it unbearable. Her head ached; she had slept late into the day beneath the low tin roof of the Pella Hotel.

She had been given the best room in the establishment, and as she had tossed upon a mattress which felt and sounded as if it had been stuffed with paper, she had gained a feeble consolation by imagining what the worst room must be like.

It was Sunday, a day of depressing idleness. She had risen too late to get into the dining-room, but she had only to picture what she had missed, and all hunger was gone. Across the street a very square little building with fly-fringes on the screen door announced that it was a "Lunch Room Open All Hours."

Adèle was not intrigued by this scandalous declaration. Her trunks were packed, and she was merely waiting until midnight when she and the rest of the company were to move on to Yuba City—which she prayed might be a cooler place. The others, seven in all, were staying at the home of one of those innumerable widows who "take roomers." But it was fitting and proper that Adèle, the star, should stay at a hotel.

By way of something to do, and because she could do it while resting her eyes, she took from her bag a shapeless piece of olive-drab knitting and began to work at it, twirling the amber needles lazily. It was to have been a sweater for a soldier, but the soldier had gone away, fought his battles and returned without it.

The war was over, and the unfinished sweater, frequently raveled, had become simply "knitting." It took the place of chewing-gum, for which Adèle had a suppressed desire.

The low roof of the veranda kept the sun off, but the sun got even by shining with redoubled fierceness upon the alkali dust in front of the hotel, and the light from the street seemed to fling itself directly against Adèle's face.

She dropped a stitch. Her over-jewelled fingers moved aimlessly over the little furry humps along the needle. She yawned, and her cheeks felt stiff and hard.

Everything was deadly still; the air couldn't have been more lifeless even in her own room. If a breeze didn't come in a minute she swore she would go upstairs and lie down. Leaning back in her chair, she closed her eyes and waited.

Like a small trained animal, the ball of yarn slipped from her lap. Turning over and over, it rolled along the sloping floor of the veranda, leaving its tail behind it. Over the edge it went, and down to the road where it stopped, contentedly.

"Oh—" squealed Adèle, as her eyes opened in a baby-stare; then realizing that no one was there to get the effect of her petite manner, she finished "—hell!"

II

While Adèle was debating whether or not to climb down and get her ball of yarn, and musing upon the futility of getting in general, she was startled by a crescendo drumming of hoofs.

Approaching the hotel in a blur of white dust, was a man on a galloping pony. As he passed the veranda, he hung from his saddle in the fashion of a circus-cowboy, scooped up the ball of yarn and tossed it into the lap of the astonished Adèle. Then he whirled the pony around sharply, dismounted, and walked toward her.

"Thank you so much," exclaimed Adèle breathlessly. "It was just like the movies."

The young man—he was undeniably

young—laughed, and his tanned face made his teeth gleam very white.

"Yes," he replied, slapping his dusty felt hat against his thigh. "That's where I got the idea, I suppose. It would have been a lot easier to get off and hand that woosted to you."

"You ought to be wearing boots and a flannel shirt, though," Adèle commented. "You've got the complexion but not the clothes."

"Oh, I've got the clothes. But you see, this is Sunday."

"So it is," she agreed wearily. "And you've come to town all dressed up to see your best girl. I understand."

"How'd you know that?" He stared at her.

"I'm right, aren't I?"

"Yeh—well, not exactly. I didn't come to town for that, 'specially. I just come. Fact is, I sort of come to see you."

"To see me!" cried Adèle in amazement. "Why?"

"I saw you at the Opera House on Friday night," he began, gazing fixedly at the ground as if he were speaking a piece, "and ever since then, I been wishin' I could meet up with you, but I couldn't figure a way. Then I happened along just now,"—he glanced up and smiled— "and I'm right glad I happened along."

"So am I," she asserted. "It was beastly dull with no one to talk to."

"My name's Kerwick, Andy Kerwick," he announced abruptly, "and I know yours,—it's Vanette. Sounds Frenchy. Are you French?"

"*Oui*," ventured Adèle, *née* Minnie.

"By George, you are! I've heard some of the fellows tell about how good-lookin' the French girls are, but I never got a chance to meet up with any, bein' forced to associate with horses all the time I was over there. I don't know the lingo very well, but I can tell you're French, all right."

"Ah," Adèle felt relieved, "I have forgotten much—much—for I was but a teeny little girl when mamma and I left Paree and came to this country. But I have memories, dear memories!"

Adèle looked far away, recalling the tenement in the shadow of the gas tanks, where she had been born—and Pleasant Avenue, the most unpleasant street in Manhattan, which had been her playground.

"Ever get homesick?" he asked. "I should think you'd get that way, travelin' around."

"It has been so long since I've had a home, I would not know how to behave in one." Adèle sighed gloomily.

"That's bad. Person ought to have some place to come back to, or there's no sense in goin' away."

Adèle missed the logic of this remark, if logic it had, and laughed politely before she remembered that she ought to confine her mirth within the boundaries of a gentle grin. Her teeth not being what they were, she could indulge in hearty laughter only when alone, at which time, strange to say, she never felt like laughing.

The affliction had its compensation, however, for it had forced her to cultivate a tight little smile which was prim and pretty. When she smiled at men, they usually thought that she looked extremely kissable, but didn't say so. When she smiled at women, they usually thought that she looked rather mousy, and said so.

"My, but it's hot!" she exclaimed, just for something to exclaim; but it really was hot.

"Pooh! Call this hot?"

"Why, it *is*. Just look across the street at that building—how it ripples."

"Just wait around here till September, Miss Vanette, and you'll see the whole landscape shimmy."

"Shimmy! I'm surprised. What do you know about shimmying?"

"Oh, they're not so slow at Pella. At the dances here, lots of people shimmy —or try to. The tango has gone out of style now."

"Dear me, how fashions change!" she mourned in mock dismay. "I suppose the Virginia reel will be going next."

He looked at her suspiciously.

"You're makin' fun of me, Miss Vanette. I guess you think I was tryin' to make out that Pella is a regular live town, which it ain't. 'Scuse me."

"Why, Mr. Kerwick," soothed Adèle, "you're ever so much mistaken. I like Pella. Of all the towns I've been in, Pella is the—most restful."

"It's a dead hole," Andy insisted, stifling his civic pride.

"I think you don't appreciate its advantages. It hasn't any dirty factories. It hasn't any noisy street-cars. It hasn't any saloons . . . " In fact, Adèle concluded mentally, Pella hasn't a damn thing.

"Been down to the Kozy Korner yet?"

"Heavens, no! I haven't been *anywhere*. Is this an invitation?" she asked, rising.

Andy grinned and nodded.

Tripping down the veranda steps with girlish lightness, she was at his side. Together they strolled down the blinding white sidewalk, leaving his pony in the shadow of the hotel. Andy glanced furtively over his shoulder before he took her arm.

"You—you mustn't expect much."

"All right," she replied humbly, "I won't."

The Kozy Korner was an all-embracing drug-store, with a gaily-striped awning outside, and everything except drugs inside. As they approached it, Andy glanced over his shoulder again, and quickened his pace, fairly dragging Adèle along with him.

"What's the rush?" she panted, as her heels beat an indignant staccato against the cement. "You may be a resident of Arizona, but you have the genuine subway scurry."

"I didn't realize I was walkin' too fast. I beg your pardon," Andy apologized. But he slackened his speed not one bit until they had gained the cool and sticky interior of the drug-store.

"Well, I guess we won the first heat," she gasped as they seated themselves on Mexican-hairless chairs at a glass-topped table.

"Yes; ha ha!" There was no mirth in Andy's laugh, but there was relief in his expression, and he mopped his forehead with the air of one who has engineered a great undertaking successfully. "What'll you have?"

They peered at the menu imprisoned under the glass top of the table. *"Fountain Delicacies"*—the names were as elaborately senseless as those of Pullman cars.

"I'll have a Maraschino Chow Mein," she announced recklessly to the waiter with the missing chin.

"Give me a Pershing's Dream," ordered Andy.

He never divulged the cause of his haste or why he chose to sit at the most secluded table with his back to the entrance, but after they had been there for a few moments, Adèle saw a pretty, pink-and-white girl walk slowly past the window. This girl glanced through the doorway of the drug-store, started to enter, and then changing her mind, tossed her head proudly and went on her way.

Andy had been trying to avoid her; Adèle knew it instinctively.

"You ought to sit at this side of the table," she remarked. "You just missed seeing a most charming young lady."

"I'm seein' one right now," he replied gallantly as he looked at her.

"But this young lady was unusually pretty, and she acted lonesome. I think she was hunting for someone."

"Did she have—red hair?"

"Auburn," corrected Adèle. "Women never have red hair. Do you know her?"

"Guess it was Christabel. Girl I used to know."

"Christabel? I like the name. I wish you had invited her over to sit down with us."

Andy shook his head.

"We don't get on. Besides, I'd rather be here with just you. I like you mighty well, Miss Vanette."

Impulsively Andy reached across the table to take her hand, and knocked over the remainder of Pershing's Dream. "Doggone it!" he cursed in an unmanly fashion as he swabbed his sleeve with a paper napkin. "Did any of it hit you?"

"No, strange to say," Adèle glanced down at her ample bosom, "but let's be going before any more accidents happen."

He looked at her gratefully as they rose from the table. Out-of-doors was where he really belonged, and he knew it.

"Look," said Adèle when they were on the street again, "the sun is almost down. It's actually cool."

"Let's take a walk," suggested Andy.

It was twilight when they reached the bridge that spanned the brawling Perimy River at the edge of town. On either side of the road lay Valentine's Park, an erstwhile picnic-ground, now deserted. Adèle's feet hurt; she looked with longing at the benches tilted crazily among the trees.

"We might sit down for a while," she remarked.

"We will," affirmed Andy, taking her arm and propelling her up a grassy bank.

For a few moments after they had settled themselves upon a particularly knotty rustic bench, neither spoke. Then they both started to speak at once.

"You—" they chorused suddenly.

"I beg your pardon."

"I beg *your* pardon."

"You started to say something."

"That can wait. What were you going to say?"

"Ah, nothin' much."

"You *were*. Tell me please. I'm dying to know," exclaimed Adèle, who wasn't at all.

"Well, it's just this," Andy hesitated, "I'm—plumb in love with you, Adèle."

She looked at him. He was so boyish, so honest, that he made her feel very ancient and rotten. She wanted to cry, but realizing that tears would make a mess of her complexion, she laughed instead.

"Of course you'd laugh," he smiled sadly. "You think I'm a small-town guy in love with you just 'cause you're an actress. Well, I am a small-town guy, and I do love you—but I wish you weren't an actress. I wisht you'd quit the show and stay here and marry me."

"Marry!" echoed Adèle incredulously.

"Does it sound so sudden and impossible to you? I been thinkin' about it ever since I first set eyes on you. If you liked me just a little I'd be satisfied, and I'd try and try to make you like me better, Adèle. I'll do anything you say."

"Then please don't—don't talk like that," said Adèle unsteadily.

"You care! You do care!" he exulted. Their lips met. It was Adèle's first real kiss since—she dared not remember when.

"You're so nice," she murmured as he drew her closer. "My boy—my boy."

Suddenly her body stiffened and she drew herself away from him.

"Andy, do you know how old I am?"

"Don't know, and don't care," laughed Andy. "You're beautiful. I want you. Come to my arms."

Obediently she came and nestled against him, happy. She was like an old, neglected dog, grateful for any caress.

III

LATE the following afternoon Adèle roused herself from sodden slumber and stared at the mottled ceiling of her room in the Hotel Paris, Yuba City. Her mouth felt dry, her eyes sticky, her mind stagnant.

"Another night, another day," she moaned. Then she remembered that she had reason to be glad about something. What was it?

Slowly she rehearsed the events of the night before: how she sat in the park with Andy until she missed the midnight train, how they waited in the little one-room depot for the early morning local, making golden plans for the future until she dozed contentedly, her head upon his shoulder; how his voice grew husky and his hand squeezed hers until she winced during their brief farewell on the station platform.

Andy was to meet her in Los Angeles at the close of the season, and they were to be married. With her savings she would buy a little fruit ranch; he would manage it, she would help him, and they would never, never be separated.

He was a dear boy—he was hers! A wave of ecstasy swept over her and she hugged her pillow until it nearly burst.

As she swung out of bed and put down a searching toe for her slippers, she looked into the mirror on the dresser. Then she wished that she hadn't looked. It was as if her forty-odd years had descended upon her in one mass, leaving her bleached and broken.

Cautiously she approached the glass, drawn by the awful fascination of her own reflection. Her scanty strands of faded hair were twisted in a wad at the back of her head, revealing an old scar on her brow. About her eyes was an unhealthy puffiness, the prelude to inevitable wrinkles. Her neck was streaked with shadows, as if some devastating hand had clawed it.

Adèle shivered. In ten years . . . she preferred not to think of it. She noted with melancholy satisfaction that her body was still smooth and youthful in appearance. Small consolation that—for she couldn't go about naked!

Sighing, she seated herself at the little low-backed chair. Mechanically she opened her unprofessional make-up box and took out numerous tiny jars which had odors of cloying sweetness. One by one she took them out and lined them up on the table like a small army. Adèle's daily battle with Time had begun.

Just as she was smearing herself from ear to ear with some buttery substance, there was a knock at the door. Adèle started.

"In a minute," she called, throwing a wrapper about her and wiping her glistening face.

"Miss Vanette?"

It was Andy's voice!

Adèle had a frightened, helpless feeling as she recognized it. If he should see her in her present state . . . The possibility chilled her. She hoped that the door was locked; then she remembered that it wasn't, and as she dashed across the room to turn the key she babbled wildly:

"Yes, Andy! Wait—wait a minute. Please don't come in, Andy!"

But just as she reached the door, it opened, and in came Andy.

"Can't wait," he began eagerly. "Thought I'd surprise—" His manner changed abruptly when he saw her. Pink with embarrassment, he backed out of the room hastily. "I beg your pardon, ma'am," he stammered as he retreated, "I thought this was Miss Vanette's room. My mistake. 'Scuse me."

Andy jammed his hat on his head and hurried down the hall. Terror seized Adèle. Perhaps he was not joking! Forgetting everything else, she pursued him like a Nemesis in negligée.

"Andy!" she cried. "I *am* Adèle. My boy—don't you know me? here I am!"

As he turned toward her, she put out her hands in a pitiful, hungry gesture, and waited for him to take her. Tilting back her head, she smiled the smile that had charmed so many men, but Andy saw only her discolored teeth, her chalky hands, and the dreary weeds of hair that fringed her neck.

Yet slowly he recognized her, and with recognition came a horror that sickened him. It was reflected in his eyes.

"Adèle—Adèle!" he gasped incredulously, shrinking away from her as if she were an unclean thing.

Unable wholly to believe that she was not an apparition, he reached out gingerly and touched her cheek. She was real! When he drew back his hand, the tips of his fingers were slimy and smelled of stale chemicals.

She was past all pretending.

"Kiss me," she begged, closing her eyes, "Kiss me, kiss me . . . " She repeated it over and over like some oriental prayer, her voice fading away to a whisper. When she opened her eyes, he was gone.

IV

ADELE never saw Andy again. He sent her no word, and she expected none. However, three days later, she received a shoe-box from Pella, Arizona. It was filled with an indiscriminate collection of wild-flowers—Pella boasting no florists—and with it was a note addressed to her in a round, youthful hand.

Eagerly Adèle tore it open and read:

Dear Miss Vanette:

Andy came back. I don't know what happened, but thank you.

Gratefully yours,
Christabel.

P. S.—We will be at home after June fifteenth.

"Gloating over me—the little red-headed hussy!" exclaimed Adèle.

She tossed the letter on the floor, and for a long minute stared out of the window at the dirty gray court of the Hotel Paris. Then she picked it up again tenderly and put it away in a book of yellowed newspaper clippings.

Let us forgive her this little vanity; it had been several years since Adèle had received a note with flowers.

The Trysting Place

By George Sinberg

ROY'S mother would never have approved of his conduct with Paula that summer. Roy knew it. Paula's father would have frowned severely upon his daughter's carrying-on with Roy. Paula knew it.

Consequently it was necessary for the two young people to employ secrecy, stratagem, stealth. They used to meet at an old hollow pear tree near a brook not far from their summer hotel. That was where the exchanges of kisses and vows took place. It was on that tree that Roy carved his initials intertwined with hers. It was in the hollow of that tree that they used to place letters for each other.

Then they quarreled. After each had said all there was to be said and a great many things that shouldn't have been, the engagement lay broken into a million pieces. It was all over forever.

Yet that night they met again at the old pear tree. They fell into each other's arms. They wept copiously. They begged each other to forgive. They forgave. They became reengaged.

"Poor boy, he couldn't help revisiting the scene of his lost delight," she thought.

"Dear little girl, how much the pear tree and its memories must mean to her," he thought.

They were married that fall in spite of parental opposition.

Paula never told Roy that she had gone to the old pear tree that night to see if she could find the letter she had put in the hollow two days before.

And Roy never told Paula he had stolen down to the tree that night to scratch out those damning initials.

The Poppy Dawn

By Clinton Harcourt

LI HOK-LO lay in a pillowed bunk in Win Ling's opium den in a Grant Street cellar, smoking pensively, his beady black eyes fixed on the small, peanut oil lamp that burned beside him with a steady, motionless flame.

The hour was close to midnight and the room was ghastly silent, save for the restless movement of a smoker in the bunk above. From somewhere close at hand Win Ling was burning strips of cinnamon to disguise the warm opium odor that would have crept out through the thick padding of the doors and window, to bring the white devils swarming down into the cellar to arrest him.

Li Hok-lo smoked thoughtfully, the carved bamboo pipe with its little bowl midway down its length balanced artfully between his clawlike fingers. For years he had been a slave of the peanut oil lamp, over which the opium was toasted and prepared for the pipe.

He was a slave of the drug, but possessed of a discriminating taste. Long past he had discovered that it was only the pure Li-um from Shanghai, free from dilution with dross and seconds, that inspired the lazy dreams that steeped his soul in placid contentment.

He drew in a thick cloud of the smoke, heavy gaze wandering. One of the chefs of Win Ling, a youth known as Boy Number One, entered quietly with a tray of mandarin oranges. Li Hok-lo watched him until he went out. The room, with its clean rice matting, wicker bunks and bunk covers of some woven stuff, so dimly revealed by strings of Chinese lanterns in lily, lotus, hawk and dragon shape, began to fade away as if a dark curtain had been pulled down upon it.

Li Hok-lo laid the pipe on a kakalmono tabouret beside the lamp, closed his eyes and sank back against the cushions, his brow pressed to the round mat that was the bunk's head rest.

Presently, he began to dream. He dreamt of a radiant girl, who stepped out of the door of a rice and tea shop and extended her hands to him. She was very pale and beautiful in her imperial yellow robes and little slippers. Her blue-black hair was piled high on her shapely head and decorated with rare jade. Her lips were stained with crimson and so pursed that they seemed only a scarlet splotch.

She looked at Li Hok-lo and he knew that she was Ah-Yoe, the young daughter of Chim-Fen, a wealthy merchant of Logan Street. Very gently she took the hand of Li Hok-lo and drew close to him. He looked into eyes that were brown stars, and swore eternal love. She smiled, blushed and hid her face in an ecstasy of delight.

Finally, she turned to him and lifted her lips while the night faded and the poppy dawn came and the stars disappeared, one by one. Li Hok-lo clasped her in his arms and held her tightly.

After a time Li Hok-lo opened eyes that seemed to be weighed down with lead, and found the morning sunshine had crept into the cellar. The Chinese lanterns still burned amid the fume reek of the night, but the place was de-

serted. He sat up slowly and passed a shrunken hand across his eyes. In his confused memory, blurred details of the wondrous dream still lingered.

"She came," he murmured, "like a little love-goddess! I saw six tranquil moons and among them a young bud growing sweetly. It is Fate! The gods have sent her image to walk even through my sleeping fancies. A sign! She is to be mine entirely—"

II

THE sun was well up, gilding San Francisco's bay, Angel Island, the Marin mainland, and the wilderness of ocean beyond, when Li Hok-lo turned into Hatchet Row and entered the building where he lived with his younger brother, Fu Chee. He pushed open the front door of his rooms and called loudly for Fu Chee. When there was no response, he knew the youth had already departed for the waterfront and the pier on which he was employed.

Li Hok-lo stood beside the window, looking down into Hatchet Row. His black brows drew together and his fingers picked nervously at the hem of his wide sail sleeves. Three times, while on Logan Street, he had looked upon the living Ah-Yoe and in his eyes she had appeared so enchantingly fair that his heart had quickened its beat, and love, like a consuming flame, had flared up within him, scorching him with its breath.

"The adored of the gods!" he murmured under his breath.

His talon fingers continued to move nervously; his mind flashed with myriad thoughts. As riches were reckoned in the Chinese quarter, he was a man of wealth. Long past he had made a comfortable fortune smuggling raw opium in from the mail packets, under the very eyes of the Internal Revenue officers. When his occupation became too precarious, he abandoned it and settled down to a life of ease, spending the days as best suited his fancy and his nights in the bunk at Win Ling's.

Girls, Li Hok-lo had always looked superciliously upon, without interest. Never had one caused his pulses to flutter, until he had first observed the daughter of Chim-Fen.

Most Chinese girls, following the custom of the foreign barbarians, married only for money, for the gifts they could wheedle from their husbands — silver pots of face stain, fretted ivory bracelets, jade ornaments, and gold threaded apparel of lustrous silk. But Ah-Yoe, reason told Li Hok-lo, was different from the ordinary low-born. She was a daughter of a wealthy rice and tea merchant. She would not come to him with empty hands.

After a time, he put on his black cap and went out. He made his way to Dupont Street and entered a chop suey parlor frequented by chauffeurs of the sightseeing buses, taxi drivers, opium wrecks and derelicts washed in from the ebb-tide of the Barbary Coast.

Li Hok-lo stood in the door of the chop suey emporium and surveyed the place with a dispassionate eye. His gaze fell upon a white man seated at a table in the far corner of the room, who was small, unwashed and oil streaked from the taxi he drove. Li Hok-lo picked a way to the table and made the man a low bow.

"The day dawns brightly and auspiciously," he said respectfully. "It is a fair time for friends to converse with perfect amiability. Esteemed Mr. Pink McGlome, with your good permission, I will seat myself."

The taxi driver grinned.

"You hop-heads give me a pain with that song and dance stuff! Take a load off your ankles and fall in a chair."

Li Hok-lo sat down.

"It is written," he said gravely, "in

the Book of Stars that you shall aid me. I came directly from Hatchet Row to see you."

Pink McGlome chuckled.

"The hell you say! What do you want to see me for—I got all the lottery tickets I can handle now."

Li Hok-lo smiled faintly.

"My errand, venerable sir, does not concern lottery tickets. I come to inquire if it is your wish to earn fifty dollars of the currency of the white devils, which I will pay you for a slight service. Sometimes it happens one may aid another in various subtle ways."

Pink McGlome laid down his fork and wiped his thin-lipped mouth on the back of his hand.

"Fifty dollars! You hop-heads give me a pain! I suppose every time you hit the stuff you're Rockefellar with a million bucks in nickels! Give me a peek at the dough if you are not dreaming this."

Cautiously Li Hok-lo fumbled in his embroidered jacket and produced a crumpled bill which he laid on the table. At the sight of it, Pink McGlome pushed aside his chop suey bowl and narrowed his eyes.

"You're on the level with this stuff, John? No kid? You ain't just coming out of a trance and stringing me along, are you?"

The Oriental made a polite gesture.

"From my lips fall perfect pearls of truth. This money may be yours entirely, if you will but heed my instructions. The ghosts of my ancestors bear witness of my sincerity. Shall I speak?"

Pink McGlome nodded.

"Sure! Let's hear it!"

Li Hok-lo leaned a little forward.

"You are acquainted with the wealthy Chim-Fen whose rice and tea store is on Logan street? It is about his daughter, the little Ah-Yoe, that I would address you. It may possibly be that you, likewise, know Ah-Yoe."

The taxi driver chuckled.

"You bet your Sunday muslin socks I know her! She's the best looking Chink frail on Logan street! A looker for your eye and class to the heels! What about her, John?"

Li Hok-lo laid a significant finger on the fifty dollar bill.

"Confucius says that wisdom is a gem of ray serene. In your own clever way you must discover certain facts concerning Ah-Yoe. Learn for me if the girl has a lover; learn for me if she entertains a suitor; learn for me if her troth is plighted, and if so, who the man is, that would pluck the priceless poppy growing among the six moons. These things I must know. Bring me the knowledge and in exchange I will give you this sum of money upon which the tip of my finger rests."

Pink McGlome shook a cigarette from a flat pasteboard box and set fire to it with a flourish.

"I make you, John! I make you coming and going. I'll pick up the info and the minute I get it I'll stop around to your place and climb on your ear. Right?"

"It must," Li Hok-lo reminded him, "be the truth and the truth only, for much depends upon it."

The other jammed a greasy cap on the back of his red head.

"You hop-heads give me a pain! Would I make myself a liar for fifty dollars? Don't make me laugh—"

Li Hok-lo returned to his rooms on Hatchet Row, satisfied with McGlome's promise. He brewed himself a cup of tea, flavored it delicately and sipped it thoughtfully. Entrusting the taxi driver with the commission was a crafty move. Li Hok-lo knew his Chinatown; if he, himself, sought the information he might never expect to lay the plans he contemplated. The whole of the growing structure would topple over and lay in ruins if it became gossip that he

was interested in the girl, Ah-Yoe.

The long afternoon merged with evening and dragon shadows crept into the room. Li Hok-lo went to the window. In Hatchet Row the first lanterns were beginning to flicker. He turned away from the window as the door opened and his brother, Fu Chee, entered. The youth was tall and finely made with a sinuous body knotted into muscles from his daily toil. He was several years the junior of Li Hok-lo and different in face, figure and mannerism.

"My brother," he said, closing the door behind him, "the eagle returns to its nest. I am not tired from my day of work but a wolf is within my belly. Come, let us journey together to the chop suey parlor on Dupont street where I may banish the pangs of appetite."

Li Hok-lo shook his head.

"Go yourself," he said ungraciously, "while you feed your body I shall feed my mind, for the mind shall survive even though the body perish."

Fu Chee looked vaguely troubled.

"Dearly beloved brother," he said, "the devil smoke is warping your soul! Too many times have I begged you to break the pipe in half and sever the chains that bind you. I pray that you cease to travel to the cellar on Grant street, and engage in some honest occupation that will hold your strict attention."

He laid a hand on his brother's shoulder. Li Hok-lo shook it off roughly.

"The whelp," he snarled," shall not dare to address the Lion! Take yourself away and keep your advice for those who crave its hearing!"

With a sigh Fu Chee put on his hat and departed.

He had been gone some ten minutes when Li Hok-lo was aroused from a brooding revery by a staccato knock on the door. He jumped up eagerly and admitted Pink McGlome, who stepped in, sniffing the drift joss on the stirless air.

"Have the gods," Li Hok-lo inquired rapidly, "smiled upon you and filled your ears with conversation?"

McGlome grinned crookedly.

"Listen! I got all the dope you want —picked it up from a fish peddler who knows Chim-Fen and the girl. This here Ah-Yoe is keeping company with a bird by the name of Ling Foo who runs a jewelry junk shop over near the Hill. It's a cinch that she likes this baby about the same as I do carbolic acid. But what can she do? The dope from headquarters adds it up that Chim-Fen made the match and nothing can crack it. Get me? She and Ling Foo are all set to get hitched up right after the Chinese New Year. I guess that is what you wanted to know, ain't it?"

Li Hok-lo handed over the fifty dollar bill with a deep bow.

"Knowledge," he declared sonorously, "opens mysterious doors, philosophy teaches that the impossible can be surmounted by the ladder of intelligence. I pray that you be present in the chop suey parlor on Dupont street tomorrow morning at the hour of ten. I will show you then how you may make more money."

Later, in his bunk in the Grant street cellar, Li Hok-lo handed his pipe to Boy Number One and composed himself among the cushions. A wonderful dream took shape in his cloudy senses. Again Ah-Yoe came to him down the length of a dim street. She glittered like a goddess with gold and gems; her painted lips were scarlet flowers of the dusk. Shyly, she gave herself into his arms and lifted her face for his kiss.

Gently he led her toward a waiting coach, whose door opened at his approach. He sank back on silken up-

holstery and cradled the girl in his arms. Instantly the enchanted coach whirled away down a path of fading star dust, while the poppy dawn brightened like a waking flower and soft love words filled the ears of Li Hok-lo . . .

III

At ten o'clock the following morning Pink McGlome, in the chop suey parlor on Dupont street, listened to a scheme that Li Hok-lo unfolded. For ten minutes the Chinese spoke slowly and with exact precision. When he concluded, Pink McGlome expelled a breath and moved his shoulders.

"You hop-heads make me sick! Say, where do you get this kidnapping stuff? Do you think I want to spend the next twenty years making little ones out of big ones? Do I look crazy to you?"

Without change of expression Li Hok-lo folded his hands in his sleeves.

"Then you do not care to aid me, good friend?"

McGlome lifted a quick hand.

"Wait! Don't get me wrong. You're a good kid, John, and because I like you I'll take a shot at this. But it will cost you money. I couldn't think of doing it unless I get paid a hundred berries. Understand, one hundred dollars!"

Li Hok-lo fumbled in his jacket and produced a roll of money.

"Here is the sum you ask for. Take it and fear nothing. An austere dragon directs our destiny. Take the money and repeat my instructions, so that I may know that you thoroughly understand them."

McGlome stuffed the bills in his pocket and chuckled.

"I'm jerry like an owl! Listen. At eleven o'clock tonight I run the bus into Logan street. I hand in the note you give me and then I stick around until the party begins. That's all, ain't it? Sure? Well, so long until tonight."

He placed his greasy cap at a rakish angle and went out to the curb where his antiquated taxi stood. Climbing in, he drove down Dupont street but instead of turning east at the first intersecting avenue, as he usually did, he continued on into Logan street. In front of the door of Chim-Fen's rice and tea shop he alighted and went in.

When the proprietor had finished with a customer that he was waiting upon, McGlome touched his arm and drew him aside.

"Listen, Chim-Fen," he said earnestly, "I just got wise to something what I think you ought to be set next to. This ain't no *pfuf-pfuf* talk, understand, but the real goods. Something is due to happen to your daughter Ah-Yoe tonight. Slip me a ten spot and I will tell you all about it."

Chim-Fen, stout, bland and prosperous, narrowed his slant eyes. For some minutes he pondered the matter silently. Finally he produced a shark-skin purse and took out a green ten dollar note.

"To what you say," he murmured, "I shall give my strict attention."

Pink McGlome placed the money in his pocket and rubbed his ear.

"Listen. A wild Chink, over on Hatchet Row, is going to kidnap Ah-Yoe tonight. Get me? He sends a fake note to the girl, asking her to come out so he can deliver a message. When she shows up, he slams her into a clock ark and beats it. Understand?"

Chim-Fen bowed.

"At eleven o'clock this night!" he answered.

Outside again, McGlome entered his taxi and drove toward Telegraph Hill. In front of a Chinese-American jewelry store, whose double windows were crowded with cheap trinkets, he alighted and went in. The store was empty save for the proprietor, an elderly man

of studious appearance who wore thick-lensed glasses.

To him Pink McGlome spoke briskly:

"Ling Foo?"

The other bowed, rubbing his hands.

"Ling Foo is my name. Do you wish to purchase something? Perhaps a cigarette case of beaten copper cunningly set with the lapis-lazuli. Or if it is for a lady, and it usually is, may I suggest a lustrous robe of purple-and-gold with the—"

McGlome interrupted with a cackling laugh.

"You hop-heads make me sick! Listen. I don't want to buy—I want to *sell* you something! I got some dope you ought to know, about how Ah-Yoe is due to be kidnapped tonight. See? Make me a present of a ten dollar case note and I'll chirp like a canary!"

After some mature deliberation, Ling Foo handed McGlome a bill and listened carefully to what he was told. Leaving the store the taxi driver mounted to the seat of his vehicle and meshed the gears.

"This must be my birthday," McGlome chuckled, as he drove off.

IV

The night was clear, warm and free from the drift of any clinging fog. The air was as soft as the breath of an infant, the sky a mosaic of stars that surrounded a proud moon. Moving into Logan street, Li Hok-lo looked at the moon and frowned.

"Better if clouds veiled its face," he told himself. "But no matter. Nothing shall interfere. I will take her into my arms and know the mystery of that mocking red mouth. The gods will favor us and a great ship will take us back to the China of my heart. In Mansu-Fong I will erect a palace which will be a temple, where daily I may worship her loveliness. So is it written!"

With pulses beginning to pound, Li Hok-lo approached the rice and tea shop of Chim-Fen. Down the street, close to the corner, a taxi stood like a black rock in the murk. Li Hok-lo considered the cab with kindling eyes; in five minutes the curtain would sweep up on the stage holding the love-drama of which he was the playwright.

Crouching back in the tapestry of shadows, Li Hok-lo grew as motionless as a wooden Buddha. A queer nervousness, born of a desire for his soothing Pipe of Dreams, began to pervade him. By turn he felt strangely elated and morbidly downcast, happy and sad.

He had folded his hands in his sleeves and had drawn a breath, when from somewhere close at hand a door shut with a muffled slam—footsteps pattered and a small, graceful figure emerged from the rice and tea shop and came out into the street.

On fire, Li Hok-lo left his concealment and advancing made a deep bow.

"Ah-Yoe?" he breathed.

The girl looked into his face just as she had looked in his dreams; her eyes were brown stars, her lips crimson flowers on a still pool.

"You are Li Hok-lo? It is your wish to converse with me?"

He bowed again and touched her arm.

"Let us walk, Ah-Yoe. I will explain as we go along—"

She fell into step beside him, Li Hok-lo beginning a rambling narrative he had prepared for the occasion. When they came abreast of a dark areaway, the girl halted and made a gesture.

"Sir," she said, "I do not understand one word of what you say. I think you have made a mistake. Permit me to return to my dwelling—"

Li Hok-lo braced himself.

"Beautiful one, upon whom the gods

From somewhere close at hand a door shut with a muffled slam—footsteps pattered and a small, graceful figure emerged from the rice and tea shop.

have been so extravagant with their gifts, if my words are cryptic, my actions shall not be! Compose yourself for you are in my power and together we will journey toward the—"

A shape of shadow darting out of the areaway and leaping like a cat on Li Hok-lo's shoulders, silenced him abruptly. Simultaneously another man crossed the street in a series of bounds and threw his weight upon the struggling figures on the pavement, shouting loudly. Terrified, for Chim-Fen had told her nothing of the plot, Ah-Yoe ran forward. Back of her the moonlight glittered on cold steel; presently the voice of Li Hok-lo rang out in a shrill scream of anguish.

Ah-Yoe reached the corner of Logan street as someone, attracted by the sound of the scuffle, loomed up before her. She looked into the face of a sturdy Chinese youth whose dark eyes brightened when he beheld her.

"Oh, please," she wailed, "take me away—take me away quickly!"

Without questions, the youth drew his arm through hers and glanced hastily about. A taxi was coming down Logan street. He hailed it, throwing open the door and assisting the girl in. A backward glance showed him the street was filled as if with the combatants of a Tong riot—

V

THREE hours later the taxi stood at the foot of Dupont street looking out over the bay. The path of star dust was fading and the poppy dawn was near. In the cab, Ah-Yoe drew her slim fingers across the face of the youth, who held her in the cradle of his arms.

"How strange is Fate," she murmured. "My father had pledged me to an ugly old man who wore glasses and whom I despised. The gods have heard my prayers and have sent you to me. I have always dreamed I would some day have a young lover!"

The youth pressed his lips to her blue-black hair.

"I will love and honor you always," he whispered. "See—I am as strong and powerful as three year bamboo, from my toil on the pier. I am well able to protect and care for you. Some day, too, my brother, who is a devil smoker, will wither up like an autumn leaf and then all his riches shall be mine and being mine shall be yours! So it is written!"

At the wheel of the taxi Pink McGlome looked at the last star and yawned prodigiously.

"Them hop-heads," he muttered, as soft voices blended back of him, "give me a pain!"

He Really Lives

By Carl Glick

MASSOMANIE . . . The very name rings with romance. What dreams and fancies it awakens in the hearts of the poets! A place of great adventures, where the golden age of chivalry could live again, where knights could woo their ladies fair, and love have all the glory of immortality and poetry and song. And in Massomanie such things did happen.

Massomanie was, to be literal, Pullman Car No. 9 of the long train that stood quietly in the station at St. Paul, poised for its thunderous flight across the West to Seattle, lightly touching the prairies, panting up the sides of the Rockies, then coasting down the Cascades to the sea, giving for one moment as it passed a glimpse of some fairy scene of beauty to the weary travelers, only to snatch it away the next moment.

The dull journey was about to begin, and already the car was full of its waiting passengers. There were three old maids on their way to the Yellowstone, a hamper of food under the seat, much to the disgust of the porter; several bored and tired traveling men; and some of the usual odd assortment of tourists eager not to miss a single sight.

But there were only three who really deserve our attention: Betty Winters, a schoolgirl armed with all the popular magazines as a relief from the winter's required reading of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, and so forth; Mrs. Clayton —emphasis on the Mrs.—wondering what friends she would make this trip (she has always corresponded with those delightful strangers she met once on her way from Omaha to Chicago); and Miss Sanders, a delicate, ethereal school teacher of many silvered summers, thrilling with the promised delights of the coming vacation.

But they all looked so bored with one another. Afraid to speak as yet, waiting until the train began its long journey, and then prisoners for two days at least, they could discover one another's names, histories, destinations and future hopes.

Betty rustled the covers of her magazines and tried to look interested. Mrs. Clayton wondered if the three old maids would be worth cultivating, and if her husband at home would see to it that the maid sent the laundry every Monday morning. Miss Sanders hoped that there would be a famous author or playwright on board. Her subject was English, you know.

And so, expectant of romance and adventure, they waited.

Then romance and adventure came. . . .

II

It would be hard to say who saw him first. His appearance had something in it of the unexpected and the dramatic. Followed by a porter with some traveling-bags of genuine leather, he dropped into Lower Six.

Betty Winters cast aside her magazine. Mrs. Clayton had a moment's thrill and forgot her husband. Miss Sanders closed her eyes and thought of Marlowe's description of Leander.

For he was handsome. Oh, so handsome! As a matter of fact, he was almost too good-looking to be true. Clean-cut, classical features, the coloring of a restored Rembrandt; tall, slender, lithe, and . . . well, think of the best-looking man you have ever seen, then count to one hundred, and add to that your idea of the best-looking man you ever hope to see, and you have the picture.

Betty gazed openly and brazenly. "I didn't know they made them that way," she murmured to herself. Then she saw that the middle-aged woman opposite was also looking in his direction, and picked up the magazine again. But she did not read. She merely peeked over the top.

Mrs. Clayton, trying to shut out the memories of her whiskered, wrinkled husband at home, was lost in those never-to-be dreams of her youth and the imagined Fairy Prince that never came.

The porter entered the car again with the deference always assumed toward those who take a stateroom. He was followed by a young girl wearing a well-tailored suit and a hat trimmed with daisies. But there was about her a faint trace of sophistication. She, too, seeing the occupant of Lower Six, paused a moment and caught her breath. Her face flushed; then she tossed her head and, going into the stateroom, closed the door with a bang.

The shouts of the train guards, the long whine of the whistle, the last farewells on the platform, the belated travelers jumping hastily aboard, and the train started. The restraint that had hitherto held the passengers in check seemed to clear like a sunny day.

Betty looked across at Mrs. Clayton and smiled. She moved over, for she could see better from that side of the car. The young man, whom we might as well call Lower Six, sat with his eyes closed.

"Do you care for a magazine?" said Betty in a friendly tone. "Isn't he good-looking?" she added.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Clayton, not trying to evade the question.

"I just know I've seen him some place before. His face looks so familiar."

"That's what I've been thinking," echoed Mrs. Clayton.

"I bet he's a movie actor. I've always heard, though, that they were awfully disappointing in real life. But he isn't. Where have I seen him?"

She went back to her seat and picked up all the moving-picture magazines she had.

"Here," she said to Mrs. Clayton, "you look through this one, and I'll take this!"

But their search was of no avail. They couldn't find his resemblance.

As the morning dragged along, the women had a chance to get acquainted. Miss Sanders was drawn into the conversation, and she, too, admitted that she had a faint remembrance of having seen him some place before. But where, she did not know. She preferred to think of him as the ideal of the fancies of the poets.

"I can't find his picture any place," wailed Betty. "And I've just got to know who he is."

"But how will you find out?" asked Mrs. Clayton.

"Ask him!"

"Would you dare?"

"Why not?"

It might be added that Betty had been going to a very select girls' school. Her home was in western Montana, and so, combined with that "hail-fellow-well-met" attitude of the breezy and friendly West was the self-assurance that a year of Eastern culture gives to a Western wild-flower. *"Savoir-faire"* I believe she called it. And that means that she would hesitate at nothing!

"I once had a dreadful experience with a stranger," said Mrs. Clayton,

"when I was going to Denver one summer. There was a man on our train. Not handsome like this one. But I felt that I had seen his picture before, some place. We travel a great deal every summer, my husband and I. Well, I just knew this man's face was familiar. And I didn't know but what I knew him, so I said, 'Haven't I seen you before, some place?' My dears, he turned ghastly pale, and what do you suppose happened that very afternoon when the train stopped? . . . A couple of detectives came aboard and arrested him. He was a murderer that the police had been trailing! Since that time I have been rather afraid to speak to strange men!"

"Oh, but he doesn't look like a murderer," replied Betty, thinking all the time that Mrs. Clayton had improvised her story in order to be the one to speak to him herself. "I think he has a nice look in his eyes. But he never smiles. I'm going to ask him if he isn't a movie star."

"Oh, my dear!" said Miss Sanders.

"Well, why not? They all like it. Movie stars are awfully vain, and think of the people that do speak to them. One more won't hurt. And if he is, I'm going to get his autograph!"

Mrs. Clayton giggled like a schoolgirl. It was really quite exciting, and she thought that she, too, would like a word with him.

At luncheon the conversation was continued.

"There's one thing I like about him," said Betty. "He isn't a flirt. I can't stand men who flirt!"

The object of their admiration was facing them at the other end of the dining-car.

"I hate college boys," went on Betty, having in mind a freckle-faced, pug-nosed youngster who had been casting amorous and lonely eyes at her ever since she entered the car. So she gave him a haughty stare, to be softened the next moment when she turned her gaze on Lower Six, who sat at the same table.

"I like the way he dresses, don't you?" whispered Mrs. Clayton, the lure of the romantic having gotten the better of her.

"Awfully good taste," replied Betty. And she made up her mind to have her brother get a suit of the same cut and cloth if possible.

"Such a good forehead," said Miss Sanders. "He looks like the pictures of Rupert Brooke."

"What movies does he play in?" asked Betty.

She was gently reprimanded.

"Oh, but I don't think he's a poet," she said. "The authors I've heard lecture have been awfully homely messes."

III

After lunch Betty followed Lower Six into the observation-car. Mrs. Clayton and Miss Sanders went back to Massomanie. Mrs. Clayton wanted a short nap.

The train was speeding along the Dakota prairies. The shades in the car windows were drawn, shutting out the hot June sun. The observation-car was practically deserted.

Betty saw him seated in one of the armchairs, gazing dreamily out of the window. She made for the chair next to him. Just then, due to her vivid imagination, the car gave a sudden jolt, and she had to thrust out a protecting hand to save herself from falling. It was by merest accident she had to grab his chair.

"I beg your pardon," she said, as she steadied herself.

"Rather rough sailing," he answered as he gallantly gave her a helping hand, and assisted her to the chair at his side.

"Thank you," Betty said with a giggle

as she sat down and tried to look disinterested.

"Not at all," he replied, closing his eyes and leaning back.

Betty had a good chance to observe him at close range. Yes, he was handsome. But where had she seen him? Betty believed in working fast. She had learned long ago that time was precious, and being at a select girls' school, where men are rare visitors, she had acquired the technique of getting acquainted as quickly as possible.

"You're in my car, aren't you?" she said.

"What? I beg your pardon?" He opened his eyes.

Betty repeated her question. He had such nice eyes!

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You know, I suppose this is awfully impudent of me," Betty went on. "But I'm just dying of curiosity."

"Really?"

What a nice-sounding voice he had! Like deep, cool water.

"I just know I've seen you in the movies. But I can't quite place you."

He flushed. "Do I look like a moving-picture actor?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that's a compliment," he said drily.

"But aren't you?"

"No."

"But I'm sure I've seen your picture some place."

"You probably have," he answered. "It's terribly bold of me speaking to you in this fashion, but your face does look so familiar. And I know I've seen you before, some place. You might just as well tell me who you are. For, after all, when I get off the train at Missoula, and you go on, we'll never see each other again."

"That is very true," he answered, almost ironically.

"So who are you? I'm just dying with curiosity."

He gave her a look that might have read in its meaning, "Go ahead and die." But then his sense of humor got the better of him. He almost smiled, but checked himself just in time.

"Suppose you guess!"

"Then your picture has been published?"

"Oh, yes," he said with a bored tone.

"Not a movie star. Then maybe an actor?"

"No!"

"A tennis champion!"

"Well, I play."

Betty jumped at this clue. "Then it's been in the Sunday papers that I've seen your picture."

"Yes," he answered rather sadly. "I suppose my picture's been published in the Sunday papers, too."

His very manner, and the bored way he said all this, led Betty to another conclusion. Surely. Why hadn't she guessed it from the first? He was a millionaire, a society man, and all that. But she didn't like to ask him this point blank. As a rule the Four Hundred are so sensitive about themselves, and the real thing never speaks of his or her social position.

"I think you are a meany," she said pouting. This pout of hers she had found to be very effective when dealing with college boys. It usually helped her win her point. "You might tell me. I'd never guess."

He looked out of the window, frowning ever so slightly. One of his hands was hanging over the arm of the chair. He crossed his fingers. Betty could not see this.

"Well," he said, "I don't like to see a charming young girl die of curiosity on my hands. So I guess I'd better tell."

Betty blushed. What a lovely compliment! And so gallant of him!

"You've seen my pictures in the papers, all right," he said. "I couldn't keep them out. And I'm beginning to wish I had!"

"I know just how you feel," said Betty. "My father's a Congressman, and reporters are always after him. He says he spends more time posing for the camera than he does giving speeches. And he loves to talk."

"Well, how's this for a story?" he went on, still with his fingers crossed. "My father and I had a violent quarrel. You see, he wanted to go on with the business. But I can't. I want to try my hand at something different."

Betty immediately sensed the whole plot; the young millionaire, the crusty father, the quarrel, the dramatic scene, and then West for the hero! It was wonderfully thrilling. She had always felt that things like that really existed in life just as they are pictured in the movies, and now she was certain.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she said. "Of course you'll make good."

"I hope so. Father runs a soap factory. I don't care for manufacturing soap myself. I'd rather make carpet-tacks. There's more in it. So we quarreled."

"I don't blame you for wanting to lead your own life. But I don't see what difference it makes whether you make soap or carpet-tacks."

He looked at her quizzically, and saw that she was believing what he had told her.

"I suppose I ought to write short stories," he said, half aloud.

"Why don't you?" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "I bet you get a lot of material."

"I do," he replied, almost smiling.

Then Betty told him about Mrs. Clayton's adventure with the murderer.

"Well, inform her I'm not that, and relieve her from worrying. But listen, you'll not repeat what I've just told you?"

"Oh, no. Cross my heart and hope to die."

"Don't yet," he replied wearily.

Just then Mrs. Clayton put in an appearance, and Betty had to introduce her. Since she didn't know his name, she merely introduced Mrs. Clayton. He bowed, touched her extended fingers and let it go at that.

Betty felt that since she was the possessor of his secret, she could well afford to leave him alone with Mrs. Clayton. And after all, her curiosity was satisfied, and it would not be advisable for her to let him see too much of her. Let him seek her out if he wanted to talk to her again. She had always found that effective when dealing with men.

So she got up gaily, and with an "I'll see you again" made her triumphal way back to Massomanie. Anyway, Mrs. Clayton, who was already married, did not count as a possible rival.

IV

"I SUPPOSE," said Mrs. Clayton, when Betty had gone, "that that silly child has been asking you a lot of personal questions. She's awfully spontaneous. Goodness knows when I was young girls were not as outspoken as they are now. She thinks you're a movie star."

"But I'm not," he replied.

"You're not?"

"No. Nor an actor. Nor a tennis champion. I've had my pictures in the papers, though."

"Yes. I just knew I'd seen you before, some place."

"You, too?" he said, gazing at her sadly. "You aren't the lady she was telling me about that talked to a criminal?"

"Yes. Wasn't it silly of me?" She was as bashful as an ingénue of seventeen.

"I hope you don't think I'm a criminal?" he asked.

"Oh, no, of course not!" Mrs. Clayton leaned forward.

"I suppose you might as well know who I am," he said, "so your suspicions will be distracted." He crossed his fingers again, and paused a moment. "Of course this is very confidential."

He glanced nervously around the car. They were practically alone. His voice sank to a whisper. "I'm a well-known Secret Service man," he said. "Yes. Government. *Sh!* Of course, I don't want it known. You'll not tell?"

"Oh, no, really," Mrs. Clayton thrilled. "My husband trusts me with his private affairs. But I just knew you were someone whose picture I have seen. But for the moment I couldn't remember where."

"Don't try," he said, almost bitterly. "It was an unlucky moment for me when I posed for the camera. I'm trying hard to have those pictures suppressed. I thought it would be good business for me. But unfortunately it hasn't turned out that way at all." He sighed, leaned back, and uncrossed his fingers.

By that time Miss Sanders had heard from Betty that he wrote short stories. An author! She hurried breathlessly to the observation-car. She must talk with him. Oh, the joy of finding someone with whom she could intelligently discuss books — one who actually wrote them himself!

She trembled when she came into the car. But, controlling herself, selected a copy of the *Atlantic Monthly* from the magazine rack, and settled down in the seat next to the idealized young man.

Introductions followed. Mrs. Clayton professed a headache, and thought it would be a kindness on her part to let Miss Sanders have a few moments alone with him. How these women do stick together! So she made her way back to Massomanie, replying to his *"Sh!"* and the warning finger on his lips with a stealthy nod.

When they were alone Miss Sanders began her campaign.

"You write stories," she said.

"Well, I occasionally indulge in a little fiction," he replied.

"Have I ever read anything you have written?" she went on, breathlessly.

"I don't think it's been published . . . yet," he answered.

"But I know I've seen your picture some place."

He sighed. "Yes, you probably have. *Et tu,* Brute? I do my stories only on the side. Sort of a recreation. I'm not a movie actor."

"Oh, I guessed that."

"Thanks."

"But I knew from the moment I first saw you that you were a poet. You have such a sad air. You haven't smiled once."

"A man in my position doesn't dare," he answered enigmatically. "If I smiled in public, people would recognize me."

"How odd!" The element of mystery held Miss Sanders breathless.

"Listen," he said. "I'm going to tell you the truth. I've got to confide in someone. See, my fingers aren't even crossed. That impossible girl . . . I hope she isn't a friend of yours?"

"Oh, no. Nor Mrs. Clayton, either. I just met them this morning."

There was something about Miss Sanders that appealed to Lower Six. She had that air that makes one want to tell one's troubles—the sort of feeling that upon her bosom you could weep and know you would not be misunderstood. Miss Sanders was a successful teacher, and the young had learned to love and respect her confidence.

"Well," he went on, "she wanted to know all about me. And so I told her some yarn. Yes, *some* yarn. And then the other woman, I told her still

another. And neither of them was true. Of course, all this is confidential."

"Oh, certainly!"

He went to the magazine rack and brought back several illustrated magazines.

"See that! And that! And that!"

"Yes."

"Well, it's me."

And then he told her the long and bitter story of his fame. He spared no details. Nor did he spare himself. And he told her yet another story that made the tears come into Miss Sanders' eyes.

"And she said she wouldn't love you because of this," said Miss Sanders when he had finished.

"Yes. And so do you blame me for not wanting to smile in public?"

"No. But she will forgive you? She promised that?"

"Yes," he replied. "If I ever live it down. That's why I'm going West, where I won't be known. In time . . . who knows? She thinks I won't be able to stick it out. That I'll go back. There's the test. But, so help me, I'm going to make good!"

His face was serious, and his eyes were grave.

"I know you will," said Miss Sanders, touching him on the arm.

"Thanks," he replied.

The girl in the stateroom appeared in the passage at the far end of the car. When she saw that Lower Six was in the car, she turned quickly away.

But he had not seen her, and went on talking with Miss Sanders.

V

At Fargo the train stopped for ten minutes. And the weary travelers had a chance to stretch their legs on the platform. The girl in the stateroom joined the throng. Lower Six strode along, his hands in his pockets, followed at a discreet distance by Mrs. Clayton and Betty.

Suddenly he came face to face with the girl in the stateroom.

Both stopped.

He gasped. "Why, Verona . . ." he began.

She looked at him coldly a moment.

"Why are you following me?" she asked.

"I'm not," he replied, honestly. "Are you on this train?"

"You knew I was coming West," she went on.

"No, I didn't. I haven't heard a word from you or about you, since . . . since . . ." He stopped short. There was a moment's silence between them. Then he impulsively went on, "I'm on my way West. I don't know where. Some little town where they don't read magazines, and I can get a job and do a man's work. If you would only believe in me. . . ."

"But you promised—" she said, stubbornly.

"That I wouldn't see you again, or try to seek you out. I shall keep my promise, Verona. Maybe some time I shall be forgotten."

He touched his cap and turned abruptly away.

For a moment she gazed after him, and then, biting her lips, went back to the privacy of her stateroom.

Mrs. Clayton and Betty were all agog. They could hardly wait to find Miss Sanders and tell her what they had seen . . . and heard.

But Miss Sanders had witnessed the meeting herself from the car window. When Lower Six got back he dropped down beside her.

"Well," he began, "she's on this train."

"I thought as much. And won't she—"

"She's as cold as ever. Oh, why should women be so darned proud? She

knows I love her—love her more than I do anything else. Think of what I'm giving up for her sake. And what it means to start all over again. But what's the use of explaining to her? She thinks I'm not sincere."

Miss Sanders' eyes were moist.

"There'll be a way out," she said. "Maybe . . . maybe, I can help you," she added brightly.

VI

Miss Sanders was not without originality. Nor did she lack in tact and diplomacy. And there was nothing that so warmed her heart as being the God-in-the-machine to a romance.

And she had an idea!

So after dinner she drew him aside a moment.

"Go and wait in the observation-car," she said. "And stay there until either I come or else—"

She would say no more. Lower Six obeyed her trustingly. But he wondered what sort of a hide-and-seek game she was going to try.

He did not know that Miss Sanders, going back to Massomanie, rapped cautiously on the door of the stateroom.

The door opened.

"Come in," said the girl.

"My dear," said Miss Sanders, "I know you will forgive me for being so informal. But then this is a Pullman car."

"I'm awfully glad you came," the girl replied. "I've been rather lonely."

Miss Sanders thought she detected a faint suspicion of red eyelids. She was rather pleased at this sign, and so determined that she would not waste valuable time in useless discussion.

"My dear," she said, "I hope you won't think I'm officious, or want to intrude into your private affairs. But he has told me all about it. Most young men and young girls do let me know their secrets."

"He told you!" gasped the girl. Then she drew herself up coldly. "Did he send you to see me?"

"Oh, mercy, no!" said Miss Sanders quickly. "I'm doing this on my own impulse. He just told me why you quarreled. My dear, don't you think you are awfully proud?—too proud?"

"You know what he does, of course!"

"Oh, yes. And what of it? Isn't that a little matter compared with the fact that he loves you? And he isn't going to do it any more. You know that, of course?"

"But I somehow can't quite believe him. He's had it so easy for so long."

"My dear, I'm going to tell you something—something I've never told anyone before. But then, we may never see each other again. My life is past—the best part of it. Yours is all ahead of you. I once had a lover, too—when I was a girl, and young and pretty as you are. He was a clerk in the store at home. Just an ordinary clerk. And I was too proud to let people see me with him. . . .

"I was a silly girl, then. I didn't quite believe in him, you see. And he loved me, dear—just as much as this young boy loves you. If I had only believed him when he told me of his dreams and ambitions!

"Well, you can see me now. I'm all alone in the world. And he . . . well, he didn't always stay a clerk. I've always envied the woman who married him. She's had everything she wants—a big house, and children—children of her own."

Miss Sanders stopped a moment to wipe the tears out of her eyes.

The girl was silent. Her head was bowed, and she was twisting and untwisting her handkerchief into a knot.

Miss Sanders went on. "He's back

in the observation-car, alone. And there's a moon. Good-by."

She rose and went quietly out of the stateroom, closing the door softly behind her.

VII

About two hours later, when the porter had begun to make up the berths, Betty came hurrying into Massomanie. She seized Mrs. Clayton by the arm.

"What do you think," she said. "He's out on the back platform with his arm around a girl! And he told me he was a millionaire's son."

That news was more startling than the fact that he was on the back platform to Mrs. Clayton.

"A millionaire's son!" she exclaimed. "He told me he was a Secret Service man. There's something awfully shady about him."

Miss Sanders, having gathered together her various garments necessary for her descent into the ladies' room, stopped a moment. She was told of the terrible deceit of Lower Six.

"Well," she said, turning to Betty, "and he's out there with her?"

"Yes. And what I saw, Miss Sanders! What I saw!"

"Who is he, anyway?" put in Mrs. Clayton. "I think we ought to tell the conductor."

"Give me one of those magazines," said Miss Sanders. "See that!"

"Yes," they both gasped.

"Well, that's him!"

Betty sat down weakly. "I might have known all the time."

"It does look like him," said Mrs. Clayton. "But he's smiling here."

"Yes," said Miss Sanders. "That's why he never smiles in public."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Betty. "That's all he is! I didn't want to marry him anyway." She threw the magazine aside, and began to wonder at what station the freckle-faced college youth would get off.

Miss Sanders told her version of the tale.

Betty picked up the magazine again, and looked at the picture. "He is good looking. I don't blame her for loving him." Then she read aloud the inscription under the advertisement, "'The man with the million-dollar smile. Why? Because he uses Pepetto Tooth Paste!' Well, I don't care if he did pose for this, he's handsome!"

"Yes," said Miss Sanders, "but he's going to give that up, and make good at something else."

"Well, what gets me," Betty went on, "is the fact that he really lives!"

The Wisdom of Solomon

By R. I. Egan

NEARLY every man has experienced the difficulty with which I was recently confronted. I was in love with two girls. Which should I marry?

Myrtis was a delightful, dainty little thing, as sparkling as the bubbles in a glass of "extra dry." To dance with her was to know for the first time the poetry of motion; to kiss her was to touch the spark of passion to the TNT of the heart.

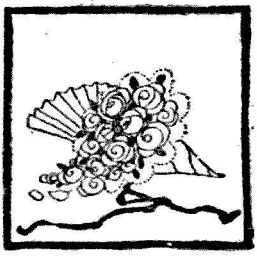
Clara was a quiet, common-sense type; sure to make a comfortable home and be a dependable helpmate. She harmonized with my quieter moods.

I found it difficult to make up my mind. One part of my nature demanded Myrtis; another was drawn to Clara. The situation called for the wisdom of Solomon. However, I finally came to a decision. Which girl did I marry?

Alas, my friends, I did just as Solomon would have done. That is why I am now behind prison bars.

I married both.

MOST husbands would be surprised if they knew what complimentary things their wives say about them. Most fish would also be surprised at the complimentary things the anglers who caught them say about them.



The Pearls of the Leading Lady

By Ormonde Trego

HE play had progressed through two dreary acts and the polite though bored London audience settled back to await the advent of the third and last act with patient resignation.

In the stalls a program rustled; a peanut-shell crunched underfoot in the gallery, and the house lights snapped out suddenly. At the same moment a warm glow spread along the trough of the footlights and the parting curtain disclosed the set.

In his second-row orchestra seat, the man who called himself Captain Valentine folded his arms and crossed his well-tailored legs. There was nothing so monotonous to him as the fragile tea-cup comedies of the younger school of British playwrights. To a man of his alert, swift-moving temperament, the dragging drivel of the inane dialogue was maddening. With difficulty he curbed the impulse that would have carried him directly to the coatroom and the street outside.

It was only the knowledge of his impending task, of the adventure confronting him, that kept him in his chair, stiff and motionless.

The play was entitled *The Affair of Lady D.* From the size of the audience it was evident it was anything save a financial success. The leading rôle was taken by an Irma Delray, a young actress of considerable talent and popularity.

It was to see Irma Delray and something she possessed that was responsible for the presence of the adventurer in the orchestra of His Majesty's Playhouse.

In the four corners of the world, in Port Said, along Bombay's Mogul Street, under the palms on the purple Isle of Monique and in the cafés of Paris, for more than twelve months, he had read and heard of the magnificent pearl necklace given Irma Delray by the young Duke of Stratford.

It was to behold the pearls that Captain Valentine had crosed the channel and plunged into the gray fogs of London. Booty was scarce even in Paris; the prospect of plunder was enough to carry him toward any destination.

The act unfolding, creaked like rusty machinery. Captain Valentine felt a stir of anticipation. In the first and second acts Irma Delray had appeared in morning frocks and a riding-habit. The scene in progress represented evening. It was here that Lady D would appear in an evening-gown—wearing the pearls.

The adventurer waited, steeling himself to calm patience.

Presently the liveried footman on the stage answered the tinkle of a bell and with stiff formality admitted the leading lady. Irma Delray swept in, buried under the luxurious weight of a chinchilla wrap.

The faintest ripple of interest ran through the small audience. She divested herself of the wrap and removed a spangled veil from her dark hair, stand-

ing revealed in a smart black evening gown by Poiret.

From throat to waist hung the double rope of her famous pearl necklace, lustrous and gleaming.

As she spoke her lines, the adventurer let his eyes rest on the dangling necklace. He was close enough to the stage to obtain a good view of it. He contemplated the pearls with narrowed gaze, his anticipation growing. What he had read and heard concerning them had not been exaggeration. They were of rare beauty and high value, a prize worthy of his most brilliant and valiant efforts. In them he saw a reward equal to any coup he had ever made.

Halfway through the act he relinquished his chair and made his way to the coatroom. A tall, well-built blond man was being handed into a fur motor-coat when he reached the room. The adventurer was forced to wait until the check-girl had retrieved the other's stick and hat.

"Gladys, my dear," the man drawled in a good-humored voice, "I have a fancy that Miss Delray's pearls would look fetching on you. If you ever take a notion to leave here, it might be an excellent idea to run around back and help yourself to the necklace first. I know a hundred places where you could sell the pearls for any amount. Not a bad idea, what?"

"No fear of getting anything away from her," the check-girl answered with a touch of asperity. "She takes better care of them than she would of a child —if she had one! Oh, no fear of *her* losing anything that way!"

The man fitted a fashionable derby to his head, lighted a fat cigarette, dropped a shilling into the girl's hand and wandered toward the lobby doors.

Captain Valentine presented his brass check.

"I hope," he said amiably, "you will not take your friend too seriously."

The girl, finding and holding his ulster, showed her teeth in a smile.

"Oh, him? Well, I should say not! He is always joking that way, Mr. Ronland Wetterly is. No one ever takes him serious, sir."

Outside, on the damp pavement, where the fog hung misty and cold, the adventurer felt for his cigarette-case. He dismissed the idea of the blond man's interest in the necklace. Men who achieved did not go about discussing plunder in public places. He turned toward the stage-door alley of the theater, a faint frown shadowing his lean, handsome face.

The work he had laid out for himself would require keen strategy. Not only would it be difficult, but it was not to his liking. Women he did not prey upon unless the circumstances were such that he could not help himself. In all of his long career of desperate ventures and breath-taking chances there was not one crime that weighed on his conscience.

It was enough for the present that Irma Delray had received the necklace as a gift from a man who could replace it a dozen times without the least concern. He knew something about her. He understood that her numerous admirers had lavished countless gifts of jewels upon her.

If the necklace was filched from her she would not be required to suffer. And, the adventurer told himself, no matter how great the opportunity, he would touch nothing except the necklace itself.

At the stage entrance he tipped a red-faced doorman with prodigal extravagance and spoke with a well-marked French accent:

"Monsieur, it is that I represent the *Temps* of Paris. I have an appointment with Mademoiselle Delray for an interview. I will go directly up and not trouble you, *mon ami*."

Before the doorman could frame an

answer, the adventurer had bowed with charming grace and was rapidly ascending a narrow stone stairway that twisted up into the regions above.

II

THE stairway emptied into a corridor that was lined with doors behind which was a subdued buzz of conversation. Coming to a halt Captain Valentine eyed his surroundings in some perplexity, the topography of back-stage being quite foreign to him.

He determined to locate the whereabouts of the leading lady's dressing-room, discovering it finally by the unforgettable sound of Irma Delray's voice. High-pitched and angry, it seeped from behind the door that was located toward the end of the passage.

Close to the door the adventurer listened.

"There is no use quarreling, Mr. Rosenthal," the actress was saying petulantly. "I have quite made up my mind. There is no use in keeping the play going. It is hopeless, and you as the producer should recognize the fact. There is nothing to do but to close it up and take our losses philosophically. I am willing to sacrifice the money I put into it, rather than to go on and on—"

The voice of a man, thick and excited, broke in.

"But, Miss Delray, all I ask is that you give it a chance. Give it a chance! Give it a fair show. Did I ever pick you a lemon yet? How do we know it's a bloomer when it ain't had a fair trial? Give it a chance to get settled down and see if we don't break even on it. Give it—"

"No, I will wait no longer, Mr. Rosenthal. I wish it closed up at once. When my personal following is exhausted we will be playing to empty seats. I have no intention of being identified with a failure. It will hurt my reputation. I repeat, I am willing to lose all that I have put into it. Please do not argue, it is entirely useless."

After a few minutes more of vain pleas on the part of the man, the door of the dressing-room banged open and he came out, chewing fiercely on a cigar. He passed the adventurer without glance or comment and disappeared down the stairs.

Captain Valentine turned hastily to the door of the dressing-room, knuckles extended to rap upon it. The murmur of Irma Delray's voice again came out to him and he dropped his hand.

"You see how it is, Edith. There is nothing to do but to close up. Do you remember what I said to you last week when I first realized the play was a dismal failure?"

"Yes, madam, I remember perfectly," the respectful voice of a girl answered.

There was a short pause.

"I have decided that what I told you must be done. It must be done without any more delay—*tonight!* Come here beside me and while you are doing my hair we will talk. You are certain of your brother's aid?"

"Yes, madam, he is willing to help in any way."

There was another pause.

"Then listen carefully to my instructions—"

The actress lowered her voice to a pitch that was almost a whisper. It was only by straining his ears that Captain Valentine was able to hear what was being said. For a long five minutes he listened to each precise detail, the frown slowly leaving his face to be replaced by a shadowy smile appearing on his lips.

Satisfied, presently, that there was no further cause to linger or to seek admittance into the dressing-room, he went down the stairs. Nodding to the doorman, he retraced his steps down the alley and emerged into the fog-filled street.

His watch showed him that the hour was nearing midnight. From what he had learned he still had all of two hours grace to reorganize his plan of attack and arrive at a new decision. He walked as far as the Strand and hailed a four-wheeler that took him to his hotel west of Green Park.

The hostelry was small and unpretentious—a place from which he could come and go without arousing comment or speculation. He had used it once or twice before on flying visits from Paris in quest of loot, and with high success.

He sought his room, his mind swimming with the memory of the amazing conversation that had drifted out from behind the closed door of the dressing-room. Immeasurable relief flooded him. The Fate that had whirled him triumphantly through the fire of a hundred perilous episodes was once more his friendly ally. He felt that light had filtered into the darkness of what had appeared a cryptic puzzle; not the smallest part of his satisfaction was the fact that now he would not have to turn his steel against a woman.

And within his eager grasp the wonderful pearl necklace nestled!

In his room he drew the shade and smoked a meditative cigarette. When he was through with it he drew out his double kit bags and packed them with neat care. Next, he lifted the mattress of the bed and pulled out his service revolver. He saw that each chamber held a cartridge, slipped off his coat, and hung the weapon in a silk-string cradle of his own devising, so that it lay close and flat under his left arm, ready to be drawn instantly.

At thirty minutes after one o'clock the Plunder Prince plunged out the light and made his way below. He left his kit bags with the clerk on duty in the lobby and sought the streets.

The fog still smoked in from the sea, cold and depressing. The sidewalks, muddied earlier by a million feet, flowed east from Piccadilly Circus, deserted. London had gone to bed an hour past—quietude brooded over the city like the folded wings of Time.

The adventurer turned up the collar of his coat and walked east. He took the underground as far as Sloane Square and struck off in a northerly direction. He swung past Hyde Park Corner, cut through Half Moon Street and turned into Oxford Street, coming out at the end of Tottenham Court Road. Again he consulted his watch as he neared his destination. He saw that he did not have any too many minutes to spare.

Tilton Lane received him with a swirl of fog. Out of the mist he was able to detect a shadowy aisle of stolidly respectable houses, ornate and dignified, the homes mostly of people of wealth unable to pierce the charmed circle of Mayfair and Belgravia.

Captain Valentine felt a pulse-beat of expectancy. Here was the scene of his latest exploit. Somewhere ahead bulked the residence of Irma Delray—the four walls that must shortly enclose him and stage the escapade.

He shot a glance at the gold-leaf numbers visible on the glass front-doors of the houses he passed, continuing on and stopping only at the sound of whining rubber tires on the wet asphalt of the ribbon of street.

A large limousine glided past him like a phantom cruiser. Even as he paused the car ran into the curb a few yards beyond and the chauffeur snapped off the lights.

Captain Valentine eyed the car dubiously. Its presence, lightless and motionless at the hour, stirred his alert intuition. He passed it slowly.

When he was abreast of it, a man in the snug tonneau struck a match for a cigar, holding it between cupped hands.

In the flickering flare of the match the face of the blond man whom the

check-girl in the theater had called Mr. Ronland Wetterly was for an instant lighted up!

III

PUTTING the limousine behind him, Captain Valentine went on. That there was a kink in the smooth skein weaving the fabric of the night's adventure, he could not now doubt. The appearance of the man was puzzling. Was he after the pearls himself or was there some other object in his vigil?

Moving his shoulders as if to throw off the doubts weighing on them, the adventurer slowed his gait. A new thought presented itself. Possibly the conversation he had overheard was a trap. He smiled grimly. He had walked a thousand dark alleys in safety; it would be rather amusing, he reflected, if an actress was destined to be the means of bringing his career to an abrupt and disastrous conclusion.

The house of Irma Delray came even with him. He laid a hand on the scroll-iron railing of the stoop and listened for footsteps in back of him, the fog closing him off in a world of his own. He heard nothing, and mounted three wet steps that led him into a vestibule, through double swinging-doors of plate-glass. The second, or inner door, was locked.

He drew out his penknife and wedged its blade under the latch. When he saw it would snap if forced further he dropped it back into his pocket and produced a small bunch of master latchkeys that he carried for moments of emergency.

He fitted each key in turn to the refractory lock, turning each until he found the one that fitted the tumblers and turned the latch over. He pushed open the door and stepped into the blackness of a foyer where the air was gratefully warm after the dampness of Tilton Lane.

On quiet feet he moved across the foyer, straining ears and eyes. A wall of darkness hemmed him in. With a hand outstretched for protection and guidance he went on until he was brought up short by the newel-post of a stairway made invisible by the blackness.

Lifting a groping foot for the lower step, he suddenly turned and looked over his shoulder, every nerve taut and on guard.

From some room not far distant came the stealthy rasp of a window being lifted—a current of cool air creeping into the foyer. The adventurer smiled, backing against a wainscoted wall. The singing silence, heavy and inviolate, was destroyed by muffled footfalls.

Stiff as stone, the adventurer heard some one coming toward him, fumbling and feeling with a breath that was rapid and irregular. After a minute a hand was dropped to the wooden balusters and a sigh of satisfaction sounded.

The intruder began to ascend the stairs.

Still with his back to the wall, Captain Valentine thought of the menace of the lightless limousine outside in the fog. Had Mr. Ronland Wetterly stalked past him with ghostly tread, or was the one who had forced entry to the sleeping house a new and unknown quantity? He frowned again.

Guided by the balustrade the adventurer crept up the stairs, pausing and listening to the retreating steps above him. Without mishap he reached the top landing where the close air closed over him like an impenetrable blanket.

Now the footfalls sounded to the left of him. They ceased altogether and through the parted portières of a room some yards away the tiny, dancing beam of an electric flashlight broke out, wandering about the confines of the chamber like a trapped firefly.

Captain Valentine crept to the hang-

ings and inserted an eye to their velvet folds.

For some minutes he was unable to locate anything with definite distinction in the erratic lunges of the torch. It was only when the light was rested on a table and became steady that he saw he was looking into a drawing-room of ample proportions, splendidly appointed with shadowy furniture, sprawling rugs and glimmering *objets d'art*.

The adventurer's gaze moved to the intruder.

The man was not Ronland Wetterly but a burly individual attired in cheap, shapeless garments. He was youthful and dark featured, a novice and blunderer from the manner in which he conducted himself.

Shielding his face with a red mask the man turned to a small, square safe which he proceeded to examine with an amateurish deliberation that made the adventurer fume with fretful impatience.

With a languid air, seemingly indifferent to the passing of time, the thief picked up a small bag from the floor, opened it and drew out a number of tools. Serenely unhurried he put a drill together, screwed the plug in the socket of the table electrolier and donned a pair of gloves. Then he turned on the current and began to bore into the face of the safe a few inches above the dial.

Captain Valentine felt his blood run hot and turbulent. How long before the figure in the waiting limousine would come to action? He longed to tell the blundering fool at the safe that time was precious.

The restlessness he had felt in the theater assailed him again. He shot an involuntary glance at the black well of the unseen stairs.

A sigh of satisfaction took his eyes back to the folds in the portières. The marauder within had accomplished the first part of his task. He turned off the drill, blew the steel shavings from the hole he had bored and fitted a nitro cartridge into it, equipping the percussion-cap with double C wire, which would be exploded on a contact.

This done to his complete satisfaction, the miscreant caught up three of the Persian rugs from the floor and flung them over the safe. He stepped back and made a short circuit with the wires he held in his hands.

Immediately a soft, dull explosion made the rugs jump and the acrid odor of burnt powder crept out on the lifeless air. Pulling the rugs hastily away the man swung the sagging door of the safe open and squatted in front of it.

He appeared to have some concise knowledge of the safe's contents, for almost instantly he lifted out Irma Delray's double-rope pearl necklace and stood up, chuckling.

He picked up his torch and trained the light upon the dangling necklace. For a long minute he appraised the plunder with deep satisfaction. Finally he bundled it carelessly into a pocket of his jacket and shut off the light.

Stepping away from the curtains, Captain Valentine drew his service revolver and wound his fingers about the cold barrel. He crept back to the head of the obscure stairway, savage contentment filling him.

Footsteps came toward him, this time careless and quick. He drew farther back but not before an outstretched hand had brushed his arm and disturbed air waves made by a sibilant gasp fanned his face.

"Is that you, Edith?"

The hoarse whisper thrilled away into the sighing silence. The adventurer stood poised, waiting to give his adversary a fair chance before he struck.

"Edith, is that you?"

On the heels of the question, the flash turned on again struck Captain Valentine directly in the eyes—a short-arm blow whistled past his ear. He darted

to one side and, wheeling, brought the butt of his gun down with staggering force.

A hollow grunt sounded and the flash, falling, winked out.

In a watch-tick, the adventurer's hands had delved into the pockets of the falen combatant. With a thrill he tore out the pearl necklace and crammed it into his shirt-front.

But at the same instant footsteps on the stair grew loud and the same voice he had heard speaking to the check-girl in the lobby of the theater boomed, domineering and imperative:

"Here, now! I say, just a minute!"

Something the adventurer knew was a cane struck him smartly on the shoulder. He lunged down two steps of the stairway, warding off a series of vicious blows and felt heavy hands, gifted with some knowledge of fisticuffs, meet his attack. A stinging blow knocked the service revolver from his hands. Reeling under the weight of his opponent, the Plunder Prince was flung against the balusters and then up and over them. Hanging into space, he fought with blind grimness, tearing away the hand that clutched his throat and planting a desperate fist in the target of a soft, upturned face.

The blow was such that his antagonist stumbled backward and lost his balance. Dragging the adventurer with him the man plunged down the stairs, clawing and grappling at each step, while a woman's scream sounded on the landing above.

Tumbling into the foyer, which spasmodically blossomed into light from a touch on the switch on the floor above, the adventurer, with a mighty effort, threw off his opponent and downed him with a crashing hook to the jaw that hurled the man up against the wall.

In a brace of minutes the adventurer was out of the door and on the running-board of the waiting limousine.

"Quick!" he commanded jerkily. "Scotland Yard!"

When they reached Bassington Row, Captain Valentine opened the side door of the tonneau and dropped quickly off.

IV

THE boat-train from Charing Cross ran through the hop-fields of Kent when Captain Valentine yawned and threw his cigarette away, looking at the slender spires of Canterbury, gold-and-silver in the morning sunshine.

The man who shared his compartment, a stout Britisher in tweeds, folded the morning paper he had been engrossed in and looked across the carriage.

"I say," he began, breaking the silence that had reigned since London had been left behind, "rather a fuss in Tilton Lane last night, what?"

The adventurer lifted polite brows.

"Fuss?" he repeated innocently.

The other looked astonished.

"Then you haven't read about it? My word, remarkable! Robbery, scandal and what-not! You know Irma Delray, of course—but then who doesn't? She lost a beastly lot of money on her new play and conceived the brilliant idea of recouping. Clever, deucedly clever! She employed someone to steal her pearl necklace so she could recover the insurance on it and still have it. Ripping idea, what? Eat your cake and have it, too!"

He broke off to chuckle heavily.

"But the dear girl hadn't reckoned with Ronland Wetterly, a member of the firm who held the insurance on the necklace. Wetterly had his own private suspicions that there was something up, so kept his eye on Irma. Last night—"

The man rambled on but Captain Valentine was not listening.

Dover and the flash off sea!

Somewhere over there lay Paris and safety.

Still Waters

By Steward Chandler

A GLEAM of malicious triumph lit up his hard, crafty face, as he sat motionless in the flat-bottomed boat watching the muddy bubbles rise to the surface of the pond. First they came thick and fast, then more slowly, one by one, as though they had not escaped without a struggle.

When the last ring of ripples had lost itself in the weeds on the bank, and the water was still again, he took up the oars and pulled away toward his cabin.

"Now let them come!" he muttered half aloud. "They'll never find you there!"

They came that afternoon, the Sheriff and his deputy, with search-warrant and prominently displayed firearms. Every inch of the house they ransacked. They peered behind the boarding, probed the dirt floor, sounded the well, looked up the chimney, examined the ground all about for new-turned earth.

But they found no evidence, and rode away again at sunset, baffled.

II

LATE that night a stealthy figure stole down to the edge of the pond. It was the man who had watched the bubbles. He pushed off in the boat, dropped a grappling-hook over the side at the end of a rope, and began slowly and quietly to row back and forth across the dark water.

Suddenly the rope tightened. Swiftly he seized it and began to pull it in. A dark something became dimly visible below the surface. Another pull, and it was neck and shoulder out of the water.

With infinite care he loosed the hook and drew the Thing up until it rested on the boat's stern.

Until that moment he had showed no trace of emotion. Then all at once he gasped and fell on his knees in the bottom of the boat. His eyes were staring, his face ghastly pale in the moonlight.

"Good Gawd!" he moaned, touching the Thing's cold neck with nerveless fingers—"Good Gawd! The cork's come out!"

The Empty Glass

By Julian Kilman

ERSE TOTH'S long Magyar body was unhappy in its cramped spying place behind the case of butterflies on the stand in the corner of the little room. In the head that surmounted the magnificent torso of Derse Toth there lived a maggot; the thing seemed to be writhing, twisting, looping its leprous-white body through the interstices of the brain.

Several times Van Dusee was on the point of discovering the intruder. Once, the old entomologist, having approached the stand, leaned forward so far that in a moment, even in the poor light, he must certainly have observed him.

But there had come a diversion—the distant tinkle of a bell advertised that a belated customer had entered the shop in front. After his return, the old fellow again had directed his steps toward the stand, when suddenly he paused, his features twisted with pain, and he caught his hand to his left side.

The Magyar, peering through beneath the insect case, and knowing of the old man's failing health, himself experienced a smothering sensation of hope. Perhaps the old fool would die before his very eyes!

But no. Van Dusee stood still a moment, his lips apart, his tongue visible, flabby, unnatural in his mouth, uttering a sound like "dow-dow"; but presently he recovered, his countenance became normal and he turned to the table beneath the gas jet where lay his work.

In spite of himself Toth shivered. That "dow-dow" sound recalled some half forgotten Hungarian lore dealing with the next world. It seemed almost as if the ghostly pinions of the black bird of death had just fanned his cheeks.

In his reaction he *thought* profanity; already his surveillance had been prolonged to three-quarters of an hour—the crouched position had ragged his nerves; the maggot was twisting, writhing, looping its leprous-white body; it hurt!

What was the old fool doing now? Ah, yes; preparing the potassium cyanide paste, a layer of which caked in the bottom of a glass or small jar was invaluable for its swift killing and consequent preservation of the filament coloration on the wings of the moths and butterflies captured by the naturalist.

Almost it seemed to Toth, as the water was mixed with the deadly crystalline compound, that he could detect the familiar scent. Like crushed peach leaves it was, and the odor by compelling association sent his thoughts winging off to the night jaunts he had had in the woods with the enthusiastic Van Dusee, following blazed trees, each one with its daub of molasses mixed with stale beer to attract and benumb the beautiful night-flying species.

Just when the idea of robbing the old man first took form in the turgid brain of the Magyar he never really knew. Toth was not self analytical enough for that. The fact was that the thought, with that waywardness fa-

miliar to those who create bits of art, had perfected itself subconsciously through the long months of their acquaintanceship. The seed had lodged in his brain, and suddenly, months later, aye, twelve of them, had come fruition.

So he planned to rob his friend. His friend! Pah! A doddering old Germanic misfit with a hoard of money—some of it possibly hidden in the very room—and no kith or kin; a man who spent his days in a squalid shop on the ground floor of the tenement selling second-hand clothing to the city's scum, and dreamed away his evenings and Sundays ineptly puttering in the back room over a hobby of no use to God, man or beast.

"The Hungarians are a fine people, Toth, *mein* friend," Van Dusee was wont to proclaim. "But the German! Ah! Wonderful! For months mit a microscope studying so liddle a thing as the ventral notch of a beetle he will sit!"

"*Ja,*" the Magyar would flavor his reply. "The Germans are a great people."

II

For years Toth, an unschooled laborer, a pseudo-intellectual, avid with ambition, and secretly contemptuous of his adopted country, had hunched his huge shoulders in night-schools poring over such childish matters as algebra, history, geometry, and the piffling elementary sciences taught by fools. But he had thrilled as he realized what the result could and would do for him in this broad land, where a hundred million idiots were waiting to be led.

He wanted power over his fellows, mental power; the physical already he possessed. More than once, his stalwart six feet three inches of height topped off with its ugly black-browed face, had sent a quiver of fear into those of his own ilk who had attempted to stand in his way.

But progress had been slow, damnably so, waiting in cheap eating-houses the while to satisfy a voracious animal appetite. Once, disgusted with the triviality of his waiter's work, he had quit, and, existing nearly a month on stale bread, attended his law classes looking each day more like a starved wolf.

Sheer hunger had driven him back to the sour-smelling Greek dump. And so had been accomplished that first year, ended but two months since, during which his assiduity had marked him in the school.

He had grown impatient. "They" were putting obstacles in his path; "they" questioned the sufficiency of his night-school preliminary credits, and this had resulted in his being accepted only conditionally, as a special student; "they" were making it difficult for him to gain entrance into a law office so that he might satisfy the "experience" part of the bar-examination requirements.

All this at a time when the world over the proletariat was ripe for qualified leadership. . . . The hurdles were being raised because it had been learned that he was delivering what "they" called radical talks on the street corners in the neighboring city of Steelawanna.

That was it! And such had been his conclusion, even before Musset, the sophisticated French anarchist one night sharply had challenged a soap-box assertion and thus paved the way to an intellectual camaraderie, unique in the experience of the naturalized Magyar. The two disagreed entirely on the polemics, naturally, and Musset, a doctrinaire, nimble-witted, familiar with four-fifths of the capitals of Europe and the philosophies of all of them, compelled the younger man to render a certain amount of homage.

In his precise English he had sneered:

"You waste time in your study of the common law. *Nom de Dieu!* Why perfect yourself in an institution that is the precise symbol of all that is destined to be overthrown!"

"To 'bore' out, Comrade Musset," answered Derse Toth, in the patter of the cult. "To meet the yokels on their own ground; to talk to the hundred million in their own terms."

The eyes of the anarchist snapped fire. He paced the room, his lean face spiritualized by ill-health and he talked, swiftly, flashing from language to language, including the Magyar's own tongue, decrying, scolding, beseeching, with a facility and range of vocabulary that was astounding. At first the younger man fought back; but before the continued verbal attacks, he began to weaken —not in belief in his tenets—but in the manner of best subserving them.

Musset, one evening, had placed his slender hands on the shoulders of the young man and considered him.

"Ah, Monsieur Toth!" he said, emotionally. "Come with me to Europe, if only for a year or two or three. Hear Sudermann in Vienna! Sit under the marvelous Leitschonovitch in Moscow! *Then* return to your America."

Surprised by the moisture in the Frenchman's eyes, Toth's own more stolid spirit had been etherealized for the instant.

"But the money," resumed the practical Toth. "What you advise will cost $1,000. And where can I—"

He stopped. Even as he spoke there occurred the flowering of his mind. By nods and grimaces the anarch in the past had evinced his admiration for Toth's studious cultivation of the entomologist whom they had occasionally discussed.

"Books!" Toth boasted. "I read and read until I know more of his hobby than he himself knows."

Musset smiled.

"You are to be congratulated," he remarked. "The German is a sentimentalist. He loves you sweetly. He may have made you his heir, who knows?... and when he dies!— Musset went off into fireworks. But he came to almost immediately. "Why wait for that event?" he demanded.

The eyes of the two men probed each other.

"You, too, think—" began Toth.

"*I know!*" interrupted Musset savagely. "A flutterer! As purposeless, as evanescent in the scheme of things as one of his own damned butterflies."

III

At the sound of running water, Toth's thoughts clicked back into their groove. Van Dusee had finished his task and was now washing his hands at the tap. It seemed like the end of the vigil and under cover of the noise Toth shifted his tortured body to a new position. But the old man did not go. Having dried his hands on a towel he sat down quietly at one end of the table and taking some papers from his pocket commenced their perusal.

Toth's breath came fast. He knew Van Dusee had been away that day and somehow, without specific reason, felt there was a relation between his absence and his money. Suddenly, as he stared he witnessed a startling thing. The old man, seemingly from nowhere, had produced a large quantity of currency and spread it out before him. The money looked limp and dog-eared and ancient, but most of it was yellow.

As Van Dusee began to thumb it over, slowly counting, pressing, folding, rearranging it, Toth's brain reeled with realization of the illimitable possibilities of study and travel represented by these bits of dirty paper. In his eager interest in the spectacle he moved one foot; it scuffed the floor ever so slightly.

The old man heard; his preoccupation was destroyed; he looked over at the stand, and Toth found himself peering straight into the simple countenance of his friend. Not daring to breathe, the Magyar set his jaws. If he was observed, it meant the end! He would leap out and kill forthwith.

With the muscles of his big legs tensed Toth prepared to spring. But the next instant the old man seemed satisfied, for his eyes returned to the table. Presently the bills were made up into a few neat bundles which the old man thrust inside his clothing. Then he turned off the light and left the room.

Toth allowed several minutes to pass before he went to the open window that gave on the alley. It was through this window that he had entered *via* the fire escape from his room two stories above.

The night was a lovely one in June; the time he estimated to be about ten o'clock, and in the stillness he could hear the voice of the old German in converse with someone in the shop. He let his body through and dropped softly to the alleyway.

A few quick steps took him to the rendezvous at the end of the alley where a lurking figure slid from the shadows and joined him. There was a whispered conference, a series of Latin ejaculations; the voice of the slim anarchist became a hiss.

"He must be erased, expunged . . . why did you not kill him?"

Toth laid a detaining hand on the other.

"My friend and comrade," he said, with surprising patience, "here is where a knowledge of the working of the common law becomes valuable."

Musset shrugged his shoulders; for all his learning he was playing the role of a spoiled child—and knew it!

"Listen to me," went on Toth calmly. "It becomes necessary to kill him and it shall be done—"

"For the Cause," snarled the anarch.

"For the Cause," agreed Toth. "But all in good time, Comrade. It must be accomplished with care, and already I have a plan."

Musset exclaimed with a delight that was almost childish as Toth unfolded his scheme. This Magyar was sound!

The two left the alley and strolled into a by-street. Where the light was poorest they stationed themselves and presently were rewarded by the sight of a man hurrying toward them. The lunch box proclaimed him to be a workingman, very likely returning home late from some machine shop. Toth confronted him. The workman, catching a glimpse of Musset's figure in the background, gave way; he half turned as if to flee. But he was too late.

Toth's arm leaped out and caught him around the neck, in a sort of hug. The workman was medium-sized but stocky in build; and he now fought with quiet, organized ferocity; his open hands clawed the face of the Magyar, leaving litle trails of blood; his knee, brought up expertly into the stomach, must have hurt.

But the gigantic Toth merely smiled —and tightened his terrible hold—the frailty of the squirming thing . . . How pitiful its strength! . . .

The victim moaned and struggled with renewed fury. Toth suddenly brought his right arm before the face and locked one hand over the other wrist in such a way as to give him a leverage across the neck. To do this he took a terrific pummeling. But the next instant there came a scream of anguish. It was promptly stifled by a cupped hand; and then something snapped.

The neck of the workman had been broken; his body would have slipped to the ground. Toth, breathing deeply, caught and held it and gazed into the face of the man he had murdered.

"So quiet he sleeps, eh, Comrade!" he murmured.

The anarch touched him on the shoulder.

"Make haste," he chattered. "Someone approaches."

Unobserved, they dragged the dead man along the street and into the alley, and in a trice Toth thrust the body head first up to the sill of the window of Van Dusee's studio where it lay half in and half out Bidding Musset wait for him farther along the alley, Toth lifted himself up cautiously to the window. Then, catching the body, he reversed it so that the head hung downward, and released it. The dead man plunged the eight foot drop to the cobblestones.

After a moment's study of the crumpled figure beneath the window—the man the police would assume to have murdered Van Dusee—the big Magyar moved over by the door leading to the front. It was after the hour when the shop was usually closed, but tonight evidently the old German had delayed; he was still talking to someone.

Toth filled his lungs with air, and stretching his arms high above him, flexed the muscles. Many times he opened and closed the steel-like fingers with death itself in their fiber, anticipating the moment when they should be locked in the withered throat of the old entomologist . . . then Vienna . . . Moscow and Leitschonovitch . . . the journey to start the very night with Musset or the one o'clock train for New York.

Stealthily he began to move about the room, swaying from side to side, with a rolling gait, his huge body in a half-crouch, his arms out before him, his face twisted, his eyes squinted to pinpoints the better to see in the dark.

"God!" he thought. "I am strong. I could kill any living thing tonight."

IV

But Van Dusee did not come. The visitor out there remained and the two talked *and* talked *and* talked. The Magyar found a chair and sat down. There was time—plenty of it. Another half hour of life, what mattered it? And Musset would wait. Ah, yes! That delightful fellow would wait. So droll an individual, this Musset! How he had shivered at the killing of the workman! Toth smiled with contempt for his confederate's lack of stamina. With all his mental equipment, what a snivelling specimen the night had shown the anarchist to be!

Experiencing thirst, the Magyar felt about him for a glass. His fingers encountered several and easily he recognized them as the ones Van Dusee had charged with the potassium cyanide paste earlier in the evening. The paper top came off one of the glasses and Toth this time actually did catch the scent of crushed peach leaves.

He stood up and reaching farther along the shelf, clutched an isolated glass. His fingers explored the inside. It was empty, and holding it beneath the tap he let it slowly fill with water. Then he drank it off, almost at a gulp. The water tasted peculiar, and the thought flashed across his mind that the glass, having possibly been used as a temporary receptacle for the compound, might have retained some traces of it in the inner circumference of the bottom. He filled the glass again and drank. This time the water seemed sweet.

Expanding his immense lungs, he stood up. High above him he extended his arms, suffused with the primal vigor of his being.

"Moscow and Leitschonovitch!" he gloried.

Again he opened and closed his vice-like fingers.

"Here, in the tips of the little five brothers!" he exclaimed.

A slight pain shot through his stomach.

"The poison?"

The Magyar laughed, almost aloud. He brought his two clenched fists in a thump against his barrel chest.

"By God," he muttered. *"I am strong."*

But another spasm, sharper than the first, caught him. He suddenly gripped both hands to the stomach; then the pain increased swiftly and he reached for the glass to procure some more water.

The agony became acute. He mouthed curses and writhed, and stumbling, his head collided with the edge of the wash-stand.

Then his lungs seemed constricted; and on hands and knees he dragged his big body toward the window. He must have air. By a superhuman effort he raised himself until his shoulders lay on the sill.

It was the last effort of a fine animal. There came a light froth to the lips. The Magyar died miserably, with his white face frowning down upon the workman he had murdered half an hour before.

In a few minutes a figure skulked along the alley. It was Musset, his sight preternaturally sharpened by the exciting events of an evening big with promise of continental travel.

In the window he spied the face of the Magyar.

"Toth," the anarch called in a nervous whisper. "Monsieur Toth!"

But Derse Toth did not answer.

All Dolled Up

By Beulah Poynter

"I'LL say *that* has all the ear marks of a dirty dig!" exclaimed Cleo, in reply to her friend Myrtle's question, asking if she had been down to Fourteenth Street to invest in a new spring outfit.

"Fourteenth Street, my eye! You're one a them birds Shakespeare speaks of, who has eyes and never uses 'em. When I buy clothes I go in for class or nuthin'. Get me? Class or nuthin'!"

With a wide, sweeping gesture she removed a jeweled pin from the hat under discussion, and carefully laid the headgear on the shelf of the locker behind her. A little silk-lined packet followed. She held it up for Myrtle to see the label.

"Class or nuthin'!" she repeated.

"My eye!" ejaculated Myrtle. "I'll say *you do!* Fifty-seventh Street tag n'everything. What's the idea, dearie, have you shook the straight and narrow and taken the rosy path to the tune of a slab-sided millionaire?"

"I have *not.*" Cleo dropped into a chair before the long shelf that acted as a dressing table for the extra people in the motion picture studio where she worked. "When I catch up with a slab-sided millionaire, as you call him, it won't be no rosy path I'll travel, but a carpeted aisle to the tune of wedding bells and Mr. Lohengrin's best-known march."

"Well, don't tell *me*, dearie, that no five dollar a day motion pitcher Jane like yuh and me can afford tuh buy clothes from Lucile on her *salary*. My ears may not be mates, but my eyes see *straight* in spite of your quotin' Shakespeare to the contrary!"

Cleo dug a carefully manicured paw into a jar of cold cream and smeared a portion of it over her retroussé nose. "I didn't buy the glad rags, Amelia," she said in a mock heroic voice. "They was give tuh me for an act of charity I done."

"Charity!"

"Yeh. That act by another name would sound as sweet! *Charity!* In other words, bein' hep to a situation before the climax arrived, and straightenin' it out, lad-da-twa-see?"

"No, I don't see—I wisht for once yuh'd use correct grammar. It sort a gets my nanny when you talk slang all the time—what's up your sleeve, anyway?"

Cleo glanced over her shoulder to see if anyone was listening, then hitched her chair closer to Myrtle's.

"D'ye remember me ever speakin' of that little dame from up Utica way?"

"No."

"Sure yuh do. You met her oncet at my rooming house. Don't yuh recollect? She had the front hall bedroom on the top floor next to mine? Yuh met her comin' down the stairs one time when yuh was comin' up tuh see me. I know yuh did, cause yuh asked me who the baby with the red hair was and yuh said yuh thought she'd been cryin'."

"Oh, her. How'd I know she was from Utica?"

"I'm tellin' yuh, dearie! I'm tellin' yuh! If yuh got a good look at her you'd know she was as pretty as any

screen favorite yuh ever seen, with a kind of Theda Bara look in her eyes, and a Mary Pickford sweetness around her mouth, and a figure like Gloria Swanson's, and even if she did half to live in a hall bedroom and cook over a gas jet, there was something of class and old family about her. Though I'll say she was kind of old maidish the way she dressed her hair. She never used any rouge—not even a lip-stick. My Gawd, Myrt, I should think a woman 'ud feel naked goin' on the street without any make-up on, wouldn't yuh?"

"Who is she, anyway? Don't tell me she give yuh the glad rags."

"Be peaceful, Nemesis—yuh're time will come! Her name is Marion Westlake, and she used tuh live in a farm near Utica. She clerked in the basement a Gimbel's store—sellin' most anything, I guess, from ribbons to rubber goods—and she's an orphan—absotively alone in the woild, and no mother tuh guide her, as the Bible says. So be it tuh her credit now and forever after, that she walked as discreet as she did, and looked neither upon wine, women or song.

"I noticed her the first day she came tuh room at Ma Shenesay's. She was in black with a band of crepe around her arm, and she looked kinda peeked and miserable. Her eyes were like burnt holes in a blanket, they were so big and dark in her little pointed white face.

"Yuh had tuh look at her a long time before yuh realized for certain just how pretty she was, because her lips was almost as white as her face—and there bein' no style to her dress—black bein' a color that oughta be stylish or discarded.

"Then most every night when I'd come home from the studio, I'd meet her on the stairs and we got tuh sayin', 'Hello!'—me feelin' sorry for the lonesome expression on her face—and maybe her thinkin' I was in the same boat.

"Then one Sunday I ups and knocks at her door and says, 'Are yuh home, dearie, and if yuh are, would yuh mind company?'

"Say, Myrt, yuh oughta seen the glad look that come into that kid's eyes when she opens the door for me and invites me in. The front hall room don't boast a radiator, and it was cold. Marion was sittin' with a shawl wrapped around her and she was readin' a book a poetry by a guy called Omar Kayham.

"When I sees that I yipped like the ninny I am. 'My Gawd! an' I allus thought he was a cigarette!' She just smiled kind of long-and lingery like and says, 'I'll read you a little if yuh like, it's beautiful.' It was—and so was her voice. I could tell by the way she pronounced her words she was educated.

"She told me all about herself before the afternoon was over—how her father had died when she was a baby, her mother just a little while after, and then her only brother had been killed in the war two years before. She'd come to New York to earn a living, and she was doing it the only way she knew how.

" 'With them eyes and that hair!' I gasps. 'Yuh wasn't never cut out for a saleslady. Why don't yuh go on the stage?'

" 'I couldn't act,' says she, 'and I'd be too timid, anyway.'

"Well, I sizes up that room with the dingy wall paper, the faded red carpet, cheap brass bed and the wash bowl and pitcher, and says I, sniffy like—'D'ye intend tuh live all your natural life in this room?'

" 'Oh, no, I'll move when I can afford it.'

" 'Tuh another hall bedroom. Yuh don't ever expect tuh save enough clerkin' at Gimbels tuh have your own apartment, d'ye? My Lordie! Kid, if I

had your hair and figure I wouldn't be doin' extras—I'd be a starrin'! It's lack of pulchritude that keeps me down!'

"She just laughs at that, and says, 'I'm goin' tuh marry—that's how I'll move.'

"Well, that made me perk up and sit pretty. 'Marry!' I gasps. 'Have yuh got his pitcher with yuh?'

"She shakes her head, 'No, I haven't.'

" 'Does he live here? What's his name? What does he do?' I goes on all excited.

"She just sinks back on the bed and keeps laughin' fit tuh kill. 'I don't know him,' she cries. 'I ain't ever seen him—but I'm waitin' for him tuh come along.'

" 'Yuh poor fish!' I gasps, 'and yuh think Mr. Romeo is goin' tuh come huntin' for his balcony in a hall bedroom, or the basement of a department store? It ain't done, dearie, in these days of man-huntin' females!'

"She stopped laughin' at that. 'Don't working girls in New York get married?' she asks kind of wistful like.

" 'Sure they do, but they don't sit back and wait for Lochinvar to come and carry 'em off on a white steed. They go out and get the said steed themselves, and nab Lochinvar by the hair of his beard, figuratively speakin', and trot him off to a minister.'

" 'Ain't yuh funny. Yuh surely don't mean that girls have tuh propose to get married these days?'

" 'Not exactly propose—but ease 'em along a little. There's a lotta competition, old dear, and the sweet young male is skittish. Modest violets blushin' unseen will stay unseen unless they kick a haughty hoof and throw off the ground around 'em, then, maybe, Mr. Sunflower will condescend to cast his optics earthways, and bow his haughty head in their direction. No, dearie, yuh may be as sweet as the mornin' dew, and as domestic as Darby or Joan, whichever one was that domestic, but it won't get yuh anything if the male of the species don't know about it!'

"She looked real pitiful then, and actually, Myrt, there was tears in her eyes.

" 'I never thought of it in that way,' she says, 'somehow it's allus seemed to me that the grandest career cut out for a woman was tuh be a wife and a mother, and because there wasn't anything else appealed to me, that it was just natural the right man should come along some day.'

" 'Yuh're speakin' sense,' I replies, 'but there's a lot a dames that takes the right Mr. *Wrong* cause the right Mr. *Right* was just around the corner and they didn't have compunction enough to give him their callin' card and invite him to tea.'

" 'Yuh don't mean I should flirt, do yuh?' she gasps, all wide-eyed at that.

"I shrugs my shoulders. 'Why not? How yuh ever goin' tuh get acquainted in a city like this if yuh don't?'

" 'Oh, I couldn't ever do that. It's—so—so immodest—I simply couldn't.'

" 'How many men have you met since you landed in this burg?' says I, cold as ice.

"She shook her head again. 'Not one, really. I work with girls. The floor walker says good morning, and once the postman spoke tuh me. That's all.'

" 'And a fat chance yuh have a knowin' more, haven't yuh, unless I introduce yuh to some a the swells hangin' around the studio—and *M* spells Money tuh them—not Marriage. They'll ask yuh to dinner and squeeze your hand, and if yuh get up-stage, they'll get sore as a turkey gobbler about tuh be beheaded for Thanksgiving, but as for buyin' a wedding ring—*nothin' doin'!*"

"She looked sick at that. Honest, Myrt, I didn't know there was a girl in the world with the marriage fever as bad as she had it. I reckon all of us

deep down in our hearts are strong for the love and family thing, but we don't show our hands.

"But here was a Jane, modest and sweet as they make 'em, confessin' to an ambition we was taught to sneer at, and with no more chance a gratifyin' it than I have of landin' in Ziegfeld's chorus in my last year's bird's nest.

" 'Tuhmorrow night,' says she, 'I'm gonna go tuh dinner with one a the girls in the store—her brother and another chap.'

"I snickered. 'Childs,' says I; 'take it from me, dearie, if you're lookin' for happiness, steer clear a them kind a guys. They're strong on weddin's, oh, yes, but you'll be supportin' the male portion a the family in no time—and as for your own apartment and babies—forget it—!'

"I don't know whether my philosophyin' stuck in or not. Anyway, I fetched my hot dogs and canned kraut that'd I figured on havin' for dinner over to her place. Then I went around to a delicatessen, it bein' open by that time, and got some cheese and other things and we cooked a meal fit for the gods over her gas jet. Then she suggested going to church.

" 'Church!' says I, 'dearie, don't tell me yuh're religious?'

" 'Not as much as I oughta be. I'm ashamed tuh confess it, but I ain't gone to a church since I've been here. I'm too sleepy Sunday mornings, and I don't like to go alone at night.'

" 'Well, yuh're not goin' this P. M.,' says I, 'I'm gonna spend this evenin' puttin' a marcel wave in that mop a hair of yours, and tryin' different color effects on your face. If you're out for a killin', kid, yuh gotta have the proper scenery.'

"I ain't sayin' she understood all I said bein's my line a talk and hers wasn't exactly similar, but she knew curlin' irons when she seen 'em—and rouge. At first she was ready to say *no*—*not*—*never*—but I knocked all the negatives out a her in a jiffy, and before she went tuh bed she wouldn't hurt a king's eyes, nor a movie director's, tuh look at her.

"I missed her for about a week. Then one night when it was pouring pitch forks and black cats, and the wind was blowing a regular hurricane across the Hudson, I bumped into her in front of the house just as she was tryin' to hold her umbrella over her head and stick a key in the hole at the same time.

" 'How's every little thing with yuh?' I asks, unlocking the door. 'Engaged, yet?'

"She knocked the water off her hat, and says, 'No, not yet!'

" 'How'd the dinner party come out?' I asks.

" 'Awful. The men were terrible.'

"I follows her up the stairs, and she tells me all about it while she's unfastenin' her shoes.

" 'What yuh want,' says I, 'is class—a lot of it.'

" 'I don't care anything about money—but I do want refinement and education—character.'

" 'That's what I'm tellin' yuh. Well, you're lookin' for a man's sized order, and tuh get it yuh got tuh put yourself out a little. The kind of a husband you're out huntin' for, ain't growin' on gooseberry bushes in the aisles of a department store, nor pickin' strawberries off the wall paper of a hall bedroom, but—they might pick peaches off a Fifth Avenue.'

" 'I don't get yuh,' says she, kind a puzzled like.

" 'Well,' says I, 'yuh got a date with me, dearie, tuh visit Mrs. Astor's alleyway at seven o'clock tuhmorrow night, pervidin' the Gods are willin' and Waddel don't keep us overtime.'

" 'Mrs. Astor's alleyway!' she gasps, 'what a funny place to go.'

"I didn't wise her up a bit, but left her a-visionin' us a-creepin' down a back alley, stumblin' over tin cans, bottles and a black cat or two—like in the alleys they have up where she came from.

"The next night I puts another wave or two in her hair, pursuades her to rouge up a little, and we beats it downtown.

Them big eyes of hers sure blinked when she saw what I meant, and she colored up a little when she says, 'I guess I'm awful stupid. They don't have real alleys in New York, do they?'

"'Now, sit tight,' says I, 'and keep your eyes glued on the way some a them mashers ogle the girls that ain't here for no other reason than to get acquainted. That's what I brought yuh here for—to give yuh a lesson in man huntin'.'

"'Man hunting!' she yips. 'Oh, how terrible.' And at that she gives my arm a pinch in her excitement that makes me lose my equilibrium and bump smack dab into the beautifulest specimen of he-man I've seen for a long time—not curly haired nor long lashed—but strong and straight and slim and dressed like he was a walkin' advertisement for somebody's clothing house. He kind of eyed us in a nonchalant way, and sauntered on after begging my pardon for *me* bumpin' into him.

"'Get that?' I asks, after he'd past out of our line of vision. 'That's the way it's done. If you'd a spoke to him he'd a answered back—and presto—you'd a been acquainted.'

"'Why didn't *you* speak tuh him?' asks she, real sniffy like.

"Well, she dragged home by the hair a the head, as it were—but two nights later she come knockin' at my door, and I nearly dropped dead when I saw her.

"That kid was dolled up in rags Geraldine Farrar would a been pleased tuh wear, and from the top of her marceled dome to the tip a her satin shoes she looked swank—swank bein' English for swagger, if you don't know what I mean. I heard it in a Broadway show and have been dyin' to use it ever since.

"'Well, look who's here,' I gasps, 'what's the grand layout for?'

"'I'm goin' tuh visit Mrs. Astor,' says she, with a coy smile. 'I'm goin' to take your advice. I'm twenty-five years old, no man has ever asked me to marry him except a grocer, a shoe clerk—and my father's—er—man of all work. I want a husband and a home, but I don't want the kind of a husband I can get in the class of society where I'm placed, so—as long as I can't get acquainted with the right kind a man in a legitimate way, I'm goin' to try another way. Wish me luck, Cleo, I've turned man hunter, too!'

"Could you beat it? And she was as deadly serious as Cleopatra's viper. I could just picture her sitting in Peacock Alley with a frozen face and a glassy stare—not daring to raise her eyes to a single man who passed—quakin' in her boots for fear one of them would speak to her, but hopin' in her soul someone would batter down her fort of modesty and carry her off, figuratively speakin'.

"It was a noble purpose she had in mind—to win her rightful place in the world. But, oh boy, that kid was scared, and I wasn't far wrong in my visions of what she did, cause she told me all about it afterward.

"Will you believe me that little modest violet went night after night on her man huntin' orgy without ever bein' spoken tuh nor sayin' a woid to anyone? She'd come in to see me when she got home, and with tears in her eyes she'd tell me all that had happened. How nearly every night the good lookin' he-man that I'd bumped into would pass her and give her the once over, and that her heart would jump up into her mouth for fear he'd speak tuh her, and yet

she wished with every ounce of her that he would.

"And was I wise to the situation? You just better bet I was. Without ever havin' said a word to him she was simply mad about him, and ready tuh cast her lot with his, come what may.

"'What's his name, dearie?' I asks. 'Have yuh found out?'

"'Oh, no, how could I? I don't know anyone he does.'

"'And you don't know his occupation, nor nothin'?'

"'No!'

"'My Gawd, Marion!' says I, 'where's your sense a values? You're plumb batty about a good looker, who may be a gambler or a shoe clerk without a red cent tuh his name.'

"'I don't care a thing about money,' says she, all stubborn. 'It's bein' a gentleman that counts with me, and principles.'

"'Go to it, old dear!' says I, 'and if yuh need any help call on your Aunt Cleo, but don't say I never warned yuh!'

"My Great Stars of Israel, Myrt, I never knowed how prophetic that was! For the very next night I was curled up on my downy couch—a $9.98 mattress—when the landlady comes tripping blithely up the stairs, as blithely as two hundred pounds of good beef will admit, and says tuh me that I'm wanted on the telephone important, urgent, right away quick.

"I could see by the look in her nob's eye that she was burstin' all ways to Sunday to know who was callin' me on the telephone at that hour a the night, and she followed me down the stairs taggin' at my heels like Ma's pet poodle, and then she leaves the parlor door open to hear what I said.

"And say, Myrt, when I got the message over the 'phone, I was so plumb upset by it I just yipped out and paid no attention to whether Ma Shenesay heard me or not. Of course it was Marion callin' me, and what d'ye think. *She'd been arrested!* Arrested there in the hotel for speakin' to a man, and she wanted I should come down right away and prove she was a respectable workin' girl.

"'Well,' thinks I tuh myself, 'a lot I can do towards provin' who and what you are, but I'm your friend at the crucial moment if yuh need me.' So I hops into my street clothes and wafts my shape down to the hotel, where they was detainin' her in an ante-room off a the lobby.

"When I drifts in I sure was handed the surprise of my life, for there stands Mr. Good-looker and the hotel manager, and poor little Marion with her glad rags wilted, her nose red and tear-stained and the livin' image of all that is miserable and unhappy. When she sees me she grabs me in a Jess Willard and sobs.

"'He's a detective! Cleo! A detective, and he spoke tuh me, and when I answered back, he arrested me!'

"'Great Stars of Israel!' I ejaculated.

"Then sobbin' fit to kill, with Mr. Good-looker standin' kind of grim beside her, but with a twinkle in his eye I didn't like, the poor kid pours out the whole story a how he'd passed her again and again and looked at her, and she'd looked back and maybe smiled. Then he'd said, 'How's every little thing with yuh tonight?' or words tuh that effect, and she'd got up enough courage to answer him—when bingo! The fat was in the fire!

"He'd yanked her right off to the hotel manager as a suspicious character, and the manager told her they'd had an eye on her for a week. He said they'd been pretty certain there was something wrong with a woman who sat around in a hotel alley all evening without an escort, and never said nothing to no one.

"Well, of course, the poor kid had tried to tell him that she only come to get acquainted, but naturally that made matters worse, for it sounded fishy, or raw, whichever way they wanted tuh take it. But at last they let her send for me.

"Say, I was hot around the gills and feeling all kinds of a blithering fool. You see, it'd been me that had sicked her on when I'd oughta had sense enough tuh know that every hotel has detectives with weather eyes out for unsuspectin' females, and then the whole explanation of the matter sounded silly and schoolgirlish. But I buckled my sword to my girdle, figuratively speakin', and waded in up to my neck, ready to sink or swim with her.

" 'My Gawd, gents!' says I, 'can't yuh see she's a lady and pure as the driven snow? Ain't she told yuh how she's a stranger in this town, with never a chance a meetin' a real man, the kind of a man that appreciates home and fireside, and old-fashioned girls with mother-love oozin' from every pore? That kid wasn't ever cut out to be a shop girl! She's a home maker! Not a home wrecker! And we—she and me—seen how she was driftin' on to the pathway of an old maid with never a chance at real matrimony, and so we had tuh make that chance, unconventional and against Hoyle, as it was! I'm tuh blame for her doin' this! It was my idea from beginning tuh end, so if there's anyone that has tuh pay the penalty, it's me, not her. Let her go and arrest me!'

"At that, Mr. Detective claps his hands, and booms out in a big, good-natured voice that never belonged to a flat-foot gum shoe.

" 'I was right, Tony! The girl is fine, and we owe her our abject apologies!'

"Marion gets red and funny-lookin' at that. 'I—yuh mean I'm not under arrest?' she whispers.

"Then the hotel manager begins to apologize all over the place saying at first he was a little suspicious of her, seein' her constantly about the place, and then when his guest, Mr. Leffingwell—pointing to the detective—became so interested, they decided to test her, and incidentally give Mr. Leffingwell a chance to get acquainted with the fair unknown without actually flirtin' with her.

" 'Yuh mean yuh ain't a detective?'

" 'No.'

" 'Well, wouldn't that shake the foundation out of your skeleton?' says I.

"Believe me, I was sore all through to think a the scare they'd thrown into the kid, to say nothin' a gettin' me out a bed and everything. But all of a sudden I see Marion and Leffingwell eatin' each other up with their eyes, and I see she don't bear any malice or anything, and I realized that all's fair in love and war, and if that's the way he went about it to meet her, far be it from me to spoil her romance with my indignation.

"Well, of course, they got married, and he was everything she'd ever dreamed of, or wanted in a man, with money tuh boot.

"As I'd been Cupid in disguise, I was there with bells on tuh kiss the bride and throw rice all over her. Hence the Fifty-seventh Street label and the beauteous rags, which Marion gimme as a thank offering.

"But wait—that ain't the half of it, dearie—as you've heard remarked at the Follies! What do yuh think of that shy little fox! Shop girl, my eye. She was an heiress with half a Utica chasin' her for her money, and she'd only come tuh New York to win love for herself alone.

"Yuh never can tell about these shy ones!"

Critique

By June Gibson

IT was very late and I was exceedingly squiffy.

A taxi saw me to the door where my man Pitts was waiting to assist me.

As I paused before the foyer mirror to adjust my collar, a terrible sight met my eyes.

"My God!" I groaned. "Do I look as bad as that?"

After days of delirium I learned that an hour previous to my arrival home that night Pitts had substituted for the foyer mirror a Futurist portrait of my wife.

Tonight

By Helen Hersh

GRAY shadows from the ancient moon,
Lie lingeringly
On the white pavements,
Like the fingers of an old lover
On an alabaster arm.

Night, with its ageless burden of hidden stars,
Stands scornfully
Above the new city.

And below, in a noisy room,
A drunken poet
Dreams of Babylon.

The Undoing of Le Croix

By Eric A. Darling

THAT year a little settlement had sprung up about the halfway house at Devereaux Point. Cabins grew mushroom-like, a store and saloon appeared, and as there was a constant stream of goers and comers the days were full.

Le Croix was an anomaly, a mystery, a man to set one guessing with the mere sight of his face. He put up a cabin and a small saloon, wherein he opened a gambling house.

He was a huge man, a veritable giant, with black hair and swarthy skin. His eyes were a challenge to everyone who looked into them, hot, fiery, daring eyes that seemed to cover a lot of things.

In a land where the elemental rules, they pay little heed to such things; but even here Le Croix was marked.

And not the least of what made him conspicuous was the woman whom he installed in the cabin—a small, sweet, fairy-like girl of a woman, whose little head seemed ever bending under the weight of white-gold hair that burdened it.

Her face bloomed like a flower, but when she raised her great blue eyes one had a distinct shock and looked instinctively at her husband—for they were an open tragedy.

Fear rode them like a witch, and anguish unspeakable.

She went hurriedly about her household tasks, a neat, faithful worker who made the best of what she had, and she looked out from her shining small windows very much like a prisoner.

Lola Lambert, swinging by that way with the carrying stride of perfect health and perfect joy of life, caught sight of the flower face with its haunting eyes, and abruptly stopped.

She laid a hand on White Ears' head and smiled at the other woman.

"Gray Lad," she said softly to her wolf-dog, "here's a soul in trouble." And with the freedom of the open lands she went and leaned in the doorway.

"Do you want a friend?" she asked, without preface.

The girl looked at her in silence for a moment. Then she dropped the cloth with which she was drying her few dishes, and came swiftly to the door. She put her little hands on big Lola's shoulders, and searched her handsome face, where courage and tenderness and love of humanity shone forth belligerently—if such gentle attributes could be said to do so—and a catching sigh came from her lips.

"Oh!" she said half tearfully, "oh, a friend! More than anything else in all the world, mam'selle! And I have none."

"You are French?" asked Lola, touching her fair hair wonderingly.

The girl nodded.

"And yet you are so fair! And you need a friend. Would you like me for that?"

Dull, indeed, would have been that one who could look into Lola Lambert's face and not sense the strong, sweet heart behind it, the reliant and capable nature.

This little friendless, unhappy woman saw deep into those rich recesses and her lips quivered piteously.

"I—I—have not the words, ma'm'selle," she said wistfully, "but you, who could make this offer, will know what it means to me. I want you—oh, how much!"

"All right," said Lola frankly, "you've got me."

And she reached out her strong arms and hugged the stranger. She was not given to caresses, but with her kindly tact she saw that here they would be better than fine gold.

"Elsie," she said to her friend, Mrs. Wright, that night as she brushed her hair in her friend's room, "there's something the matter there. Something deep and awful, and I'm going to dig it out."

"You take my advice and leave that affair alone," said Elsie Wright grimly. "Word has already come down about Le Croix. He's from far up Yakinna way, and he's a bad man."

"He may be all that," said Lola judiciously, "but all bad men meet their Waterloo sooner or later. He can't bluff 'all the people all the time.'"

II

Two days later Lola went deliberately to the new cabin for a regular womanly visit. She took a bit of sewing to bring her nearer to the blonde-haired girl, and White Ears walked sedately at her side.

They found a tremulous, glowing welcome. The girl was eager for a woman's speech, though she labored under a fear that kept her great eyes traveling from window to door and back again to Lola's face.

Of the Gray Lad she was half afraid —he was so huge, bulking grimly in the narrow space of the neat room.

She put a timid, rose-leaf hand on his rough head, and looked into his steady, pale eyes.

"What a great, wild creature!"

But Lola laughed and shook her head.

"Wild?" she said. "He is the tenderest thing I know. I know of no other heart in all this world so melting with love. Why, the Gray Lad would give his life for one he loved, and, you know, 'greater love hath no man than this.'"

"True," said the girl quickly, "and few men have so great."

And while they sewed a bit and drank a cup of excellent tea which the girl brewed deftly, Lola told her, in rambling anecdote and eulogy, the whole long story of White Ears, from the first night when he had sniffed a wild wolf in the California mountains, at her cabin door, to a dark day at Kunman's Bend, when he had leaped at the throat of Le Brun, the half-breed.

"Mother of mercy!" breathed the little woman. "He is no brute, but a human lover! Has he not, think you, a human soul gone astray in his brute's body?"

"No," said Lola. "He is but the highest type of animal; but they, after all, are only our little brothers."

"And love—ah, ma'm'selle! It is love that makes humans of brutes and brutes of humans!"

And she looked swiftly out the window, but not before Lola had seen the heavy tears that filmed her eyes.

"Ah," she thought, "here is her tragedy!"

At that moment there came a step at the door, and Le Croix entered.

At sight of the two strangers in his house he stopped abruptly, and a scowl drew deep between his eyes.

He looked at them with unconcealed displeasure, flagrant in his rudeness. That needlessly hostile glare set the blood racing in Lola's veins with hot resentment.

"How do you do?" she said insolently. "Monsieur Le Croix, I believe? Your wife has already found two friends in her new home, you see." And she touched White Ears with an airy gesture.

But whatever she declared for him, the Gray Lad declared himself most pointedly. Here was no friend for him, this evil man with the daring eyes. The bristles rose on his spine, and his white ruff fluffed with challenge.

Le Croix scowled at them a moment, then, without a word, turned on his heel and went out, slamming the door behind him.

Lola looked fixedly at the girl.

She was pale as a sheet, and one small hand fumbled at her throat, while the fear rode up in her face like a cloud.

"I have brought you trouble," said Lola simply, at which understanding words the other dropped her face in her hands and fell to weeping wildly.

Lola leaned forward and put a reassuring hand upon her heaving shoulder.

"You are burdened with some tragedy," she said gently. "I saw it that first day when our eyes met through the window. That was why I came to you. There is nothing so bad that it cannot be helped. I am your friend, and I am very strong. Also, I have an inordinate faith in myself. If you will open your heart to me I may be able to help you. Your husband," she finished frankly, "is a beast and a bully, but I am not afraid of him."

The girl gasped, and raised her fearful eyes.

"Oh, ma'm'selle! You do not know; you must not speak so! He might hear!"

"Bah!" said Lola. "Let him. I hope he does. His eyes displease me. Also the Gray Lad. Didn't you see?"

But the little woman was in a very tumult of terror, and Lola rose to go.

"Sooner or later you will tell me," she said. "Think about it. Think it all over, and remember that I am strong —and fearless. And that I am longing to help you."

III

In the days that followed Lola knew that she had made an enemy whose quality she did not underestimate.

When they met, Le Croix looked at her with eyes of such deadly malice that she felt a creeping in her spine. But this only served to make her bristle in every nerve, as White Ears bristled.

The arctic winter swept down upon them in a night, and the cold pressed in upon the land like a blue crystal cup, inverted, holding it in a vacuum.

The snow came and rose to the windows, and life drew in to the fire-bright interior of the Wright House, with its swarming stream of goers and comers who traveled the snow-packed trails as if it were summer.

Several times again Lola went to the Le Croix cabin, but after each visit she found the terror so intensified in the little woman's eyes that she desisted.

"If you want me, Felice," she said gravely, "I am always ready—always waiting for the word from you—but I think I cause you more sorrow than pleasure, so I will not come again."

But this the lonely girl could not bear, as the next few weeks bore witness. She came at night, trembling and afraid, to the Wright House for an hour's talk in Lola's room. She seemed to droop more and more, as if the weight of the pain she carried was growing unbearable. Lola's heart ached for her.

And then, just before the Christmas holidays, Felice told her story.

"Oh, ma'm'selle," she said, "it is the end of a year, today, since I have seen him! A year that has been a thousand! My heart is dying within me. What shall I do, ma'm'selle? Oh, what shall I do?"

"Do?" said Lola Lambert sturdily. "Do? Tell me first—and see him later,

if it is possible of human accomplishment, whoever he may be."

"It is Louis Boileau—French Louis, they call him at Siskit Gulch. His heart is true, and mine, always mine to the end of our sorry lives, as my heart is his. He is beautiful—oh, beautiful as sunset over golden waters, a flaming lover of a man! *Mon Dieu!* What do I say. He *was* beautiful—straight and tall as a pine-tree—until that awful day—that black day when—when—"

She hushed her sobs, and glanced furtively around.

"When Le Croix broke his body like a child's toy! That was at Siskit Gulch, when Pierre Gaefline went broke at the gaming tables. He was my uncle, my own mother's brother, and he had raised me—he and Francia, his wife. It was a mighty night of play—it was talked of long in those parts—and at its end Pierre had laid down all he had in this world.

"He still owed Le Croix much—oh, so very much that when Le Croix found he could not pay there was one great scene. There were guns and knives and men's oaths, and it seemed that there would be murder done. I know, for we came to the door, Francia and I, drawn by the word of Pierre's trouble, when the affair was at its height. There were many men in the great room. I can see them still, under the lamps on the walls. And in the crowd I saw Louis. He smiled at me and I, for all my fear, smiled back.

"My lips were still warm from his kisses, for he had left me but a short time back, and, oh, ma'm'selle, we were betrothed!"

Here the sobs broke the story for a time, and Lola smoothed the bright head bowed under its memories and its grief.

"And then a strange thing happened. Just when it seemed that Le Croix would kill Pierre, cowering before him like a coward—the whole camp feared Le Croix, ma'm'selle—the gambler's eyes fell on us there in the doorway. They lighted—oh, how they lighted with the fires of hell! He stopped in his evil oaths, held still the hand raised with the shining knife, and then he laughed and lowered the knife.

"'*Voilà*, Gaefline!' he cried. 'Maybe this can be arranged, after all. I'll take little Gold Hair yonder and call it square. Eh? What do you say? Give her to me and get out yourself, and you shall have your life.

"I could hear the men breathing in the awful silence that fell. Me—I could not breathe. Pierre, white as a ghost, looked at us and wet his lips. He had no love for me, but even so I think he felt sorry for me. He waited but a minute, then he flung up his hand and said: 'Done!'

"The word rang in the walls, and I felt the cheek of the door come over and hit me upon the temple. I caught myself, and kept my senses with an effort. And then—oh, then something happened that will light my heart to its dying day! I saw a slim form cut through the crowd, and, leaping high like a panther, reach for Le Croix's throat.

"It was Louis, ma'm'selle; French Louis, and his red cheeks were white, while his black eyes were flames of fire.

"'Beast!' he cried to Le Croix, 'I'll kill you for that!'

"I covered my eyes at the fight that followed, for I knew that it could have but one ending. Louis was but a lad—a slim, graceful lad, and Le Croix was, as you see him, a great giant of a man. And, besides, he had a knife. I could hear the sounds of their feet on the floor and a word or two, and at last pitying oaths from the men, and then a fall. When I dared look he lay at Le Croix's feet—my gay Louis.

"He did not die; I thank *le bon Dieu* for that; but he was ruined. The knife had found some muscle in his slender

back that was vital, and he will never walk again, they say. He sits all day in his cabin at Siskit Gulch, eating out his heart, while I—live with Le Croix. Pierre and Francia left that night. That is all, ma'm'selle, except that I am not Le Croix's wife. He has already a wife somewhere below. And I—wish I could die this night. It is a year—a year!"

For a while there was no sound in the fire-bright room save the girl's hopeless weeping. Then Lola Lambert put a firm hand on Felice's soft shoulder.

"Come!" she said. "Look up. From this minute you've got to fight. You have followed the line of least resistance because you feared Le Croix—"

"Not for myself, ma'm'selle! Not for myself!"

It was a cry of anguish.

"I follow him like a dog because—because of Louis. If I disobey one word he threatens to go back to Siskit Gulch and—kill him where he sits alone!"

"Of all things! Well, the time has come. We'll take a fall or two out of Le Croix. Now tell me—if Louis sat in this room this minute and a priest stood there, would you marry him?"

"I would kiss the ground under that human who made it possible!"

"Has Louis money? Could you live?"

"No. But I would work a million years for him!"

"Then go home. We'll see what we can do with this Le Croix who threatens."

IV

In the following week, Lola held speech with Artuk, the Indian, and the result was the gathering together of the pick of two crack teams of dogs that had proven themselves that winter, and the overhauling of the lightest sledge.

"I guess, Gray Lad," she told White Ears, after a manner she had of conversing with him, "that we can cover some ground, eh, boy?"

She had never driven him. Something had always held her back from it, though she had longed to see the great gray dog in full sweep at a team's head. She knew that Artuk's dogs were the best in all that part of the country, and she chuckled and thought far ahead. The coming battle with Le Croix exhilarated her like wine, and she made careful plans, minute in detail.

She was very happy that winter. The wild land had laid its mystic touch upon her, and the open homage her beauty brought her everywhere was sweet. She learned to know men in the abstract and to use her power of appeal to them.

She sent a secret agent—Artuk's son—to Siskit Gulch, a broken camp, but a matter of five days away, with a frank epistle to one Louis Boileau.

The reply she received brought tears to her eyes, it was so truly a lover's heart that had dictated it, yet so hopeless a one.

"Verily, this Le Croix is a fearless man, and an arrogant!" she mused. "He sets up his wicked life within five days of that camp where all men knew him! I wonder what he did up Yakinna way."

She gave the letter from Louis to Felice, and saw its magic work.

The girl was transfigured, lighted by a white fire from within, and for the first time she seemed to lift her little body under her weight of fear.

Then Lola sent Artuk's son on another journey, and shortly after his return Father Harrick happened up to Devereaux Point.

Now, Father Harrick was the best man in a radius of a thousand miles, bar none. He was beloved as far on the hard trails as his winsome old face was known, and he carried under his rusty cassock the heart of a lover, a dare-devil, and a Galahad in one. It was wholly given to his Master's service,

but Father Harrick had his own ways of interpreting that service, and often high romance played a leading part therein.

Lola told him the pitiful story in her own bright room, and he walked up and down, with his sinewy hands locked behind him, while his blue eyes sparkled and burned with the light of battle.

" 'Tis me fer th' undoing av this sinner," he said at its close, "an' 'tis the tinder hearrt ye have, my daughter. Oh, the great good hearrt! Where is this lad, Louis?"

And presently he departed into the white ways as quietly as he had come, and none save herself and Artuk's son knew his business.

Lola, for the first time, put White Ears in harness. He looked fully the king, towering in the lead of Artuk's picked team, and she thrilled with pride in him. And the Gray Lad himself stood proudly, for he had learned this work in a hard school, and knew his powers.

With his first work-out, Lola came back with cheeks glowing and a light in her eyes.

"Pete," she said solemnly to Artuk, "this is no wolf-dog, this friend of mine. He is a monarch of his double breed!"

But that same week an important event transpired.

A man came down from the Cheehuk Rapids with a team of dogs which he delivered to Le Croix. Great, snarling malemutes they were, lean as wire and hard as nails.

They were matched to a hair, all five of them, and they were better dogs than Artuk's. They would have hopelessly outclassed Lola's team had it not been for White Ears, with his amazing height, power of shoulder, depth and breadth of chest. White Ears dwarfed all of his kind that came in contact with him. Even as it was, Lola pursed her lips and her eyes were thoughtful.

"The old devil!" she said to herself. "He has sensed something."

Twelve days she waited after Father Harrick's departure; twelve days wherein she drove her picked team daily, hard, sweeping drives, that, beginning with a few hours, had lengthened to the whole day.

White Ears ran in the lead, forever leaning into the harness as a born leader runs, his strong heart recognizing no difficulty. They would return at night like a triumphant procession, tearing in on the run, the gray bodies stretching against the snow and Lola's cheeks flaming like poppies.

"What does it all mean, my friend?" Felice begged, with her troubled eyes searching Lola's face.

"It may mean all the world to you," Lola answered. "Have you got the small, light pack ready, as I directed?"

"Yes, ma'm'selle."

"And you will take a great chance for life and love—and Louis?"

"Anything! Anything for *me*—only—only— You are quite sure that Le Croix can be kept from fulfilling his threat? That it is which wakes me, cold with fear, in the night! I am afraid he will kill him, as he said!"

"If I know men," said Lola Lambert grimly, "these rough, quick, fairplay-loving men of the North—and I think I do—we'll take a fall out of Le Croix the Bully! We'll call his bluff; we'll strip him to rags at his own game and make him a joke in the diggings; or else we'll make him kill himself preventing it!"

At dusk on the thirteenth day an Indian came into the Wright House with a scrap of paper, which he gave to Lola unobtrusively, drifting out with the night again.

It was a letter from that religious knight-errant, Father Harrick, and it was beautifully written, full of hope

and excitement and love—of love and belief in God and man:

My dear Daughter—

I have found Louis, the poor lad, chained to his chair, but sweet and true. I have found all the hearts in Siskit Gulch, and laid them bare with the story. I have sent the tale by runner to every camp within reach, asking every strong man who hears it to come here to attend the finish.

You are known all over the land, and men swear by you for your courage and your beauty. Now I have added the news that you are to snatch Felice from Le Croix, present her to Louis, and give the pair a settlement of money for life, which is the last thing needed to make your word the law. Already they are coming in from the near camps, and the saloon is a buzzing hive of excitement.

There will be here a great committee of reception, and what you ask of them you may count on getting. But be very careful of Le Croix, and start when you wish. The trails are good, all except a point below Caribou Clip, where there are a few miles bad going.

Lola read this letter and raised her eyes to the curtained window, where the blue night crackled with its cold and its stars, and they began to shine like stars themselves.

She laid down the paper and opened her closet door, her fingers already fumbling with the buttons of her housedress. Inside that door, arranged for instant use, there stood every smallest thing she would need for such a trip as she had never taken—garments for the trail, a pack of provisions that were graded down to the day and hour, simple tools, her rifle and its ammunition.

In thirty minutes she stood with her hands on Elsie Wright's shoulders, bidding her good-by.

"Oh, Lola!" the other was gasping fearfully. "This is madness! The man is a killer, a regular beast, a terror!"

"A cheap bluffer you mean. And I'm quite a bluffer myself, if it comes to that. Now, good-by!"

V

At four o'clock that night Le Croix came into his cabin, having closed the saloon, as was his custom, at that hour.

He found an empty house, dark and cold, where there was wont to be warmth and light and one who rose to brew him his cup of strong tea.

He swore softly, struck a light, and looked at the neatly made bed.

No little head had overslept on its pillow.

Then did Le Croix fling out in the crackling cold like a lunatic and run to the Wright House kennels, where Artuk's dogs were used to snarl and fidget the night through.

They, too, were empty.

His evil face was a mask of fury in the darkness, his eyes red points of light.

It took him but a few minutes to kick his team into harness, to fling together those things he had to have, to strike the signs of their going, and to drift away on the trail to Siskit Gulch.

Far ahead, in the blue arctic night, Artuk's picked team followed their leader at a swinging, easy gait. The leader ran like a great, gray shadow, as lightly, as swiftly, his huge brush waving, his white collie collar gleaming faintly. Beside him ran Lola, tall, tireless, of amazing strength, cheeks blooming, eyes shining, lips smiling now and then; alert, keen, watchful, her heart in tune with adventure and the great things of life.

The trail was smooth as glass, well trodden and packed. She had nine hours' start of Le Croix. Her dogs were strong, well fed, of proven courage, and she knew them all. Moreover, she was

engaged on the business of humanity, which, of all things in this vitally interesting world, was the most important to her. And she was pitted against a savage enemy well worth her steel.

Therefore she was happy.

Above, in the dark sky, long streamers and ribbons of color waved, as if a god played with divine confetti—the ancient and magical display of the Northern Lights.

On the light sledge little Felice sat, wrapped in her furs, her blue eyes wide and abrim with excitement.

At dawn they stopped for rest and food. Lola unhitched the dogs, fed them abundantly—the bulk of the sledge-load was food for them—ordered them down in the snow, where they curled obediently, each soft brush covering four bunched feet for warmth, and fell to the sleep that these dogs learn to snatch at a moment's notice.

Felice got stiffly out of her wrappings, all eagerness to help.

"Do you curl down on the sledge, ma'm'selle," she begged, taking the tiny alcohol stove from Lola's hand. "Rest, as the dogs do, while I make the breakfast."

And Lola laughed, and yielded. She, too, slept in a moment, and when Felice awoke her, forty minutes later, for steaming tea, crisp bacon and hardtack, she felt fresh as at the start.

She ate, and went promptly to sleep again, however, for she knew the value of conservation of forces, while Felice sat on guard, thinking of Louis, an odd little sentinel in the frozen land.

At the end of another hour they were under way again.

Behind them Le Croix had gained that hour and fifty minutes, for he had not stopped. The team he drove was as hard and strong as himself—a fitting complement.

That night Lola made a fire behind a bank in the lee of a wooded rise, and slept like the dead while Felice kept frightened watch.

The girl was strung to the breaking-pitch with fear and excitement, but she was game to the last ounce of her little body.

Le Croix also camped that night, but he was up an hour sooner, so that he gained a bit more. And he pressed his dogs, riding more, for he was no fit runner of the trail like Lola Lambert. Had Lola known those dogs, she, too, would have pressed a bit, for they were famous for a thousand miles around.

And so it went, from blue dawn to blue night. The cold pressed upon them like a finger, striving to squeeze out that mysterious and conquering enemy of the elements—life. Gray clouds shut out the pale light of the days, and the white expanse of the land was appalling in its loneliness.

Hour by hour they swung ahead in the trail, and always Lola ran close to her leader's side, sometimes with a hand on the outstretched head.

Two, three—the days swept by, and Felice was dumb with the strain and the wild hope.

"Oh, ma'm'selle," she gasped, "will we make it?"

"Make it?" laughed Lola. "Haven't we the great Gray Lad to pull us in ahead of the devil and all his imps? We'll make it like a top!"

"How can I ever thank you, ma'm'selle? What can I do to pay for this?"

"Pouf!" said Lola. "Love your Louis as payment; make his helpless life to bloom like a garden; and if it ever comes your way to pass it on to another in trouble, do it. So shall I be paid. For that is the gold of life—the helping hand to the under dog."

They made the bad pass at Caribou Clip without mishap, and stretched away for Siskit Gulch. This was late on the fourth day.

And that night Le Croix also passed

the Clip, so near had he drawn in his hatred and his seething fury.

Lola camped that night, without a fire, for there was a tightening about her heart, a tensing of her muscles for the final struggle.

The swift, unceasing pace had begun to tell a bit on Artuk's dogs.

Mokwa was getting a trifle footsore, and Hunnun, the usual leader, was developing temper. Lola held them firmly to the trail, but it was a constant strain.

The last day dawned gray as smoke; a heavy day, warmer, and with a low sky.

All through the morning Lola kept looking back over her shoulder.

Felice, too, watched the back trail in silence, though her little hands were clenched until the knuckles stood out white beneath her heavy mittens. They made short shift for noon, stopping barely long enough to feed the dogs and snatch a mouthful themselves.

And at that moment Le Croix was eating up their trail, a scant hour back.

Verily, that famous team from Cheehuk Rapids deserved their fame.

At two o'clock, Lola, running at White Ears' side, heard an inarticulate cry from the sledge behind. She turned in time to see Felice slump forward among the furs, the tension broken at last by oblivion, and far behind, on the crest of a rise, she saw Le Croix.

"Lord love us!" she cried aloud.

Then she turned back again.

"Gray Lad!" she cried. "Lola's Lad! Now is the time! Mush! *Mush!*"

And at the unaccustomed word from her lips, the great dog dropped in his tracks, lowered his flowing tail, stretched out his head, and flew away like the wind. That was a pace that Lola, hard as she was, could not keep, so she flung herself at the sledge, scrambled on, and hung, leaning forward.

From time to time she looked back at Le Croix. His team was coming fresh and strong, as if they had not been rushed and driven by a cruel hand. The man himself had out a whip, and was beginning to ply it, flushed with rage at sight of his quarry.

Never in all the eventful years had Lola lived such an hour as followed. The blood pumped slowly in her veins, her head felt clear, her brain keen. As the danger heightened, she grew cool and calm, without underestimating the danger that rode with Le Croix, the killer. She did not try to revive Felice. Indeed, she hoped the girl would remain unconscious until the issue was decided.

Away and away down the long, white trail they flew. Artuk's dogs, when the need arose, forgot their grievances and their pains, and ran as she had hoped they would. But finest, freshest, most courageous was that friend of her heart speeding in the lead. For an hour they kept the pace, and Le Croix had not gained. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly she saw that he was closing up.

She slipped off the sledge and ran awhile, lightening the load, resting the dogs a trifle. But she soon saw that would not do, and flung back upon it. The man was gaining. . . . There was no doubt about it. . . .

"Mush!" she cried. *"Mush,* Gray Lad!"

And White Ears *mushed!* He would have strained to obey that voice from the edge of death itself. The others responded valiantly, and for a time they drew away. Then Mokwa fumbled a foot, and went floundering for a hundred yards. White Ears, redoubling his efforts, pulled her with him, so that she did not slacken the pace.

But strain as they would, that relentless pursuer kept creeping up.

Lola knew that Siskit Gulch was scarce an hour's run away, and she prayed wildly that she might hold her own, and make it. Le Croix knew that, also, and was ready to kill every dog in his team to prevent just that.

Ahead there was a great circle where the trail made a turn to the north. Felice had told her of this turn as they had talked over the trail at night. As it came in view, Lola felt a presentiment grip her heart.

She dreaded the moment when they should present their broadside to Le Croix.

As they swung into the turn, she looked back, and her blood went cold within her. Le Croix was fumbling among the furs at his feet. The next moment he straightened up with a rifle in his hands. It was a long shot, but he would take chances.

"Mush! Mush!" screamed Lola. "White Ears! *Go!*"

But with the words there came the bark of the shot, and Mokwa tumbled among her mates' feet. Instantly Lola was out, knife in hand, cutting the traces of the luckless dog.

Again they were away, but Le Croix was taking careful aim once more.

"Oh, God!" cried Lola in anguish. "Not the Gray Lad! Don't let him kill the Gray Lad!"

Again the rifle snapped out, but the shot went wild. Once more, and yet again. Le Croix had stopped on the turn, that he might hold them side on, and was kneeling on the sledge. He aimed for the huge gray leader, and fired again. Not White Ears, but Hunnun, took the ball, and dropped.

Again Lola cut the traces and started forward, this time crippled indeed, with only three dogs against Le Croix's full complement.

And then Le Croix settled on his sledge and leaped forward after them. It looked as if the game were up. And at that minute, Lola, turning her straining eyes ahead, saw, far down the trail, the smoke from the cabins at Siskit Gulch.

The sight aroused the old fighting spirit within her.

"No!" she said between her teeth. "No! Not *now!*"

And she slid off the sledge. With every ounce of her strength she forged to White Ears' side.

"Come!" she gasped. "Come, lad!"

The great dog was already doing his own work and that of Mokwa and Hunnun, but he leaned forward a little harder. His brave heart recognized no difficulty so long as Lola lived. Therefore, with a great straining of all his mighty body, he kept up his pace, and Lola, straining every nerve, kept it also.

She did not look back; she could not and keep up that speed. She watched the distant smoke, and prayed. And Le Croix, back on the sledge, raised his rifle twice to shoot her in the back, and twice desisted, held only by that too-near smoke. But he rose on his swaying sledge and took a snap shot at the dogs again.

This time, as the rifle spat, the Grey Lad flinched, and squatted for a second's space, while a red stain came slowly out on the edge of his white collar and slowly spread. But he did not even slacken speed. The ball, clipping across Felice's prone body, and over the two smaller dogs, had found the king at last.

At sight of that bright stain Lola's eyes dilated, and she flung herself on the sledge, snatched up her rifle, turned, and fired . . .

She saw Le Croix drop his gun, and she leaped off again to run.

That was a grand finish, that last, long stretch into the huddled camp, with White Ears pulling like a fiend; with Lola, her hand in his shoulder band, pulling with him; with the third dog down, and dragging with a crippled leg; with Felice rolling in oblivion; with Le Croix, the killer, sweeping so near that his oaths were audible.

Lola knew that there was something moving on the trail ahead; that a great swarm of small, black objects was com-

ing to meet her like a whirlwind; and then that they were men, who whooped and shouted as they plunged forward. And ahead of all the rest there ran a grotesque figure, whose white hair flew in the wind, whose rusty cassock flapped at his feet—Father Harrick, who caught her in his tender old arms just as it seemed she must sink.

"Le Croix!" she gasped. "Stop him!"

But there was no need for that. A hundred men surrounded the bully, and his life hung in the balance. He was hauled off his sledge with scant ceremony and dragged to the saloon, where Louis sat in his chair. Strong arms lifted Lola bodily and took her there. Other hands pulled the sledge with its helpless burden. But Lola cried like a child, and reiterated that the Gray Lad was shot. The Gray Lad was shot!

So they carried the great dog, also, and the other two, that had done such gallant service. And it was a strange, triumphant procession that stopped before the door of the Gold Drift Saloon and finally entered it, bag and baggage.

It took an hour to straighten it all out, to get the tears from the eyes of the big, handsome girl, to see that White Ears was only scratched, that Le Croix would never use his right hand again, and to bring little Felice out of her swoon and lay her in the trembling arms of French Louis—Louis, who had grieved a year, chained to his chair.

And presently Father Harrick brought his book and married them, while a hundred men stood by. And Lola smiled, and promised a lifelong settlement for the bride. And Felice wept, and kissed her hands, kneeling to do it.

And for Le Croix?

Well, the hundred men took it upon themselves to tell him, singly and collectively, what choice fate they would hand out to him if so much as a hair of Louis' head was harmed.

And they furnished him with fresh dogs for his famous team, and sent him adrift that night, refusing him the common hospitality of the camp. Which proved his status to the last shade.

Lola, swaying on her feet with weariness, smiled round at the ring of faces in the lamplight.

"Commend me to you men of the far places!" she said. "I knew I could count on you—I and the Gray Lad!"

And White Ears, at mention of his name, slipped a slim muzzle into her hanging hand.

Thought of the Morrow

By Richard Van Tuyl

NEXT week I shall marry the sweetest girl in the world. Tomorrow I shall undergo an operation which, the surgeons assure me, will be successful. I am color blind. Great Heavens! A sinister thought has just struck me. Suppose, when my sight is made normal, I find that I have wooed a negress.

In Retrospect

By Leslie Nelson Jennings

I HAVE forgotten much,
But I remember this:
Your hands' protecting touch,
Your kiss.

I have outgrown the ways
Of lovers—the disdain,
The anger, the amaze,
The pain.

Such are the years, and such
Is Life, that I should miss
Your hands' protecting touch,
Your kiss!

The Dare

By Harold Ward

ETTY BURCH, known to the police of two continents as "The girl who never was caught," stood before a jewelry shop inspecting with womanly curiosity the glittering display in the window.

"Not figuring on lifting the Duke's diamond, are you, Betty?" drawled a masculine voice at her elbow. She turned suddenly to gaze into the laughing eyes of "Adonis" Brown, of Headquarters.

"Thanks for the idea," she retorted laughingly. "I hadn't thought of it before, but now that you mention it, I do have half an idea that I could find a use for the jewel."

"Think again," Brown retorted. "If you want to retain that sobriquet of yours, let the bauble alone. I'm going to be on the job myself the night of the wedding, and while I wouldn't mind having the distinction of being the first man to pinch you, I hate to see you stick your head in the lion's mouth. Not only will the regular force be represented, but old Van Twiller's hired the Pinkertons to send over a squad of their crack operatives to guard his daughter's presents. So you see, young lady, there's no chance for you."

Betty Burch arched her eyebrows prettily. "Really, Mr. Brown, you interest me," she smiled. "Do you know that I've half a notion to take a sporting chance, just for the pleasure it gives me in putting something over on you bulls. I'll wager you the best dinner that money will buy that I can lift the diamond and get away without being caught. Are you on?"

Brown looked at her quizzically. Then a flush of anger mounted to his cheeks.

"You little devil," he exclaimed brusquely, "I'd like to slip the bracelets on you, on general principles. I'd take the bet, only—"

She wrinkled her nose saucily. "Only what?" she asked with an air of injured innocence that belied the twinkle in her roguish eyes.

"Why, I'm not such a fool as to think that you'd come to me and confess that you'd stolen the sparkler—if it was taken," Brown answered.

Betty thought deeply for a second.

"Tell you what we'll do, Brownie," she said seriously, "We'll make it what is called a 'gentleman's agreement' between the two of us. If you pinch me in the act, all right. If not, and I make a clean getaway, you are to forget this little conversation and act as if it had never taken place."

She hesitated. Then suddenly she leaned over toward him and whispered:

"Of course, I'll not dare to tell you that I stole the diamond, but *if I do* I'll let you know that I did—by giving you a kiss. Do you take the dare?"

The big detective shrugged his shoulders. "Have your own way, Betty, have your own way," he laughed. "Only, remember, I've warned you."

He plunged into the passing throng and a second later had disappeared from sight around the corner.

For an instant longer Betty Burch stood gazing at the big diamond blazing

in the rays of sun in the jeweler's window. Then, with her brows puckered in thought, she, too, wended her way down the street.

II

THE Van Twiller ball was a social affair which promised in every way to eclipse all other events of the season. For Louise Van Twiller, the acknowledged season's beauty and only daughter of old Gaunt Van Twiller, the lumber king, was to wed the Duke of Kentmore and Bilderstand.

Society had left no stone unturned to make the international alliance a memorable affair. Party had followed party, each, in turn, outdoing its predecessor in magnificence. And, as the crowning event, on the wedding eve, came the Van Twiller ball where, according to all newspaper accounts, old Gaunt Van Twiller was expected to empty his barrel and give his only daughter a send-off that for sheer lavishness and expenditure of money would make those that had gone before look small in comparison.

The Duke's gift to his fiancée was a magnificent diamond—one of his ancestral jewels. A replica of the great stone had been on exhibition in the window of a prominent jeweler where Betty Burch had seen and coveted it, and where her conversation with "Adonis" Brown had taken place.

That she had never been caught was, she realized, not the result of her luck, but because she never went into a deal until every detail had been planned and rehearsed until the possibility of a slip had been practically eliminated.

Now, conversant as she was with the way in which the diamond would be guarded, she realized that, unless something unforeseen happened, there was little likelihood of her making good her boast to Brown.

It was not that she needed the money, for she already had enough—the proceeds of previous escapades—to keep her in luxury for several years to come. It was the patronizing air that Brown had bestowed upon her that had angered her despite her smiling exterior.

She hated Brown, the big detective—and he knew it. And knowing, he had assumed that attitude of solicitude in the hope of baiting her on to do just what she had done—plan to steal the Duke's gift to his bride.

Viewed from every angle, the chances for success were extremely slim. Yet hers was the nature that refuses to accept defeat; it was a game of wits between the detective and herself, with her liberty at stake against the Duke's diamond.

Rather than confess herself beaten she went ahead with her plans. Only she was more careful to plan every minute detail—to see that there was no possibility of a mistake—than she had ever been before in her long and, from the standpoint of crookdom, brilliant career.

III

THE bride's wedding-gifts were laid out on a long table in one room of the Van Twiller mansion: cut-glass which sparkled and scintillated with myriad colors under the brilliant electric lamps; richly carved silver worth a king's ransom—all surrounding the wonderful diamond which reposed in its velvet-lined case like a queen in the midst of her court.

Near the table, his clear, gray eyes never leaving it for an instant, save to scrutinize the face of each guest, stood Detective Edward Brown, tall, handsome in evening clothes, fitting in perfectly with his surroundings.

Close to the door stood another Headquarters man; there were others

stationed here and there about the house. Among the guests mingled the skilled operatives from the Pinkerton Agency, men and women who had reached the very top of their profession and to whom the face of every one in crookdom was an open book.

As Detective Brown completed the detail of stationing his assistants, taking the post of greatest danger himself, he smiled inwardly as he thought of the boast that Betty Burch had made only a few days before. Would she attempt to steal the jewel? He hoped so.

His arrangements had been so made that not one man nor woman, nor a hundred, could get through the net. He was inclined to think that the fair Betty, who was wise beyond her years, would think better of the bargain after mature reflection, and not make the attempt. But if she did—he was ready for her!

A stream of guests passed through the room constantly, hovering over the lavish outlay of money represented on the table. For all of The Four Hundred were here tonight.

From the distant ballroom came the rich, mellow strains of the orchestra and the silvery tinkle of women's laughter.

Close by the detective stood a woman, young, handsome, black of hair and darkly brunette of skin, faultlessly clad in a gown which showed off to perfection the lines of her graceful figure. Unescorted, she stood at the table admiring the gifts until the room was emptied for a second. Then she turned quickly to Brown.

"Quick!" she whispered. "I'm from Pinkerton's." She showed him the badge cupped in the palm of her hand, then slipped it quickly out of sight in the bosom of her dress.

"I've been mingling with the guests and overheard a few words which led me to believe that an attempt is to be made to 'lift' the big sparkler tonight. Do you get me?"

"Adonis" Brown lifted his eyebrows inquiringly and smiled.

"Thanks for the tip," he drawled, "but I guess that we'll be able to handle anything that comes our way without the help of you private 'Dicks'!"

"But you don't understand me," she hurried on. "We're hired to look out for such things and tip you off if we get wise to anything. You get the credit—we don't. It's Betty Burch and her gang. She's out to show you up. Some sort of a dare, I understand. . . .

"From what I've learned, one of her confederates is to cut the light wires and they're planning to rush you in the darkness. Watch out for it. Watch your opportunity and, if my tip is right and the lights do go out, grab the diamond and stick it in your pocket. It's that and nothing else they want. And they'll have to work fast."

Brown was about to reply when another party of guests entered the room. With a knowing look toward him, the girl turned away to the table and mingled among them. From where he stood Brown could see that she was listening to every word they said without apparently seeming to do so.

IV

SUDDENLY the lights went out. The entire house was engulfed in darkness—black, impenetrable darkness.

From the ballroom came shrieks and hysterical laughter. One or two of the women surrounding the table tittered in the darkness. Brown, his every faculty alert, leaped to the edge of the table and, with a map of the contents in his mind's eye, laid his hand on the case containing the big diamond. Snapping it shut, he thrust it into his pocket.

"Keep your places!" he shouted as he sprang to the door and blocked it with

his huge body. Remain where you are until lights are brought."

A second later servants emerged with candles, lighting the gas chandeliers. Brown ran to the switch and tried it. There was no response. The wires had been tampered with.

Into the room where the jewels reposed rushed old Gaunt Van Twiller, followed by the Duke of Kentmore and Bilderstand. After them came a troupe of servants with lights. A second later the room was again ablaze.

The lumber king's face was bathed with perspiration. "Quick!" he snapped. "The electric lights were deliberately tampered with. It was the work of thieves. Did they get anything? Speak up, damn it! Say something!"

Brown overlooked the rich man's explosion. "From certain sources," he smiled, "I learned that a well-known female crook was to make an attempt to steal the Duke's diamond and—"

The old man's glance strayed toward the table.

"And, by God, she did!" he yelled, pointing to the empty space from which the case had been taken. Several of the women shrieked while there was a rumbling explosion from the Duke.

Again Brown smiled with a knowing air. Reaching into his pocket, he drew forth the case and handed it to Van Twiller. "You mean, she tried," he corrected, "only I was on the job and—"

He was startled by a loud bellow from the lumber king who had clicked open the catch. Brown gave one look toward the case and then recoiled a step, his face white and drawn.

For, tucked away in the depression made for the diamond, lay—*a candy kiss!*

Half an hour later in her own apartment, a black wig lying on the table before her, Betty Burch washed off the brunette cosmetic which covered her fair skin, and imagined Brown's expression, when he discovered the trick she had played on him.

Occasionally her glance stole toward the big diamond which winked saucily up at her from the dresser where it lay beside a Pinkerton Detective Agency badge.

Hell's Bells Millicent

By Marc Edmund Jones

ARTHUR DODGE, retired theatrical manager, rated for a million or so by Dun and Bradstreet, was president of the Fleur-de-lis Film Corporation. His office was large and light and was furnished in genuine mahogany. On his desk were silver and fine glass fittings. Scenes from some of the more successful of his releases, excellently framed, together with the portraits of Fleur-de-lis stars and players, adorned the walls. Underfoot the carpet was velvet, so soft that the presence of shoes seemed sacrilege.

Guarding the sanctuary of his quarters was the office adjoining of his private secretary, a middle-aged woman who gave every impression of efficiency. Here the carpet was not quite so soft, nor were there so many pictures on the walls.

Beyond was the private waiting-room, presided over by a little blonde as bright and fresh as a whiff of Spring. If there were rugs in her domain no one noticed them. Likewise, the fact that the walls were bare escaped attention.

A caller at Fleur-de-lis first halted at the elevators, but, overcoming that obstacle, found it necessary to traverse the full length of the executive offices to reach the shrine of Beauty. With Beauty convinced of the importance of the visitor's errand, there was Efficiency to be persuaded in the next room. With Efficiency assured that the interview with the president of the company was necessary, there was the chance that the lord of all this might yet refuse to see anyone. In fact, he seldom did.

There was a sudden commotion outside Arthur Dodge's door. The little man looked up angrily and ran a hand with distinct displeasure through hair as white as the immaculately starched linen of his shirt.

An instant later the production manager burst in.

"What in the name of wasted footage is the matter, Jennings?" the president exclaimed, irritably. "I didn't send for you. Why—why aren't you over at the studio where you belong? What's the idea of breaking in upon me like this without being announced? Do you think I employ two secretaries, an ugly one and a pretty one, for nothing?"

The unhappy intruder glanced behind him. "Millicent—"

"Millicent be damned!" Arthur Dodge rose to his full height of five feet two, brushing ashes from his waistcoat, and flushing. "You're in charge of picture-making at the Fleur-de-lis studios. Millicent Carter's a star and she's under contract and the contract has two years to run. Where do I come in to worry about Millicent?"

"Just where we all do, Mr. Dodge," grinned Jennings. "That girl's mission in life is to worry people."

The executive head of the company dropped into his chair, almost a discouraged droop to his shoulders. "What does she want now?" he asked. "A live specimen of the extinct dodo?"

Before the production manager could answer there was another commotion

outside the door and with a rush of air the subject of their conversation burst in upon them.

"Well!" she interrupted, with rising inflection.

Millicent Carter was not tall, but gave an impression of height due to heels and a certain defiant erectness of carriage, perhaps. Her clothes were stylish—stunning. Her hat, large and black and softly flapping with each decisive movement of her, caressed hair which was flaming red, of the color of leaves at the first touch of autumn. Her eyes, large beneath darkened lashes, were genuinely green. Her complexion was pale as though she scorned the use of the universal rouge and arrestingly attractive.

Now, however, her hands were clenched and there was a petulant drawing of her eyes; a marked uptilting of her nose. Her mouth was firm. Her lips, pressed tightly together, formed a line as straight as determination could make it. Her eyes flashed from Jennings to Dodge and blazed as they caught his.

"Well?" she repeated. "I take it for granted I'm the reason for this conference."

The principal owner of Fleur-de-lis swallowed hard.

"My dear Miss Carter," he began, in a pacifying sort of tone, only to stop uncertainly.

In an instant she grew red about the eyes. She drew in her breath sharply and for a moment remained motionless, puffed like an opera singer prepared for a final high "X," inarticulate in her indignation. Then she exploded.

"Hell's bells," she almost screamed, "can't you talk up! Are you—are you afraid of me?"

Arthur Dodge allowed his glance to stray helplessly to his production manager. The latter gave him no aid, however.

"Listen, Dodgie!" All at once the girl's voice became a purr, and the transition was as startling as her outburst. "You know I can't work if I have to suffer from the heat—"

"What do you want now?" her victim managed to murmur, interrupting; more ill at ease in the face of her second mood than the first.

"What does she want?" Jennings found his tongue. "She wants us to build a special dressing-room of brick on the north roof at the studio and—"

"Stop!" Wheeling about, she faced Jennings; then half advanced upon him with clenched fists. "You wouldn't listen to me at the studio and you took my leading man's runabout so you could beat me over here to the office and now—now let's see you give an imitation of a phonograph without needles or records and with the cover locked."

Hardly pausing for breath, she confronted the president of the company again. "It's a hundred in the shade in the rooms we have," she complained. Once more her voice was soft. "I can't keep my make-up on at all; it—it melts before I can get into my clothes—"

"But an added floor on that north roof, Miss Carter—"

"Hell's bells!" Blandishment became petulance, and petulance fury. She seized the inkwell upon the desk before her and flung it to the floor, where it ruined the carpet forever. "I'm going to have what I want," she screamed. "I won't do another bit of work until you build that dressing-room!"

Turning abruptly upon her heels, she strode to the door, opened it and slammed it behind her viciously; quite unaware that the glass cracked twice across its face in protest. So a comet might have streaked its way through an otherwise ordered universe. The leading star of Fleur-de-lis could easily have

baffled the classification of the ablest astronomer.

"Hell's Bells Millicent!" murmured Jennings ineptly.

II

Conroy Meredith was twenty-four years of age and a nephew of Arthur Dodge. A rather tall young man, with nicely-defined features and an earnest expression, he was distinctly ill at ease as he waited in the very outer reception-room of the Fleur-de-lis Film Corporation.

Unquestionably the president of the concern was anything but pleased to see him. Rather than direct that he be brought into the private office the old gentleman came all the way out to the elevators to greet him.

"Uncle," Meredith began, shifting his straw hat from one perspiring hand to the other, "I'm in a serious situation."

For a quick instant the picture-producer studied him. "You—you've been sued for breach of promise again, or for alienation of affections? Or perhaps you've tried to make love to two pretty girls at once and—and you've learned they're sisters, or boarding-school crushes—"

Meredith flushed, much as a freshman called upon the carpet for a college prank. There was a rebellious fire in deep-set brown eyes. "No, it's nothing to do with women."

"You want more money, I suppose?"

A certain steel-hard determination came into the visitor's face. "I only borrowed money while I was trying to land a position through my social connections. But—I've had no luck and at least I'm not a parasite. I want you to give me a job, uncle—any old kind of a job at all."

"Fine!" The film magnate's expression softened. The mask over his features slipped completely away, revealing fondness beneath. He placed an arm up and about his nephew's broad shoulders affectionately. "K.O.!" he added, dropping into studio vernacular. "Come on in."

From the Byzantine reception-room a corridor finished in grained walnut led past the advertising and accounting departments to Arthur Dodge's suite. Here the production manager still was waiting.

"Jennings!" The president chuckled, unashamed now as he presented his relative. "This is Mr. Conroy Meredith, my sister's boy. He will be associated with the Fleur-de-lis Film Corporation, beginning at once."

Jennings glanced up in prompt objection. "In what capacity, Mr. Dodge?" he demanded.

Arthur Dodge laughed. "As a matter of fact, I have no idea what to give him to do." He turned to Meredith. "What are your qualifications, Conroy?"

"I—I guess I haven't any qualifications," Meredith admitted. "None that I've been able to locate in the past six months."

"Do you think you could act?"

"I made an awful mess of college theatricals."

"Do you know anything about business?"

"No," coloring slowly, "evidently not a thing."

"If you know nothing about business you belong in the films," Jennings muttered, yielding to the temptation to become ironic.

Dodge frowned.

"I'm not going to manufacture an opening for you, Conroy," he explained. "Nevertheless there must be some niche you can fill. Now"—facing the production manager—"now I want a suggestion. Where have we a place for a young man who's come down to earth and is willing to work?"

"Perhaps he could do something to

help solve our pet problem," Jennings suggested with mock cheerfulness.

"Pet problem?"

"Hell's Bell's Millicent!" the production manager answered, keeping his face straight.

"Good—good Lord of Retakes!" The president's face broadened infectiously. "The very thing!"

"Now you're over my head." Jennings leaned forward. "I was trying to be funny."

"Listen, Conroy." Dodge became enthusiastic. "Jennings and I were just going over the situation. Nowadays we have everything on a business basis. We beat the weather with lighted studios. We avoid camera and laboratory trouble with modern equipment. We have good directors and a system for eliminating wasted time in production. Advertising and promotion and exchange service are down to a science. Everything in the world is under our control with the one exception of—"

"Cussedness," broke in Jennings, "otherwise known as temperament or artistic genius."

"Right!" Dodge settled back in his chair. "My nephew here is a ladies' man—"

"Uncle!" Meredith objected. "For weeks I haven't looked at a—"

"No? You are not a ladies' man? How many times were you sued for breach of promise before your father's failure and death?"

"Uh—twice, but—"

"How many times have engagements of yours been announced in the society columns?"

"Maybe on half-a-dozen occasions, but—"

"You have a way with women, my boy. Now, here is a chance to handle something where the rest of us are not succeeding at all."

"But, uncle!" Meredith was indignant.

"Tell him about Millicent Carter." Dodge turned to his production manager.

Jennings, with obvious distaste, obeyed.

Meredith was incredulous. "Haven't you a contract with her? Doesn't she have to do what you tell her to do?"

"What's a contract against a woman's temperament?"

"Then—then where on earth do I come in?"

Dodge leaned forward, very seriously. "The greatest loss to picture producers is from just such bursts of unreasonableness. Millicent's dressing-room on the roof will not cost much, but her salary is forty-five hundred, aside from her percentage, and with other salaries and expenses during the week it will take to build the place we stand to lose just about ten thousand dollars."

"You mean to offer me a position to—to—"

"If you knew the amount of money slipping through our fingers you would realize our willingness to try anything."

"But what would I do?"

"Well—you might pretend to be a special publicity man hanging around for material. You might make yourself agreeable to Millicent and—and the others, too—and take them out to dinner and the theater and—well, simply get acquainted to the point where you can talk our stars out of the crazy notions which cost us so much money."

"Would I have an expense account?"

"Of course! If you can spend fifty and save us a thousand it's fine. But—go easy!"

Meredith rose. He walked to the window, looking down upon the bustle of the street below. The proposition was not flattering to his vanity.

On the other hand, his training had fitted him for nothing particular in life. Slowly the full realization of his opportunity came to him. He could try this

at the start. Meanwhile, he could keep eyes and ears open and soon he would learn the picture business. Later he could demand a real chance.

"I'll take the job," he said, turning to his uncle.

III

THE Fleur-de-lis studio was a converted car barn a few blocks below Central Park. Inside and out there had been no attempt at ornamentation, and the rough board partitions and cramped stages stood much as they had been constructed, hastily and without preliminary planning, five years before.

The original plant, in the Twenties, had burned to the ground in one of the few diastrous film fires of the city. The projected erection of modern buildings at Spuyten Duyvil had been halted by the war.

As Meredith entered the low door of the studio about the middle of the following morning there was a blast of summer temperature from within. First he was obliged to elbow his way through a jostling, perspiring, nervously anxious crowd of professional extras and film-struck youngsters. Then, beyond an inner door guarded by an iron-gray watchman, he had his first view of the set-ups of the several companies.

The glare from the overhead arcs, the Kliegels, and Cooper-Hewitt banks was acutely unpleasant; the radiation of heat under the low rafters almost unendurable.

An exceedingly narrow passageway led along one side of the interior, past the rooms of directors and scenario writers to the office of Jennings. Following directions, Meredith made his way gingerly, not at home in the stuffy atmosphere of the place and far from sure of himself after a night of reflection upon his new duties.

Suddenly he was aware of raised voices ahead, of the sound of a door slammed abruptly, of the swish of silk. He glanced up to see a very angry young lady bearing down upon him.

In the semi-gloom of the two-foot hallway he gained an impression at first that she was as tall as he, but that was the result of the way she carried herself. With no idea of her identity, he paused, standing to watch her approach. A certain vague attraction swept over him and for an instant he was conscious only of his own inner impressions.

Nearly up to him, she stopped. Her eyes met his and flashed as they caught his stare. She tapped the floor with her foot impatiently.

"Do you always make a girl wait while you look her over?" she burst out, a studied iciness in her tone. "Are you —are you trying to save money by looking at me here instead of in a theater?" Little spots of color appeared in her cheeks. "Tell me, do you think it's worth the price of admission to see me, now that you have me in the flesh?"

Suddenly he realized that he was blocking her way; that she could not pass until he flattened against the wall of the narrow corridor. He drew aside, flushed and confused.

"Thank you for not making me ask you to move," she muttered as she slipped by. He caught a note of sheer vindictiveness in her voice.

In Jennings' office he was compelled to wait. One interruption after another kept the production manager until Meredith, smarting under her sarcasm, felt disinclined to ask the identity of the girl. Finally Jennings led the way to a stage in a far corner of the studio. Here Millicent's director was preparing for his day's work with the star.

The picture in the course of making was a boarding-school story; the setting the interior of a dormitory. Standing about, waiting for the scene, were some twenty girls of various types and coloring. From one tall and very dignified

young lady with raven curls to a giggling flapper with nondescript bobbed hair every one was a beauty. Meredith, connoisseur of feminine charm, found himself overwhelmed by numbers.

All at once there was a commotion. Another girl rushed in, clad in a kimono of shrieking hues. Slipping out of that, she revealed a fascinating yama-yama creation. One look at her face and Meredith gasped. There was no mistaking the girl he had met in the passageway. She was Millicent herself.

The star, in her pajamas, with her hair down, was distinctly petite. Meredith thought her flashing feet the smallest he had ever seen.

She glanced at the girls, then rushed to one, pulling at her hair in frenzied fashion. "What do you mean!" she blazed in the hard, shrill voice which now seemed foreign to her. "Didn't I tell you once before not to put up your hair like mine? I won't have it!"

She spun around to face the director. "Hell's bells, George, don't you know better than that?" Her whole face was a black, petulant frown. "Make her change or I won't play the scene."

Meredith turned away. A feeling of intense disgust mounted within him. In the hallway he would have liked to have met this girl. Now—

Another thought struck him. This was temperament. It was his job to stop just this sort of outburst. It was his work to subdue leading ladies and to prevent their tantrums. Ye gods!

In the actual scene, in her work before the camera, Millicent Carter entirely transformed herself. All the lines and furrows of ill-temper disappeared from her face. When she smiled there was a softening of every feature until even her eyes darkened and melted with a wholly irresistible charm.

Too, under the lights, there was none of her nervous irritability of movement. Instead, she displayed a poise and polish, an inherent grace all the more striking by contrast. In a flash Meredith understood her country-wide popularity.

After the taking of the scene Jennings called her over. She wrapped her kimono about her and approached with the softness of her characterization still lingering. The hand she extended to Meredith in acknowledgment of the introduction was firm and cordial. There was friendliness in her expression until suddenly she recognized him. Then her eyes changed, seemed to glitter with hidden malice.

"So you're going to write special publicity?" she queried, repeating Jennings' explanation. "Well" — the thought seemed to amuse her—"after the way you stared me down in that passageway I should say that you were undoubtedly rude enough to make a very fine press agent."

Jennings burst out laughing. She walked away without a backward glance.

IV

UNDER the constant smart of her tongue the new supervisor of temperament soon sought other stages than Millicent Carter's; he pretended interest in the foibles of other stars, obtained introductions to everyone.

But he found himself unable to put Millicent out of his mind. There were about the floor others as good-looking as she, but there was no counter-irritant. In his consciousness all hair was red, all eyes were green.

A second day passed, and a third. Nothing was accomplished.

Not only was it necessary for Meredith to restrain Millicent Carter in particular, but it was vitally important that he do something before either that Titian-haired lady or someone of the others decided to make some new and preposterous demand. Suppose—sup-

"What do you mean!" she blazed. . . . "Didn't I tell you once before not to put up your hair like mine?"

pose a star actually should refuse to work?

Failing to achieve any sort of bright, or direct inspiration, Meredith inquired the way finally to Millicent's dressing-room. Masking his trepidation, he knocked upon the door.

"Yes?" Her voice, through the thin partition, was pleasant.

"It's—it's the new publicity—"

"Oh! Come in!"

Contrary to his expectation, she greeted him with a smile, and with her eyes as soft as though before the camera. Perhaps something in his face revealed his surprise and uncertainty, for she extended a hand.

"Sit down, Mr. Meredith, and forgive me, please. I—I was mean enough to you the other day to last for a week. I—I promise to be nice."

For just a moment he met her glance. Then he smiled also and dropped to the chair, perfectly at ease. In this mood he could handle her, or any other woman. Always a very popular member of New York's younger social set—

But she read him. She caught the faint flash of self-satisfaction in his face. Her eyes were malicious in an instant, her lips vindictive.

"No," she corrected, "I guess I won't be nice!" There was feline wariness in her manner as she rose and drew away from him. "I—I don't like ladies' men," she purred.

"But please, Miss Carter—" he protested.

With the blood mounting, suffusing the delicate texture of her skin, she took a quick turn around the little room, her tiny slippered feet, kittenlike, making not the slightest sound. Everything was neat, even to the cosmetics on the make-up table.

The kimono, the one of lurid pattern and coloring, lay over a chair. Suddenly she snatched that up. With a quick, vicious gesture she ripped it through and through. Flinging the ruined garment upon the floor, she confronted him. He caught the flash of white, even teeth.

"What do you wish, anyway?" she cried. "What sort of a story will suit you? Are you endeavoring to learn just how bad a temper I have?"

He jumped up and retreated before her, backing toward the hall.

As quickly as the coming of the storm she softened. "What—what did you wish, Mr. Meredith?"

He continued to the door, afraid of her now. "I just wanted to get acquainted," he explained. "I—I—I had thought perhaps you would go to lunch with me—"

For a moment she hesitated. Then she kicked off her slippers. Already dressed in a trim, tailored suit, she stepped into street shoes and put forth each foot in turn for him to lace. Finally she smiled, amused at his still evident distrust.

"I shall not go to lunch with you," she told him. "Instead you shall eat with me."

"But, really—"

She slipped a hand beneath his arm. "No 'buts.' We're going into the studio lunchroom and it's my treat. It's"—she actually giggled—"it's all of thirty-five cents."

Ill at ease, he acquiesced. There he found her flashing play of mood wholly fascinating. He forgot his purpose in cultivating her.

But during dessert she discovered a bit of foreign matter in the ice-cream. She turned upon the waitress so quickly that the girl, disconcerted, dropped a loaded tray. Her own nerves shattered by the crash of china, the star neglected her escort entirely. She stormed out of the lunchroom with such utter vehemence that he was left aghast.

He struggled between flat disgust and infatuation. Slowly he made his way

up to the studio floor proper. Here Jennings met him with a frightened expression.

"What happened to Millicent?" demanded the production manager.

"What hap—?"

"Yes! She came upstairs a moment or so ago in a tantrum, and one of the extra girls in another company's set laughed at her. She went white and red, they tell me, and then—" Jennings seized Meredith by the arm. "Come—look!"

In a corner of the studio was a group of picture-folk, still standing about in helpless, silent amazement. The setting was an old-fashioned country parlor with the inevitable cabinet of bric-à-brac, yellow-keyed organ with age-stained stops, and dome-encased wax flowers.

Everything was a wreck. On the floor bits of glass were mingled with the splinters of broken chairs and the débris from the cabinet. The family Bible sprawled open upon the floor in un-Christian proximity to a trampled box of face powder.

One of the male actors nursed a scratch on his face and a girl, probably the offender, sobbingly clutched at garments which looked as though they had been about torn off of her. The director, half sheepish, half angry, faced Jennings now in aggrieved fashion.

"Can't you cage your wildcats between scenes?" he inquired, in even tones.

Jennings drew Meredith away.

"She's on her way to your uncle," he confided, uneasily. "She said that if we had arranged that dressing-room she wanted on the roof she wouldn't have been carried away by the heat and made to forget herself this way. She"—Jennings gulped—"she never was quite this bad before. When your uncle hears what she has—"

Meredith dashed out without a word. A taxi was passing and he hailed it. In something less than ten minutes he emerged from the elevator at the executive offices of the Fleur-de-lis Film Corporation.

First he was struck by an unusual hush in the large room comprising the bulk of the space on the floor and noticeable through the glass of the partition. It seemed to him that everyone looked up, as though his arrival was significant; yet no one knew of his connection with the firm, nor of his peculiar duties. The air was charged with suspense—that was it!

He made his way back to the private quarters of the various officers of the company. In his uncle's special waiting-room the little blonde glanced up, plainly frightened. Then she giggled foolishly and made no effort to stop him as he hurried through. In the room of the secretary he noticed that the older woman was busy with her smelling-salts. She was not even conscious of an intruder's presence in her domain.

Arthur Dodge himself was flourishing a handkerchief, attempting to wipe spots of ink from his formerly immaculate waistcoat and shirt. The heavy glass top of his desk was cracked. Split, broken, the center of a puddle of black fluid, was the second inkwell to be destroyed by the widely popular and world-famous Millicent Carter within the space of four days.

Raising his eyes, Arthur Dodge recognized his nephew and gave vent to an ultimatum, all in the duration of half a second.

"Hell's bells, Conroy," he exploded, "she's worse! Do better than this by tomorrow night or I'll fire you, so help me Millicent!"

V

A MISERABLE young man in the attenuated quarters dictated by the recent

and constant shrinkage of his income, took to throwing books about the room in sheer despair. One was unusually heavy. As though a thought struck him, he walked over and picked it up again. After some thumbing of pages he found a place and began to read. Slowly he grinned.

He settled back into an easy chair and adjusted his reading-lamp. The volume was *Shakespeare's Works,* complete. Conroy Meredith had achieved his inspiration.

The next morning he summoned nerve enough to approach the girl.

"We—we didn't get much of a chance to talk yesterday," he said. "Won't you please"—coaxingly—"won't you please let me take you to dinner tonight?"

For a full three minutes she looked into his face. Her own was inscrutable. Then she smiled and he noticed for the first time the presence of two faint dimples in her cheeks.

"I owe it to you after what happened yesterday at lunch. I'll—I'll be ready here at seven and—and I'm really sorry. I'll make myself beautiful for penance."

As he escorted her to the table at Drennan's, so often reserved for him in former and affluent days, he almost faltered in his purpose. The manager himself hastened to greet them at the door, not without a side glance at his companion. Louis, the veteran waiter, stood with a deferential smile, ready to serve, nodding to young Meredith as though it were six days and not six months since his previous visit.

Millicent, without question, was the handsomest creature in the restaurant. In a gown of black chiffon and satin, she seemed joyously girlish. The low, soft edges of the silk blended into her skin and brought out its firm, white perfection. Her hair, ever glorious, was coiled about her head like a sunset lingering on distant hills. Her eyes were dark. Her mouth was relaxed in a youthful smile. In look and gesture, even in a subtle aura of friendliness, she seemed to wish to make up for her outbursts.

If he was infatuated before, he was now a hopeless captive. In her conversation she drew him out, meeting him upon familiar grounds. In matters of travel she was well read. Sports she loved and followed with all his own passionate enthusiasm. The cherry-stones, the consommé, special mountain trout—an hour passed before he remembered, very suddenly, the purpose which had brought him.

Before them on the table was a selected tenderloin, a filet mignon banked with mushrooms. He looked at her and saw her nostrils quiver slightly as she caught the fragrance of the dish. He glanced out to the polished floor and studied a dozen Grecian-clad dancing-girls in the midst of some evolution of their number in the cabaret.

Louis, behind him, waited to assist in the serving of the meat. Meredith set himself to his task. He drew the platter toward him with a sudden assumed gesture of dissatisfaction. He prodded at the steak with the point of his steel carving-knife, frowning elaborately. With a veiled sidewise glance he kept his companion under observation.

At first she was faintly curious. There was an attractive little pucker at the corner of her eyes, a movement of her mouth vaguely expressive of wonder. Then she spoke:

"It's all right, isn't it?"

He pretended not to hear. Certain now that she would watch him, that she would gain the full effect of the little drama he intended to stage, he began to flush with anger—anger supposedly directed at the dish before him and so well simulated that it felt almost genuine.

For perhaps a full minute he contin-

ued poking at the meat with the carver. Then, with an audible grunt he threw the knife to the table. He rose to his feet, running a hand through his hair. Again, with carefully concealed glance, he looked at the girl.

Her eyes were very wide. There was no mistaking her puzzled distress at his strange and wholly inexplicable conduct.

As though waking to action, he picked up the heavy platter, steak, mushrooms, and all. With reddening face he flung it, suddenly and without warning, out to the center of the dance floor. Narrowly missing one of the white-robed girls, it crashed to the polished surface at her feet, splashing her and causing her to scream in panic.

In an instant there was commotion. Louis attempted to seize Meredith, but Meredith shook him off fiercely. The dancers stopped. The lights flashed on full. Millicent, flushing now, leaned forward to remonstrate. She was humiliated, ashamed, uncomfortable, but Meredith ignored her. Casting off all restraint, yielding to whatever impulse popped into his head, he picked up the dishes one by one and broke them upon the table before him.

The din was terrific. Several women close by became hysterical. From every direction waiters came running. Many diners deserted their places.

The star tried to catch Meredith's arm, but her grasp was ineffectual. Clutching at his own collar he ripped it off. Calling upon the heavens and all the gods of antiquity as witnesses, he swore in a loud voice that he would be served only as he wished to be served and in exactly the manner that suited him.

At this moment two waiters, moving in concert, caught his wrists and pinned him down. The manager, rushing up, confronted the group in helpless fashion. Drennan's, as always, was unwilling to affront needlessly any young man of prominent family.

"If there is anything wrong, Mr. Meredith—"

Meredith meanwhile was cooling off. He had not realized just the extent to which he had carried his outburst; in fact he had not intended to give Millicent Carter so unqualified an example of temperament.

Suddenly a firm little hand took the sleeve of the manager. "Release him!" the star directed with a tone of command. "I'll take care of this." Then she grasped the arm of Meredith. "Send him a bill if you want," she added to the manager.

Outside, without ever relinquishing her hold of the coat of the man employed to subdue her, she called a taxi. In the car she laughed, leaning over to look up into his face.

"That was pretense, wasn't it?"

He met her gaze with the intention of denying it. Instead he smiled. "Yes," he admitted.

"Good! I like you for 'fessing up.' And—and it took nerve to play the scene, too!"

"I don't understand."

"I do! Once I played in a screen version of the *Taming of the Shrew.* I think, well"—imperceptibly she leaned a bit closer—"I imagine you've been sent to the studio by old Dodge to tame me, or something like that."

Intuition suggested he tell the truth. "Correct," he murmured.

"You know"—now he sensed a distinct melting on her part—"I'm getting to like you more and more. You're—you're frank. And I shall tell you something. All my temperament's put on, also."

"Put on?"

"Absolutely. When a girl starts in pictures she has to be different, and has to keep people worried to get anywhere, especially if she's as awfully young as

I am. But now I guess I've arrived and—well, I suppose it's time I called quits on the tantrums anyhow; they're becoming a habit and some time I'll say 'Hell's bells' when I shouldn't."

For a long while he was silent. Then he grinned.

"One thing—"

"Yes?"

"I'll always be afraid of you."

"That"—she laughed—"that will be good for you."

VI

JENNINGS fiddled with the new inkwell upon the new glass top of his superior's desk. "If you ask me," he grumbled, "I think it was better before."

Arthur Dodge was more optimistic. "He cured her, didn't he? She doesn't want a dressing-room on the roof."

"No, and that's the trouble. She doesn't want anything. Now that she's in love she's lost all her get-up-and-go. Hereafter give me pep if I do have to take the very chimes of hell along for good measure."

"Well" — philosophically — "it's an axiom, I guess."

"An axiom?"

"Yeh! You can't beat temperament."

A GIRL in the hammock is worth two in the surf.

That Cleopatra Woman

By Ray Valentine

IT was in a boarding-house where gossip flowed more freely than did the thick, lumpy gravy that the robust landlady served her undernourished boarders, and the women played football with one another's reputations by way of diversion. Where graces were not known from disgraces, and dry toast and weak coffee were served every morning between the hours of seven and eight with cruel and irritating regularity. Perhaps it was the unchanged diet that gave them that bitterness toward their fellowmen.

The women boarders resented Cleo Bodet's arrival in their midst with almost as much vigor as if they had been requested to increase their weekly stipend sufficiently to cover the cost of her food.

She was pretty—distractingly so, with a pathetic little droop at the corners of her red lips that plainly showed it had been recently acquired, as it often turned into a tremble when no one was looking.

By her indifference to her surroundings she antagonized her fellow boarders into a wild desire for some evidence in keeping with her name—Cleopatra. Never had the second-floor hall known such popularity. The red carpet with the pond-lily pattern suffered much trespassing; all without profit.

Mr. and Mrs. Bobby Gray occupied the room across the hall from Cleo. Mrs. Gray was away enjoying a vacation while her husband mopped his brow in the sweltering heat of the city.

Every woman in the boarding-house inquired daily about Mrs. Gray's health. "How is dear Mrs. Gray? I *know* you must miss her!" They felt that they had performed two duties: one, in appearing interested in the departed lady; another, in keeping Mr. Gray's thoughts in the narrow restrictions of matrimonial territory.

On the second afternoon of Cleo's arrival she alighted from the street-car and Mr. Gray got off just ahead of her. Slackening his pace he made it impossible for her to avoid catching up with him. As she reluctantly came abreast he said abruptly:

"I suppose you saw that I was waiting for you? What are you doing in this part of town?"

"I—I live there," stammered Cleo as she pointed toward the boarding-house.

"So do I! What on earth are you doing there?" asked Mr. Gray in an astounded voice.

Cleo swallowed hard and nervously fingered her handbag as she spoke in agitated tones to the man walking beside her.

"I really wouldn't have come if I had known you lived there," she answered weakly, as all the color faded from her cheeks and left her white and worn looking.

Stopping when they reached the steps they lowered their voices to finish the conversation that was causing each of them discomfort. Mr. Gray repeatedly leaned toward Cleo, and occasionally touched her arm rather sternly, as if to force her attention. The girl wiped her eyes often.

As he started to turn from her she clutched him hysterically by the hand, nodded her head and with a half sob said brokenly:

"I'll do it—tomorrow."

"No! Tonight!" he replied firmly.

Bobby Gray seemed to have grown into a burdened old man as he followed Cleo dejectedly up the steps.

Mrs. Bosworth, who led a life of ceaseless activity attending to the affairs of other people, was sitting behind the vines on the porch and heard stray bits of the conversation. No sooner had the door closed on Cleo's heels than she was on her way to the room of her chief accomplice in gossip.

Upon entering the room she sniffed as if her sensitive nostrils detected something unpleasant. She seated herself on the edge of a chair and held on to the arms as tightly as if she expected to be upset any moment.

"No more than I expected!" she began by saying. "That pink-cheeked, auburn-haired Cleopatra-woman in the second-floor front came in a few minutes ago with Mr. Gray. They didn't know anyone was within a mile of them when they stopped at the steps and whispered to each other. Furthermore, don't tell *me* that persons who haven't known each other two days have anything to talk as seriously about as they did. He undoubtedly knew that woman, Lord only knows where, before he met her here. If I'm not mightily mistaken he made her cry before he left her, and I know as well as I'm sitting right here that she made an appointment with him for tomorrow—the shameless hussy! Poor Mrs. Gray visiting her folks and her husband carrying on like this! It's positively disgraceful!"

Tightening her lips wrathfully, Mrs. Bosworth announced that she must be going. But not until she had confided to her friend that Cleo needed watching, and close watching at that. With a decided elevation of her brows and a significant look at Mrs. Gill's defenceless husband, who sat silently reading a paper, she left the room.

II

WHEN the supper-bell rang it changed the attack on Cleo's reputation to an assault on tough steak, weak coffee and soggy potatoes. Mr. Bosworth's habit of passing food without being asked was always pointed to by his wife as the essence of etiquette. But this evening it proved a source of great irritation. Cleo was sitting across the table from them.

After supper the crowd, as usual, gathered in the parlor to listen to the phonograph. Cleo wandered in among the last. One at a time the women left the room, some offering weak excuses and others not apologizing for their bad manners.

Cleo found herself the sole occupant of the room, so as the machine wheezed out the last strain of a ballad, she turned the crank and changed the record to a soothing waltz. While she was sitting with her eyes closed and her head resting against the back of the chair, Bobby Gray came into the room. He watched her uncomfortably for a while, then took her by the arm and half lifted her out of the chair,

"Let's dance."

As they started off to the melody of the waltz Cleo stopped moving her feet, dropped her head against Bobby Gray's shoulder and finished the cry that had begun earlier in the evening.

While Bobby anxiously patted her on the back and mumbled, "There—there—don't cry," over and over, Mrs. Bosworth and Mrs. Gill came in from the movies.

Excited and charmed by the scandal that was afloat right in their midst they

retired *immediately* to their respective rooms, keen on planning a fitting but dramatic disclosure of the evidence they had collected. They wanted it to be given out in a manner that would glorify their virtue and intensify the crime.

Later in the evening, after having prepared for her nightly ablutions, Mrs. Bosworth, with her hair done up on long, nickel-plated curlers, and wrapped to her ears in a bright bathrobe, started stealthily down the hall to the bathroom.

As she looked to see if the way was clear, Cleo came tipping noiselessly out of her room. She went to Mr. Gray's door and gently knocked. Receiving no response, she slipped a note under the door and returned to her room.

The feline nature in Mrs. Bosworth rejoiced, for it answered her, "I told you so." She continued her vigil in the hall, that was dark except for the gleam of moonlight that came in through the end window, then her piercing glance fell on the tip of paper that protruded from the crack under the door.

Her curiosity gnawed at her good judgment until it was in shreds. The bar of soap that was wrapped in a crocheted washrag dropped to the carpet unnoticed as she crept toward the bit of paper that showed white in the moonlight.

Stooping, she tried to get hold of the smooth edge, but her fingers were too fat and stnbby. Reaching up to the hard knot of hair she extracted a hairpin, bent one prong like a hook, and dragged the paper from its hiding-place. Silently following close to the wall, she quickly turned into the bathroom and locked the door.

With a feeling that would have done justice to a detective working to save his professional reputation, she snapped her jaws together, stretched her underlip upward until it pushed her mouth well up under her nose, and sniffed while she worked the flap of the envelope loose with the straight prong of the hairpin.

She removed a slip of paper, unfolded it and read:

CHARLES DEAR:

Bless Bobby Gray's heart! We never had a better friend. I forgive you; now I ask forgiveness. Among many other things that he made me understand was that I've been a hard-headed little fool. Why in the world didn't you tell me the amethyst pin you had in your pocket belonged to Bobby, instead of acting so stubborn when I accused you unjustly? I hate other women's birthdays, anyway—particularly when their husbands send you to the jeweler's for their presents.

I love you. Come and get me the second Bobby gives you this note—he will explain some things to you.

I love you, again, CLEO.

The next day Mrs. Gill ran breathlessly to Mrs. Bosworth's room to tell her that a man had just stopped in front of the house in a big closed car, kissed Cleo in plain view of anyone who cared to look, and drove off with her.

Mrs. Bosworth lifted her upper lip until her teeth showed, but that was the only claim the expression had to a smile. She was forced to say something, so she said:

"Is that so?"

The Odd Number

By F. Edward Pickerill

NORWOOD was an enigma whose hobby was the number thirteen.

On the thirteenth day of every month, something invariably happened to affect his fortunes—and always in his favor. On that day he would dare anything and was liable to do anything.

In succession, he won on the stock market; saved a millionaire from drowning; found several pocket books—with something in them—and did other notable things too numerous to mention.

And then, of course, he fell in love.

Would he propose on any day but the thirteenth? Not he. The thirteenth and only on the thirteenth, would he propose—and so he did. And for once in his life, it was an unlucky day. . . .

She married him!

LOTS of women who are trying to make an impression succeed merely in making a dent in their reputation.

The Chorus Man

By Carl Glick and Henry Robinson

WHENEVER Muggsy McArdle, the director, received a note from Gil Maitland, who was producing the show, he never dared disobey. So Muggsy, wiped his streaming forehead and swore convincingly at the new chorus man, third front, who apparently was all feet without the help of a guiding brain.

"Click them heels together like I told you! Off your feet now! One . . . two . . . three! Into the air! Click *My Gawd!*" yelled Muggsy in disgust, as the red-faced aspirant tied himself into a knot. "You're the prize cruller all right. You'll learn—when Charlie Chaplin plays Hamlet. Get off in back an' practise!"

"Practise?" sniffed Mazie de Wynne, prize toe-dancer of the new show, *Frivolity Fair*, that McArdle was whipping into shape. "That apple don't need practise. He needs air. Why don't you fire him, Mac?"

Muggsy shook his head.

"Can't be done," he replied, handing her the note he had received from Maitland. "Read that."

The note ran as follows

Give this gentleman a place in the chorus, and don't ask any questions.

"Of all things," said Mazie, lifting her eyebrows in becoming surprise. "What's the mystery? Has Gil gone off his nut?"

"Yep!" answered McArdle. "But I'll learn this to dance before I'm through with it. Here you, Bertie," he called out to a dainty young male at the other end of the line. "Step in and show pegleg here how to do that double click and jack-knife in two-four. *Ta-tiddy-ta-ta!*"

Bertie, the prize chorus man, pranced forward, his hands on his hips. From the top of his sleek, pomaded head to the heels of his suede-topped shoes he was the typical representative of a race that is fast becoming extinct. (Thank God!)

Bertie always spoke of himself as being "at liberty" when out of a job, and culled the counters of the Fourteenth Street department stores for silk-cuffed shirts and ready-to-wear kimonos. But he could dance. In McArdle's dialect, he "shook a nasty Douglas."

On this occasion he went through the desired paces to the director's *"ta-tiddy-ta-a"* without a hitch. Then with an irritating sneer he turned to the new chorus man and drawled, "Galton, old boy, think you can do it now? Or shall I show you all over again?"

"No thanks, Louise," shot back Galton. "I've got it, I guess."

And he proceeded to go through the complexities of the dance without further hesitation. But even at that he was awkward, and looked out of place in the chorus of a musical comedy. From the manly way in which he carried himself, his firm chin and the clean, healthy sparkle in his eyes, you would more easily imagine him as just coming from an athletic field.

As he shuffled through the dance to McArdle's hummed accompaniment, he

did not seem to be heeding the suggestions of the despised Bertie, nor the profanity of McArdle, whom he evidently did not fear.

He kept his eyes on Bebe Fansler, one of the chorus girls. He had been watching her all morning. Bebe was aware of this, and was trying her best to appear unconcerned. Incidentally, she was making an indifferent job of it. A flush of anger and shame swept over her clear, brunette skin as she heard McArdle threaten the awkward young fellow with dire disaster unless his dancing improved.

"Now you, Galton, or whatever your name is, you gotta get over this stiffness in your knees if you wanta stay with this here review. Make believe you're an eel or somethin' slipping around in a bowl of milk. Get the idea? That's all for today," he went on, turning to the chorus. "The whole bunch of you report at ten tomorrer, and we'll put the polish on the first-act. Gotta cigarette, anybody?"

The rehearsing chorus trooped off to the dressing-rooms, but before the bloomered Bebe could slip into the wings, Bertie was after her.

"Say, Bebe," he began, venturing to lay his hand across her shoulder.

The girl turned. Her gray eyes blazed, but before she could find words to express her contemptuous dislike, a cool, firm voice cut in.

It was Galton. He gripped Bertie by the collar, lifted him bodily from the floor, and set him down gently three feet away.

"Now run along, Bertie," he said, "or shall I have to do it again?"

Bertie, deeming discretion the better part of health, rearranged his tie, smoothed his hair, and slid away in terrified discomfiture. He had never been so roughly handled in his life.

As for Galton, he turned to Bebe laughing. But she faced him with a troubled look in her gray eyes. The fire had died away, but in its place was that stern determination that makes beautiful women wholly desirable.

"Bebe, dear," Galton began. "Listen to me this once. I want to tell you—"

"Please, Dick, I don't want to hear. Can't you see that you are making it very hard for me?" She dropped her eyes suddenly, fearful lest they should betray her, and abruptly wheeling she disappeared in the wings.

Galton turned away. There was a hungry, unsatisfied look in his eyes.

"Lots of time . . . lots of time . . . and patience . . . " he murmured to himself as he walked toward his dressing-room.

He had hardly gotten a step away when he was confronted by a much-rouged and underdressed blonde, whose chief claim to the rôle of ingenue lay in a surprising quantity of baby talk and two cerulean blue eyes. "Louise La Tour" she billed herself. But a dip into birth records would have exposed her as Maggie O'Ryan.

Louise undulated up to Galton, buttonholed him securely, and cooed, "Oh, Mr. Galton, I think it's so funny the way you are fooling Mac. It's quite screechable. Really. Him thinking that you can't dance. I've seen steppers long enough to know one even when he don't want it to be known. If I ain't mistaken, you've danced before?"

"Why not?" answered Galton. "Since I'm a chorus man. They usually dance . . . some, don't they?"

"Oh, you're a scream, Mr. Galton. What you claim to be and what you are, I bet are two different things. But it don't make no difference to me," she added with demure shyness that was very effective, she felt. She flashed a battery of seductive eyes. "I'd be glad to help you rehearse those hard steps any evening you say." She paused. "How about tonight?"

Now in certain schools of etiquette a man is bound to respond in the affirmative to all advances of the fair sex. Galton's innate sense of propriety rebelled against too evident use of the feminine divine right.

"I'm sorry, Miss La Tour," he said, after some hesitation, "but I have another engagement this evening. Some other time, perhaps—"

Louise raised a penciled eyebrow. "Oh, very well," she replied. Scarcely concealing her chagrin, she flounced away.

Galton looked after her a moment. Then he laughed to himself, and softly sang a paraphrase from Kipling:

"The more I see of the others,
The closer I fasten to one."

II

Few persons on this side of the Styx are as keen of perception as chorus girls. And certainly no remarks—not even those arising from the Limbo where dramatic critics view unending musical comedies—are more caustic than dressing-room sallies.

Galton was on the griddle. Mazie de Wynne was supplying the fire.

"He's the original mystery kid, and no mistake,' she said to Doll Feveral. "He can't dance. And Gawd knows he ain't no song-bird. But he's getting away with it. He musta caught McArdle passing counterfeit money or something, else Mac would have fired him long ago."

Doll offered something by way of defense. "He's a good looker, and say, Mazie, he's different from the Lizzies we see around here. Clean cut, like the guys you see at colleges. He sorta reminds me of someone I've seen in the Sunday papers. I dunno where, though. He's no chorus man. I know the brand, and he ain't got it. But I'll tell you one thing, he's got a crush on Bebe Fansler."

"Huh!" said Mazie, disdainfully, going through the solemn rites of putting on her street make-up. "She's another curio. They're a warm duet, them two. Nobody knows nothing about her, or where she comes from, either. She sticks on the airs of a duchess. Well, let's breeze, Doll. I got an engagement with a broker friend of mine at the Automat. He's got a slot reserved between twelve and half past. It's twelve now. C'mon."

They trotted airily out, and were soon followed by the larger part of the chorus. Only a straggling few were left. Some applying the final dab of rouge, others pulling on silk stockings with the ease born of long practise.

Soon the dressing-room was empty, save for Bebe, who sat in the farthest corner, seemingly lacking the energy to get into her street clothes. She looked at herself in her mirror. Her chin, surmounted by a despondent little mouth, nestled wearily in her cupped hands as she leaned with her elbows upon the table. Her gray eyes were wet with unshed tears. Her full lips quivered in a brave attempt to choke back the sobs that would swell up despite her efforts. She struggled for a moment to keep them down. Then suddenly she pillowed her dark head on her arms, and began to cry.

But only for a moment. She set her mouth resolutely and rose. She started to dress. Taking a final look in the mirror she said to herself, softly. "Never mind! He's worth it!"

Then she put on her gloves and went out into the pressing crush of Broadway.

III

As the days of rehearsal went on, Galton, working hard, had assured himself of a place in the chorus. His

dancing had improved, and his unfailing good spirits and genial manner had won him many friends among the members of the chorus.

Rumors still persisted about him, however. Mazie de Wynne accused him openly of being a secret-service agent. But he denied this, amid general laughter. Doll Feveral's active brain glued itself to the task of uncovering his identity.

One evening she was looking through the photogravure section of the Sunday papers, trying to remember where she had seen Galton's face before, when suddenly she came upon his picture. It was just as she had expected. She cut it out, and quietly put it away in her top bureau drawer.

"I thought so," she said to herself.

"Thought what?" asked Mazie, who was lying on the bed.

"Thought I'd be a detective," replied Doll, considering the matter closed.

All musical shows must serve an apprenticeship on the road before they can come into New York, and *Frivolity Fair* was no exception. The chorus, after three weeks of strenuous training, had been tortured into submission by McArdle, and now, together with the principals, were ready for the tryout.

"We open in Hartford," said McArdle to the cast after the dress rehearsal. "Tomorrow morning everybody's got to be at the Grand Central at eight o'clock. I know the sun ain't up at that time. But it won't hurt none of you. Two weeks on the road, and then two years on Broadway for us!"

"Maybe!" interrupted Mazie.

"Sink that gloom stuff," snarled McArdle. "We ain't paying you to make ouija board remarks. Just you deliver the goods, that's all I ask. Get me?"

"Yes, Mr. McArdle," chirped Bertie. "I'll go right home and pack my trunk."

"Don't forget to put in your kimono," said Galton, longing for the opportunity to take a decent, manly punch at Bertie's face.

"Who do you think you are?" replied Bertie, trying hard to look offended.

At last came the opening night, with its air of anxious expectancy backstage. The success of the show, and a long run on Broadway meant a great deal to some members of the cast.

From the clumsy way that Galton, in the dressing-room was trying to put on his make-up, it was only too apparent that he was in truth, an amateur. The lipstick wobbled between his inexpert fingers, and Bertie, who was watching him, could hardly suppress a simper of derision.

The thought came to him to put something across on this masculine Galton, who in some vague way commanded more respect than is usually accorded to gentlemen of the chorus.

There is a certain trick that is usually played on amateurs. It is an old, old gag, and was probably tried on Henry Irving when he made his first appearance.

There was a time when they used to send the tyro for the key to the curtain. But Bertie was more considerate.

"I say, Mister Galton, oh, Mister Galton," he said, "won't you run around to Joe's dressing-room and ask him to loan me his box of wrinkles?"

Galton looked up questioningly. "Sure," he smiled. And went out.

No sooner had he closed the door behind him than the entire chorus burst into laughter. But Bertie, after a moment's thought, began to look worried.

Galton rapped on the door of the comedian's dressing-room, and stated his errand.

Joe, the comedian, living up to the traditions of funny men of the stage, glowered at him in the best manner of his perpetual grouch.

"Wrinkles!" he bellowed. "Wot in 'ell d'yu mean by bothering me?"

But Galton's smile of innocence disarmed him.

"Somebody's trying to make a fool of you," he went on, explaining briefly the point of the joke. "Wrinkles don't come in boxes. You have to work for 'em!"

"Thanks, Joe," said Galton, still smiling.

When he pushed open the door of the dressing-room Bertie was brushing the last of his oily locks into place. An ominous silence fell over the men in the room. Bertie's running-mate sensed disaster, and fearing the worst, actively speculated whether or not in respect to their "friendship" he should wear mourning.

But Galton only smiled as he said, "Wrinkles don't come in boxes, Bertie. The only way you'll ever get them is by trying to fool with regular men."

Luckily for Bertie, just then the call-boy bellowed, "Overture." And there was a last rush in the dressing-room to put on the finishing touches.

IV

The genii that presides over musical comedies must have been suffering with indigestion when Gil Maitland's show started off. The chorus pirouetted through the two acts with hardly a semblance of an encore. And McArdle's vocabulary grew richer and more original as the show progressed.

"It's a good show," he moaned, "but it don't seem to be getting across. Here we got a houseful of paper, and they all act like they was handcuffed."

It is hardly to be said that Galton made a personal hit. He was even worse than a collegiate "prima donna" squashing through the inevitable campus musical comedy. It was a relief both to himself and the audience that he was not by instinct or training a chorus man.

That night Mazie and Doll were at it a in.

"He's the prize Camembert," sniffed Mazie. "What do you suppose he is doing in the chorus? Now I ask you, as one woman to another, what is he?"

"I got the dope on him," said Doll, mysteriously. "He ain't no chorus man, and never will be. See this?" and she brought out the picture that she had clipped from the paper.

It was Galton astride a polo pony.

"Well, what do you know about that?" gasped Mazie, reading aloud the accompanying legend: "Richard Galton, youngest steel magnate in America, succeeds his father as president of Amalgamated, Inc. Young Galton is now in Europe studying foreign market conditions."

She laid the picture down.

"Studying foreign market conditions," she echoed. "My Gawd! He's probably a John that's hooked onto the show so's he can follow Louise La Tour."

"No-o, he ain't that," replied Doll, wisely. "I saw her trying to date him up, and he cut her cold."

"What is his game then?"

"Listen," went on Doll. "He's here because he's got a crush on Bebe Fansler. And say, Mazie she ain't got no secrets from me, either. Remember that big steel smash-up in Wall Street last winter? Well, her old man was one of the guys that was ruined. Yep, and I guess the shock was too much, and it wasn't long after that he shot himself."

Mazie whistled.

"And that ain't all," Doll added. "I got half a suspicion that Galton, Senior, was the clean-up guy. They say he musta made a million cold on that deal."

Mazie's eyes were round with admi-

ration. "Gosh," she said. "You sure are the little Pinkerton kid. A romance going on right under my very nose, and me not guessing it at all."

"And what's more," said Doll, "she don't pay no attention to him at all. But I hope he marries her, and takes her out of the show business. She just don't belong. She's too refined."

"Are you trying to insinuate anything?" Mazie was on the defense.

"Oh, gee, Mazie, you oughta know me!"

Which started another argument we have no business listening to.

V

As the week progressed it became increasingly plain that *Frivolity Fair* was not one of the seven greatest musical shows of all time. McArdle grew gloomier and gloomier.

"Well, I've learned one thing, boys," he said, "you can get people to a show, sometimes, but you can't make 'em applaud."

When Friday came every member of the cast from the prima donna down could see the handwriting on the wall. And then the notice was posted that *Frivolity Fair* would close on Saturday.

But although the attendance had been consistently poor, one box was always occupied. Whether or not it had been chartered for the year, no one knew, but every night as the curtain went up, a beefy individual took his position in the box at the left. He cast admiring eyes at the chorus.

By Wednesday he had definitely singled out Bebe Fansler as the object of his attention. And as he watched her lithe figure his eyes sparkled. He was not pleasant to look at, and Galton, the self-appointed guardian of Bebe's welfare, conceived an immediate dislike to the well-fed ogler. And Bebe, unconscious of the danger, danced on, but she was heavy-hearted at the prospect of the closing of the show on Saturday.

Of course she would have to go back to New York, and then would be repeated that tiresome round of manager's offices, seeking for another chance. Or she might, she supposed, go back to that little upstate town, gray with all its dismal associations. Or else . . . she shuddered, set her lips together tight. Not that!

She read the notice that McArdle posted on the call-board, mechanically. Oh, the tragedy of those few brief words saying that *Frivolity Fair* would close on Saturday.

Bebe smiled grimly. As she left the theater that night she spoke to the old doorman with a cheerfulness she did not feel. Outside she saw that Galton was waiting for her. He came up. She tried to slip past him, but he blocked her way.

"Bebe," he said in a low voice, "you aren't fair to me. Give me a chance to prove to you that I want you. Let me try to explain."

She looked at him almost tenderly as he stood there. The sputtering arc-light cast fitful flashes across his earnest face. For a moment she almost yielded to this man who loved her. But the memory of her dead father, driven to suicide by the unwavering cruelty of the senior Galton's manipulations, fortified her against his entreaties.

"I—I can't, Dick. It wouldn't be right. I can't. That's all."

She walked away quickly. He did not try to stop her.

On Saturday night the show broke up. The members of the company received their salaries, although McArdle had to dig down into his own pocket.

"It's tough, I know, kid," he said to Bebe, handing her a small roll of bills. "Better luck next time."

She counted her money. Thirty-five dollars. Barely enough to get her back

to New York and last the coming week.

A voice broke in upon her.

"Why so pensive, pretty maid? What you need is a little supper and a kind friend. What about it, girlie?" the voice oiled on.

In the dim recesses of her consciousness Bebe remembered that voice. Not that she had ever heard it before. Oh, no. But it called to her mind an easy way out.

She had heard it as she lay on her narrow bed in the sultry summer nights, her young body aching for the cooling freshness of a mountain breeze. She had heard it on frosty winter afternoons when sleety needles pricked her delicate face and throat with their chilling barbs. It had called to her, bidding her, "Come, follow me! I am Pleasure! I am Temptation! I am all the things in life that you have had, and lost!"

But she choked it down, obstinately, fiercely. Now it was here again, this time in reality.

The man who had spoken to her was the beefy individual of the left-hand box. He wore a flashy suit, surprisingly cut. From the depths of a gaudy cravat flashed a larger diamond.

"Well, what do you say to the Blenheim? That's a nice, quiet place. No one will bother us. I've been watching you all through the show. and I rather guessed you needed a friend. . . . "

"Not your kind," Bebe flashed back, ashamed of having listened to him.

"Now, now. Don't get flurried. A nice little girl like yourself could be mighty comfy if—" and he smiled.

Galton had been watching the overtures that the altruistic Mr. John had been making. The instinct to protect Bebe leaped up more strongly than ever. Under pretense of looking for McArdle, he drew near the place where Bebe was standing. Galton heard the fellow's implied invitation. He struggled to keep himself from leaping at him and teaching him a lesson he would not soon forget.

The tempter wheeled again. Bebe repulsed his advances. The man grew insultingly worse.

"What do you think you are, anyway?" he sneered. "You chorus girls are nothing but—"

He never finished.

Galton caught him by the shoulder and whirled him around. He pointed to the door.

"Get out," he snapped.

The man did not move. He was somewhat too astonished. Who was this white-faced, officious chap who was taking matters so seriously? Hadn't he seen him in the chorus, stumbling all over himself in a crude, amateurish fashion? He was probably in love with the girl himself. Well, he would throw a scare into this chorus man, just to see how it worked.

"Get out yourself," he replied, drawing himself up boldly.

But it did not work. Galton drew back his right arm, measured the distance and let fly his powerful fist at the man's jaw.

Mr. John went down in a heap.

Galton turned to Bebe almost savagely.

"Come along," he said. "I've got something to say to you, and you've got to listen."

Taking her by the arm he led her out into the open air. The rain was falling heavily and a chilling wind blew down the deserted street. Galton drew Bebe into the shelter of a doorway.

He faced her and said, "Bebe, look at me."

She looked up, half afraid, half gladly.

"Yes," she replied.

"We can't help, you and I, what our fathers may have done to each other. Their lives are not our lives, and I

want to make amends for whatever my father may have done. I knew you didn't have any money, and were too proud to go to your friends. I've followed you around. Joined this show, where I've made a fool of myself in the chorus. But I did it to be near you, and keep you from harm. And I'm going to do it."

Bebe was silent.

Galton paused a moment. "Listen, Bebe," he said, placing his hands upon her shoulders, "you are through with the stage tonight. Do you hear me?" Bebe trembled as she nodded.

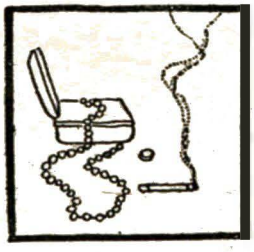
"Yes."

"And we are going to be married," Galton said.

Again Bebe nodded.

Bertie sauntering along saw the two silent figures in the doorway. Being naturally of a curious turn of mind, he came up. But when he saw for himself, he turned away, saying aloud, "This is no place for me! No place for me!"

WOMEN are undoubtedly better than men. But perhaps that is only because they do not have women to tempt them.



The Sly Old Fox

By Paul Everman

IN an upper berth of the wabbling tourist sleeper, the professor—Professor Onas Winthrop, if you please—surreptitiously edged his head between the green berth curtains and gazed downward to investigate the voices that had awakened him. He had heard the name Albuquerque mentioned, and that had not interested him particularly.

But now he saw a girl dressed in dark blue and the tall Pullman conductor beside her. He noticed that she was shapely, pretty and ultra red-cheeked.

At that very moment the girl glanced up and saw him, and as he jerked back his head he heard her laugh heartily.

He sighed. Then he turned over in his berth and slept a sound sleep that later he had cause to regret.

Even in his dreams the professor was not in a good humor, particularly because his journeying had begun in so inauspicious a manner. He had had to take a tourist berth, and an upper one, at that. This had been annoying, for the professor was long, and tourist berths are not. Then, too, the porter had failed to appear, and the berths had not been made up till midnight, the porter from the car ahead finally lending his aid. And, to complete these unpropitious facts, the nauseating smell of immigrant food had floated thickly from the other end of the car and had disturbed the professor mightily and disgusted him no less.

For the professor—well, he was a professor, an oldish-young professor who had emerged from a great university with three degrees and a cough. He delved in sociology, and once—for the purpose of sociological investigation alone, understand—he had seen a burlesque show.

With this burlesque experience he should have been prepared for what he discovered next morning. But he was not.

He awoke and found himself swaying somewhere in Kansas. Also he discovered something in his hand. He held up the something.

It was a woman's silk stocking.

The professor pinched himself fervently. No, he was awake. He examined the thing. It was champagne colored. It was new. It was soft. It was large—yes, it was large.

Then the professor remembered the girl in blue whose voice had disturbed his slumber during the night. And he grinned sheepishly when he caught himself wondering if the stocking might be hers.

Ignoble thought!

And yet, he argued desperately to himself, if it were hers, how had it got into his berth? How indeed? It had no wings with which to fly; at present, had no legs with which to climb. Yet somehow it had got there. Obviously someone had put it there. A mystery!

As the professor fluttered into his clothes he told himself that he was getting sentimental. He raised the stocking to his lean cheek. Why, it was

soft, just like a baby's head! (Somewhere the professor had read that babies' heads are downy and soft. Of course he had never had any baby's head up against his cheek. Oh, no!)

Dressed at last, he descended from the berth, the precious length of silk carefully folded in an inside pocket of his coat. He found that he had slept late, and the car was in its usual morning flurry.

The pair of newlyweds were cooing sweetly and appeared to be searching for something among their copious belongings. The big Irishman, Daugherty, was allowing his plain little wife to tie his necktie, while he blustered explosive complaints at her method. The tubby girl with the triple chin was still prowling around in her berth.

An old-rose kimono brushed past him. He jumped slightly and turned. It was the red-cheeked girl he had seen the night before. Blinking nervously, he clutched at his coat pocket.

Ignoble thought, professor!

He stumbled on down the aisle, giddy from the realization that she had smiled at him.

In the lavatory he thought many things—about champagne silk stockings and red cheeks and old-rose kimonos—the while he allowed a comb to trifle with his semi-baldness.

Daugherty's voice, raucous and chuckling, gained his attention.

"Yes. Lost her sock. And now she's up against it, because she had only one pair. See? Ho, ho! The wife offered to lend her a pair, but they wasn't big enough. You see—"

A long, hysterical whistle of the locomotive drowned out his voice.

The professor turned and saw that Daugherty was talking to a razor-faced man who looked like a circus *concessionnaire*.

A clutch at the inside coat pocket made the professor bold.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, smiling feebly, "but would you mind telling me who this lady is that lost her—her stocking?"

Daugherty guffawed obligingly. "Sure. Name's Miss Simpson—the fat one, you know. Friend o' yours?"

The professor shook his head. "No, no. . . . I should say not," he added strenuously, and walked with professorial dignity back to his berth.

But, if such a thing be possible, he had paled inwardly, for his mind had registered three distinct, albeit fluttering, impressions:

Disappointment—a triple chin.

Sympathy—a stockingless Miss Simpson.

Fright—possible and catastrophic detection of his coat pocket's contents.

II

Dodge City—Ar. 7:10 A. M.—Meal stop.

Among a large number of other passengers the professor hurried into the dining-room—like a member of a chain gang, he told himself desperately, with furtive glances to front and rear.

But his disappointment at the triple chin was allayed somewhat when he found, seated at his right, the red-cheeked girl of the blue dress. She had a smile and manipulated it perfectly. Once she asked the professor to pass her the syrup pitcher—please. He complied, and ventured a nervous remark of wit.

No disappointment here!

Presently he saw fat Miss Simpson at the other end of the table—fairly comfortable, he observed, and stockinged, he assumed. Probably the heavy immigrant had assisted her with a loan.

Gone, sympathy!

But fright—ah, fright was persistent, and disturbing. Over his hammering heart the strayed stocking seemed to

have attained mountain-like proportions and the weight and solidity of lead.

After breakfast he had to hurry to catch his train. He fled into the smoking-compartment. And here Daugherty pounced upon him and began a verbose and explosive argument about the high cost of living.

The professor merely nodded his head from time to time and contented himself by answering the Irishman's fallacious reasoning with mental reservations.

After two hours of misery he escaped and swung his thin legs down the car aisle to his seat, the berths having been made up meantime. He sat down facing the young newlyweds, who were gazing out the car window seriously contemplative of the wondrous bliss of life.

"I'll read," thought the professor.

And he jerked up his bag from below, placed it on the seat, opened it and reached inside for his copy of *Problems and Traits*.

Something soft and filmy caressed his hand, as if he had plunged it into a bowl of froth.

"See—see here!" It was Mr. Newlywed's angry voice in his ear. "Where did you get that?"

The professor started, gazed down, saw a soft piece of woman's undergarment which to him was nameless, and started again.

"My word!" he murmured limply. "My word!"

His eyes blinked about the car. The girl in blue was tittering audibly from behind a pink handkerchief. Fat Miss Simpson was gurgling to prevent an outburst. Even the blowsy immigrants were grinning.

And Daugherty, reappearing from the smoking-compartment, exploded violently.

"Ho, ho, ho! Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!"

"You—you damned robber!" sputtered Mr. Newlywed, whose name, by the way, was Bellamy. "You stole me wife's—my wife's—*this thing!*" And he snatched up the *thing* and presented it tenderly to the blushing Mrs. Bellamy.

The professor set himself stanchly.

"Ah—the truth compels me to state that you are tremendously mistaken," he said stiffly, his reasoning powers functioning once more. "I never saw that—that thing before."

"Then how did it get in your bag?"

The professor pondered this point for a moment.

"It is altogether possible," he said at last, "that you yourself put it in my bag by mistake, probably during the night. You will recall that the bag was under your berth. And, in view of the circumstances, I feel that I should have an apology."

Bellamy finally apologized, and the professor settled back in his seat and opened *Problems and Traits*. But he did not read. He knew that he was the cynosure of all eyes in the car—some of them suspicious, some of them jocose.

Meantime, the damning stocking in his coat pocket seemed to swell and grow.

III

La Junta—Ar. 12:05 P. M.—Meal stop.

The red-cheeked girl in blue again sat beside the professor in the dining-room, but he exhibited a sad inaptitude for conversational abandon, notwithstanding the girl's apparent friendliness.

The meal over, he rushed down the station platform with hope for a moment's seclusion. But he observed Daugherty and Mrs. Daugherty watching him, and, remembering that the train was to leave in two minutes, he

hurried up the car steps without waiting to assist the girl in blue, who came directly behind him.

Thrusting his head inside the lavatory door, he saw the razor-faced little man, who grinned at him widely.

"They're all watching me," thought the professor in a panic.

Turning, he stalked to his seat, past fat Miss Simpson, past the Daughertys, and sat down facing the Bellamys, who eyed him frigidly.

A hand tapped his arm.

"Please," said the girl in blue, "would you raise my window? We haven't no porter, you know."

The professor raised the window.

"And won't you sit down—here?" the girl invited, motioning to the vacant place beside her.

The professor sat down and crossed his long legs with assumed nonchalance.

"I trust you are having a pleasant journey," he remarked weightily, at last.

"Oh, fair. This ain't a bad old steam wagon, but I sure hate to have to travel tourist. It's fierce."

"It is," agreed the professor, and smiled back at her.

Her name was Alma, she told him, coughing. She was going to Phœnix for her health. Her old bellows were about played out.

The professor was surprised. "You don't look sick," he declared. "Why, you have an excellent color."

She sighed again. "Looks are deceivin' with us lungers. Sometimes the fat ones kick in the quickest. And my color"—she turned a red cheek for his inspection—"that's from fever, you know."

The professor was duly solicitous. And before long he had told her who he was and where he was going—to California.

"So you're a college professor," she said admiringly. "I went to a girls' school once, back East."

"Ah—what school was it?"

"Oh, just a little school. I don't suppose you ever heard of it."

Presently she leaned over, smiling roguishly.

"Say," she whispered, "has that old bird Irishman been tryin' to kid you over what happened this morning?"

The professor frowned. "It is hardly a thing to joke about."

"Oh," she gurgled, "it *was* funny, you know—you findin' *that* in your bag that away. These young lovey-dovies across here make me sick," she went on confidingly. "The idea o' him accusin' you o' takin' *that!* What would a man like you want to keep anything like *that* for?"

"What indeed?" agreed the professor weakly, freshly disturbed by the thought of the other *thing* in his coat pocket.

IV

Las Vegas—Ar. 7:10 P. M.—Meal stop.

Alma clung to the professor during dinner.

"My," he thought, alarmed, "I'll have to get rid of this stocking somehow. Why, it's dangerous! I'll have to get rid of it!"

And, bolting his food, he left Alma and the dining-room and hastened back to the tourist car. As he entered he was struck by a sudden resolve: he would return the stocking to its rightful owner, Miss Simpson. Poor girl! Yes, he would. . . .

No one else was in the car. So he hurried to the seat that was Miss Simpson's and reached for her suitcase. Then, gingerly, he drew out the stocking, allowed it to fall from its folds, and for a moment gazed at it.

How large it seemed, and coarsely made!

He stooped to open the suitcase. It was locked.

"Why, Professor Winthrop!" chuckled Alma's voice in his ear.

He turned to find her standing in the aisle, her arms akimbo, her eyes fastened mischievously on him.

"Eh—eh—oh, the devil!" muttered the professor, trying to conceal the stocking behind him.

But Alma stepped forward and took it from his hand.

"No, not the devil," she laughed. "Just Alma. My, professor, you're a sly fox!"

The professor squirmed. "You don't understand—" he began shrilly.

"La, yes! I understand! You're just making a collection of girls' things, that's all."

She laughed again, a bit boisterously.

"I'm a gentleman," protested the professor.

"Sure you are. And gentlemen like nice silk hose. Oh, I tell you, professor, you're a sly fox!"

The professor heard voices and footsteps outside the car.

"See here," he begged suddenly, frantically, "help me out of this, won't you? Hide that—that thing!" He jerked a trembling finger toward the stocking.

Alma efficiently smothered it in her handbag just as the passengers began to reappear. Then she invited him to sit beside her for the rest of the evening.

Relief had come. He was rid of the thing!

In a way, he enjoyed Alma's company. She was different from the college girls to whom he was more or less accustomed. She was jolly, and her banter had less of a sting than that of Daugherty, for instance.

As the evening wore on, he grew less and less mindful of her digging at his ribs, whispering, "Old sly fox!" while she laughed heartily—laughter that sometimes ended in a slight paroxysm of coughs.

They grew oblivious of the fat Miss Simpson, of the Bellamys, of the explosive Daugherty and his plain little wife.

Finally, his berth made up, the professor went to bed, but Alma sat up—to write a letter, she told him.

He was soon asleep, for he was now at peace with the world. He even snored a little—dignified, peaceful, professorial snores.

Meanwhile, time and train rolled on to:

Albuquerque—Ar. 1:15 A. M.—Lv. 2:10 A. M.

V

With Albuquerque a hundred and fifty miles behind, the professor was awakened by Daugherty's voice roaring below.

"Come down out o' there, you dirty robber!"

He thrust his head between the green curtains and stared down at the speaker and a crowd of passengers who were gesticulating excitedly below.

"Come on out o' there, you dirty robber!" repeated Daugherty, waving an appallingly thick fist in the professor's face. "Come down an' gimme back my six thousand dollars!"

"Who—I?" gasped the professor.

A dozen hands jerked him down, while he protested his innocence.

The Pullman conductor came hurrying down the aisle. Daugherty seized his arm and demanded:

"Did anyone get off o' this car during the night?"

"Nobody but the little sick girl. She got off at Albuquerque."

Daugherty confronted the professor threateningly.

"You *will* steal women's clothes and hide 'em in your bag, will you? An' you *will* steal my six thousand, will you?"

"Here, what's this?" squealed Miss Simpson, pushing through the crowd

and pointing to something limp and yellow which dangled from the edge of the professor's mattress.

It was the fateful silk stocking.

The conductor jerked loose a piece of paper that was pinned to the stocking, unfolded it, cleared his throat and read aloud:

Dear Professor:

I'm leaving you at Albuquerque and am taking with me the big Irishman's roll, which I will lift while he is asleep tonight. The pickings in this car are rather slim, as they always are when I travel tourist. But I've had a lot of fun out of presenting you with the fat girl's stocking and Mrs. Bellamy's nice teddy, which I collected while scouting around the first night I was on the train. It was an easy job. No porter to bother, you know.

My cough is better, thanks. And it may interest you to know that the girls' school I used to go to is in New York and is called Wayward Girls' Reform School.

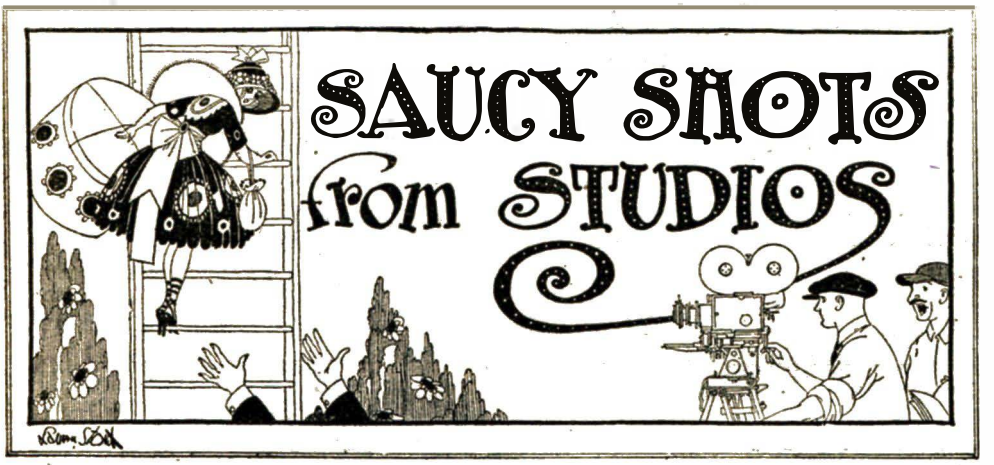
Remembering your fondness for the fat girl's stocking, I am leaving it for you to wear over your heart, as before.

Good-by, professor, you sly old fox, you!

With love,

Alma.

MAN proposes. Woman rushes at it.



By Alice Glenister

YOU all must know Elinor Glyn, and if you don't know her, you must know *Three Weeks*, the novel that has been covertly tucked under the mattresses of more high-school and college girls, under the counters of more sweet and sophisticated girl clerks, and frowned upon by more grandmothers—who also secretly read it!—than any other novel since *Trilby*.

Perhaps you are wondering just why I am writing about this famous English author in the motion-picture news of this magazine. Simply because, my dear readers, the world-renowned Elinor Glyn is going to write directly for the screen.

Paramount Pictures have engaged Mrs. Glyn to write directly for them. Though they will use some of her published novels, she will write special stories for them. She is now established at the Hollywood studios, where she is learning the A B C of motion-picture technique.

When I read *Three Weeks*, little did I dream that I would one day be chatting with the author of it in her suite at a famous New York hotel.

Mrs. Glyn is most charming. Five minutes after meeting her, I felt that she was a friend of long standing.

At once she plunged into her prospective work, and from her conversation I gathered that she is going to put into operation some very decided views of her own, which I must confess sound like a marked improvement in the making of pictures.

"The first thing I shall insist upon is to be left absolutely free to select my own casts, in order that exactly the right types may be chosen for the characters in my stories. Not again would I suffer as I did upon viewing the picturization of *The Rise of Katherine Bush*. Did you read that story when it ran serially in the *Cosmopolitan?*"

"I certainly did, and I saw the film too. Like yourself, I was thoroughly disgusted with the pictured Katherine Bush."

"Oh, horrible, horrible! Instead of a girl who was hard, unfeeling, detest-

able and utterly unscrupulous as to the means that carried her to her goal—from a mere typist to the wife of the Prime Minister of England—they made her a weak, soft, yielding creature who lolled and moped about and who could never get anywhere without being pushed. Oh, it was horrible!"

Then Mrs. Glyn leaned forward eagerly.

"Have you ever been before a motion-picture camera?" she asked.

"Not guilty!" I was glad to answer.

"Neither will I—again. Why, I *did* think I had some little claim to good looks—a nice skin and pretty teeth—but the camera is merciless; it made me look as though I had smallpox, and my teeth were dark and ugly."

Mrs. Glyn is right about the "claim to good looks." She is a woman who would attract attention anywhere, for she possesses a magnetic personality, sparkling blue eyes, an abundance of glinting red hair, lovely teeth and a petite figure.

On the day I called she wore a clinging gown of black charmeuse and a chic little gray satin turban, jauntily aslant.

Mrs. Glyn has one possession that she guards jealously. It is the coat of an immense tiger, and its story is unique. I am sure you will be as intrigued by it as I was.

During the late war a great bundle was delivered to Mrs. Glyn, accompanied by an anonymous letter which stated that her book, *Three Weeks*, had been the means of saving the writer's life from this same tiger, so, in all gratefulness, he was sending her the skin as a souvenir and gift of gratitude.

Mrs. Glyn had the skin beautifully lined with a soft mauve silk. Sometimes she wraps it around her for an evening coat. But just how the book saved the donor's life is still mystifying Mrs. Glyn.

Miss Dorothy Dalton, late of the touring *Aphrodite*, has returned from Chicago. I saw her hard at work at the Long Island City studio of Paramount. As my visit was hurried and my guide leaving shortly, I did not have a chance to chat with her. The delectable Dorothy looks none the worse for her strenuous year.

I wonder if any of you have noticed that players who were once heralded as top-notch stars have been cast in second and sometimes third-rate parts in some of the recent notable releases.

It surprised me greatly to see Montagu Love, erstwhile World Picture star, playing opposite Geraldine Farrar in Bertha Kalich's starring vehicle, *The Riddle-Woman*.

William Desmond, who has been a star almost since the beginning of the motion picture plays a part with Mr. and Mrs. Carter De Haven in *Twin Beds*. It is true that his part is prominent, but the De Havens are the stars.

Charles Richman, who has starred this country for years on the legitimate stage and in the movies also, plays leading man to Katherine MacDonald, who, however beautiful and able, is a "mushroom" in comparison.

And here again I find him with Anita Stewart, who is also endowed with her share of pulchritude, playing second fiddle—that is, leading man. After all, no matter what the reputation of a leading man before he *is* a leading man, it is the star and the star alone who comes in for the heavy end of the attention and credit.

As the farmer said upon his first view of an airplane: "Don't it beat all?"

Mr. Love was asked to explain this situation when he appeared in support of Miss Farrar. He said: "A motion-picture actor of ability would rather support another star in a meritorious production—a production which is assured

exhibition in the best motion-picture theaters—than to star himself in an inferior one. It is often a pure gamble, and the actor exposes himself to criticism."

Quite a different story is the one that floated Eastward to me on the wings of my Coast mail.

Have you seen the Metro picture *Are All Men Alike?* And do you think they are? My Coast correspondent asked May Allison, star of this picture, the latter question. To which she replied, "I am not quite sure, but it is certain that all women are not.

"That is one of the ineradicable fallacies in men's minds—that all women are alike, insofar as what pleases and displeases them, though they may be very different in looks and temperament.

"Men will not, despite suffrage and other evidences that women are capable of thinking, believe that we are individuals. They evade arguing with us on the score of 'Oh, well, that's a woman for you.'"

What do you think about it, friend man or woman? My opinion differs from Miss Allison's. Women are more or less alike in one respect: they all look up to the man who gives them credit for intelligence and discretion.

We all love adoration and respect, but all men are not alike, not by any means. There are more types of the male of the species than there are the female. But this isn't motion-picture news, is it?

Have you watched the rise of Alice Lake from a little extra girl at Vitagraph to a star with Metro? She has now taken her place as a full-fledged star, all because of her excellent work in *Body and Soul.*

I saw her over at the Vitagraph studio one day. She is a very graceful girl, with hazel eyes and a mass of dark brown hair. Since her Vitagraph days she has floated hither and yon, from comedies with Mack Sennett and Fatty Arbuckle to strong drama with Herbert Rawlinson. She played with him in *Come Through,* which is one of the best pictures I ever have viewed.

Bert Lytell picked Miss Lake for a future in stardom and first had her with him as "Boston Blackie's Sweetheart" in *Boston Blackie's Redemption.* A part in his picture, *The Lion's Den,* followed. After that she played with Hale Hamilton in *Full o' Pep.*

Body and Soul is a strong drama, in which Miss Lake justifies her advancement to title.

Frank Lloyd, who directed *Madame X,* told me a funny story about extras not long ago. It was an incident that occurred during the "shooting" of that picture.

"Extras are funny people, because they have so many queer views of the world. When we were doing the court-room scenes for *Madame X* groups of extras were always to be found in the audience talking on screen topics, and especially about the censorship of films.

"One day the argument waxed very hot. A 'French citizen' jumped up, shook his fist and spat out these staccato words: 'You don't know nothin' about censors. I tell you it's a curse to the business; it's a curse to any business; now the booze is gone and they're tryin' to cut out tobacco. After they do that you'll eat your stack o' wheats with malted milk instead of coffee, and then some egg'll up and organize a pork-and-beans board of censors and we'll have to eat baby's food or sumpin' else—bah!'"

"After that, what did you do, Mr. Lloyd?"

"After that we shot—the picture."

"Oh, I thought you were going to say that you shot the grouch—he had that much coming to him, I'll say."

It would seem from the following that Maurice Tourneur has a sense of humor that has never before been accredited him. Said he:

"I made *Treasure Island,* then somebody else made *Terror Island,* and soon another producer released *Trumpet Island,* and now I suppose Mack Sennett will do a burlesque and call it *Pleasure Island,* and put a lot of bathing girls in it."

What does he mean by that?

Charles Ray has again drafted a Christie Comedy girl for his leading woman. She is Laura La Plante, pretty and blonde and seventeen. She will appear in Ray's next First National production, which he has just started.

Miss La Plante comes right in on the pretty heels of Dorothy DeVore, another of Christie's leading ladies, who was loaned to Charles Ray for the rôle of "Mary" in *Forty-Five Minutes from Broadway."*

Charles met Al Christie the other day and the portrayer of "hick" characters remarked that he thought Ray might move his productions over to the Christie plant—it would facilitate the matter of getting girls.

Doraldina, whose daring Hawaiian dances have won for her a world-wide reputation, has brought from the South Sea Islands a dance that is expected to make her Hawaiian one look like an old-fashioned round dance in comparison.

It is the dance of the White God, which will be seen for the first time in Doraldina's first Metro starring production, *But Yet a Woman.* Incidentally, it will be executed in a costume as original, but far more beautiful, than the grass skirts worn in the Hawaiian dances.

Well, I have seen the much-exploited and talked of *Way Down East,* produced by that master of motion-picture art David Wark Griffith.

As I seated myself I tried to recall the rather distant experience of seeing the original stage production of this ancient and rather mildewed melodrama. Certainly they must have had to dust the cobwebs from the script when they took it from the shelf at the time it was sold to its motion-picture director.

In the original stage production the beloved old "down East" folks were imbued with a naturalness and originality of humor that was a delight to witness. Also, they seemed possessed of the usual amount of brains—even Martha Perkins, that hen-cackling old dame, who delighted in sordid scandal.

Hi Holler, Seth Holcomb and Reuben Whipple were lovable in their simple and homely way, with their fights and jokes and love affairs. Dear old absent-minded Professor Sterling and the others! How my memory went back to them as I read the familiar names on the program. Eagerly I anticipated the parting of the curtains that would reveal the screen.

Everything was as it should be until the visit of Anna Moore (Miss Lillian Gish) to her relatives in a nearby large city. Then, to my astonishment, scenes passed before my eyes that made me gasp. We were transported to the drawing-room of Mrs. Tremont, where the ladies wore ultra-modern afternoon toilettes, and Anna and her mother were clothed in the most *ancient* of "backwoods" styles. Each one is all right in its day, but why adhere to the ancient and honorable in one scene and skip clear through almost to the end of the Twentieth Century in another? Don't the rural districts keep pace with the city in styles? Surely they are not a decade or two behind them.

In one scene our friends in the country are transported about their roads in a one-horse shay that almost falls to

pieces and the horse has to be coaxed up the hill with a handful of oats, whereas, in the next screen our rich friends travel in the latest model Rolls-Royce.

Photographically, it is beautiful and the acting of Miss Lillian Gish is fine. The ice scenes are splendid and the whole performance produced on a lavish and extravagant scale. The summer is real and so is the winter. But I resent having my country friends made to look and act like veritable "boobs," and how can any perfectly healthy young man, dreaming fitfully and tossing about in his bed, suddenly wake up with his hair perfectly brushed, parted straight in the middle without one hair out of place? How do they do it? It can't be done except in the movies. Mr. Griffith has lifted our homely old melodrama from the sombreness of its stage presentation, admitted a strain of splendid humor, and emphasizing the tragedy and trial of the girl who was led into making a mock marriage, brings tears where no other producer is able to create even interest. He knows how to bring out the high lights with the finest and clearest effects, but his production is inconsistent. And that is my greatest objection to it.

Fatty Arbuckle is certainly scoring high in his new feature productions, much more so than he ever did in his slapstick comedies. He is always the comedian, but he has instilled into his acting a touch of refined comedy that enhances his performances and puts them into the same class as any other five or six reel feature.

Paramount Pictures are presenting him in a series of productions adapted to the screen from well-known stage productions and stories. In his latest, *The Life of the Party,* he carries his character throughout with consistency and seldom reverts to slapstick style.

Mabel Normand is nothing if not determined. When she was East she told this story on herself at a luncheon: "One day when my car was out of commission, I had to ride home from the studio in a street car. Previous to this I had made up my mind that I would never give a man a chance to say he had to give up his seat to me. The car was crowded, but I had not been standing long when an elderly man sitting directly in front of me got up and, I thought, offered me his seat.

"I pushed him gently (here Mabel got a laugh, for Mabel is not what one would call a 'gentle' girl) into his seat again. He looked at me rather disappointedly, and at the next block started to get up again. Again I pushed him into his seat.

"At the next block he rose determinedly and when I began to remonstrate with him said:

" 'Please, Miss, won't you let me get off? I've gone two blocks past my corner now.' "

Everyone who knows Miss Normand can appreciate this little joke. Mabel is always getting herself into queer predicaments through her desire not only to do someone a good turn but through her unpremeditated and very sudden acts.

For the first time since 1917, Miss Ethel Clayton is producing pictures in New York. She has recently returned from abroad, where she had a short vacation, and is busy making *The Price of Possession,* by the English author, Winifred Boggs. All of the scenes are located in Australia and the London suburbs. The story, replete with dramatic situations, revolves around two nephews, one of whom steals a birthright and flees to Australia. The other nephew follows and kills him. The wife of the first nephew accepts the birthright, but after intense conflict gives it

up. Miss Clayton's leading man is Rockliffe Fellows, well known on the stage and screen.

Miss Clayton has a pleasing screen personality and although sometimes given a poor story, carries her own part with artistry and skill. Especially fitting to her work was *The Sins of Rosanne,* taken from the Stockley story *Rosanne Ozanne.*

A Message from Mars is now being produced at the Metro studios here in New York. Bert Lytell is the star. Getting the story for production and selecting the star, were mere child's play for the production staff, but to clothe the Messenger fittingly and to represent inhabitants of Mars in the prevailing mode of dress on that planet was a serious proposition.

The art directors, M. P. Staulcaup and Arthur Zellner, delved into books and tomes devoted to history and tradition anent Mars until they discovered what is geometrically known as a tetrahedron figure. You will have to learn to pronounce this yourselves, as it will undoubtedly be adopted by the men's tailors throughout the land; I should say carpenters, for it is made of wood. The only item against its popular adoption as wearing apparel is that it weighs twelve pounds. In shape it has three flat surfaces, spangled with glittering gold stars.

Beneath the figure is worn a costume of tufted cloth that resembles a suit of tights, somewhat on the style favored by his Satanic Majesty. A pointed helmet is also worn. This costume will be worn by Alphonz Ethier, who will play the part of the Messenger. There are not many people who will envy Mr. Ethier his rôle.

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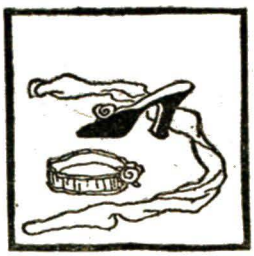

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The new gems are called Lachnites. They are cut by the diamond cutters of Europe — and mounted in solid gold. Their radiance is guaranteed eternal.

If you will send us your name and address on the coupon below, we will send you a Lachnite on 10 days' free trial. Send no money. Simply tell us which of the solid gold rings illustrated above is your choice.

If You Can Tell a Lachnite From a Diamond—Send It Back

When the Lachnite comes for the free trial merely deposit $4.75 with the postman, and wear the ring ten days as if it were your own. And then, *if you or any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back,* and your deposit will be refunded immediately.

But, if you decide to keep it, you may pay for it at the rate of $2.50 a month, or a trifle more than 8 cents a day. The total cost is $18.75, less than a twentieth of the price of a diamond.

Send the Coupon Without a Penny

Do not send us a penny. Just fill out the coupon and tell us which of the solid gold rings you prefer. Either one will be sent you with the distinct understanding that if you can tell it from a diamond, you may send it back. Please be sure to send your finger size. To do this cut a strip of paper that will meet over the knuckle of your ring finger. Decide now to see a Lachnite for yourself. There is no obligation in sending the coupon. Send the coupon now.

HAROLD LACHMAN COMPANY
204 So. Peoria Street, Dept. 1692, Chicago, Ill.

Acid and fire have been the diamond tests for years. No gem but a diamond could exist in hydrofluoric acid or in the flame of the blow torch. But Lachnites withstand these diamond tests just like diamonds. The radiance of Lachnites is guaranteed eternal.

Harold Lachman Company
204 South Peoria St., Dept. 1692, Chicago, Ill.

Send me prepaid Ladies' / Men's Solid Gold Ring set with a genuine Lachnite gem. It is understood you guarantee the gem to retain its brilliance forever. When it comes, I will deposit $4.75 with the postman. After 10 days I will either return the ring or send you $2.50 a month until the balance has been paid. Total cost to me, $18.75. If I return the ring, you will refund my $4.75 immediately. I enclose my finger size.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... *State* .....

In America alone over 200,000 people in all walks of life are wearing Lachnite Gems. And every gem was to be returned if it could be distinguished from a diamond. 200,000 people have found the way to wear exquisite jewelry at a trifling cost.