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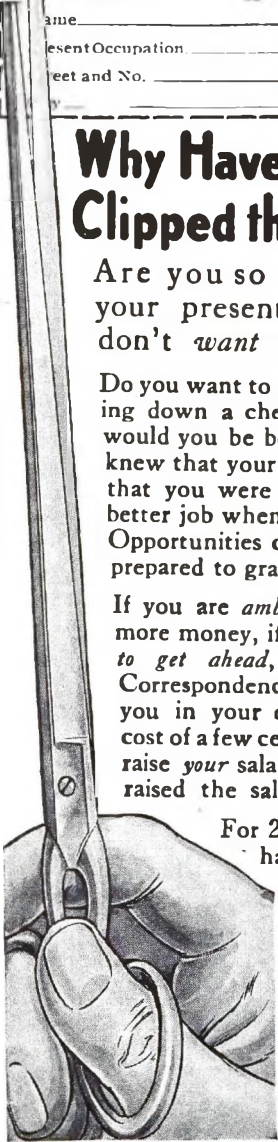
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All in All a Feature Issue

August Short Stories: Out July 12

WALT MASON OBJECTS

In a recent issue of his interesting column in the *Emporia Gazette* Walt Mason turned his sharply pointed pen in our direction when he said:

"All the fiction magazines have adopted the idea of publishing a book-length novel in each issue, and if the stories were any good the plan would be a great one. There are a dozen of them who write so much alike that nobody could distinguish the work of one from that of another."

Continuing he named James Francis Dwyer, H. Bedford-Jones and others whose work appears in *SHORT STORIES* as being in the class of writers to whom he referred.

THE SUN DIAL JUMPS IN

Now, we did not get particularly excited over Walt's diatribe because think that a good many of our readers can enjoy *SHORT STORIES* and also enjoy Mason's trenchant paragraphs, but a few people did get excited over the matter and discussed it pro and con in the "Sun Dial" of the *New York Evening Sun*, conducted by our good friend Don Marquis.

The fact of the matter is that we ourselves do not think for a minute that Walt Mason has been reading the authors he refers to, or he never could bring himself to say that their stories were similar in style or anything else.

Here for instance:

"Glancing around him in a slow, phlegmatic manner, the big man advanced toward the table where sat the first customer. Very carefully, as if he fully expected it to break under his weight he lowered himself into the opposite chair and nodded cautiously.

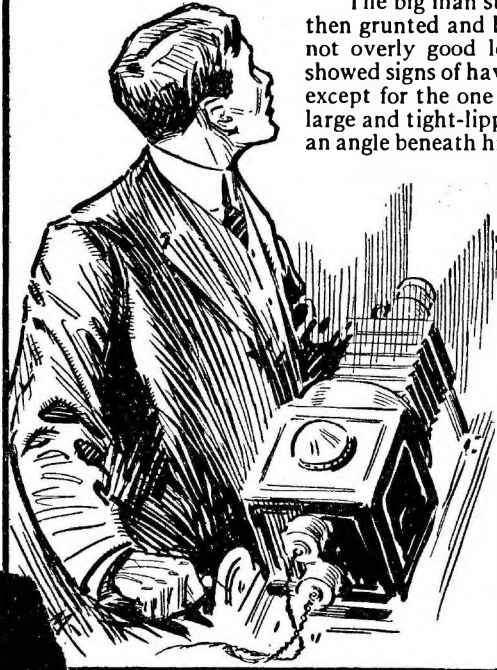
"The big man stared at him for a moment—a slow solemn stare then grunted and began to fish for something in his pocket. He was not overly good looking, this big man. His nose was stubby and showed signs of having bled recently; his hair was sandy, his eyes gray except for the one too puffed to disclose its true color; his mouth was large and tight-lipped, his chin broad and square and running back at an angle beneath his ears. His clothes looked and smelled greasy, and his hands were extraordinarily dirty and awkward in their great size."

I'll leave it to any fiction fan in the country as to whether he wouldn't recognize that right away as the two-handed punch of Herbert Bedford-Jones.

Could any one confuse the manner, style, method, or whatever of the above with this bit of liquid fire from one of James Francis Dwyer's recent stories:

"I wish I could describe that fight between Daredevil Herrick and Black Mitchell. I wish I could describe it in a manner that would make the reader see it as I saw it on the moonlit night above the Lagoon of the Four Faces. It was a fight that Homer might have sung about, a fight that Rolla the Viking would have given us his sword arm to

Bulletin Board



see. It held the four of us, the two girls, myself and Ferguson the trader, who had ambled out of his shelter the moment Herrick sprang."

I think not.

And now, if you are not convinced maybe you will recognize a difference in the style of the two previous quotations and the following:

"She is a woman whose importance may be indicated with a single penful of ink: her most intimate friends whisper to one another that she secretly nourishes the ambition to be the first woman President of the United States.

"She is further characterized by the fact that even those enemies of hers to whom the rumor has reached find nothing incredible nor ludicrous in the idea."

Who do you suppose wrote that? Could it be Dwyer, Bedford-Jones, Fred Moore? It is taken from a story by Don Marquis, whose very column gave publicity to Walt's complaint, published in *SHORT STORIES* in 1913. So there, old Dial Tender. You see where we have the "Sun Dial!"

WHAT WE THINK

Seriously, now, is it so bad as Walt Mason believes? Are these men not doing sincere work? Does it not show skill, ingenuity and a certain feeling toward the ancient and honorable art of telling a story? As troubadours they hold their audiences, and audiences, an editor learns, have a trick of detecting insincerity, vacuity of ideas, or worst of all a little heaviness in the spinning of the yarn. In any event they hold their audiences where a good many more pretentious (I do not say *better* authors) go unread.

WHAT DO YOU THINK

However, good friends, it is all up to you. Do you agree with Walt Mason, or don't you? In any event it seems quite proper to present to you, the readers of *SHORT STORIES*, an opportunity to tell us exactly the sort of fiction you prefer.

Won't you send this page back to us with the following questions answered? If you want to write us a letter, so much the better.

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Short Stories

JULY, 1915

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Short Stories



LOST SHEEP

By VERE SHORTT

A COMPLETE NOVEL OF THE FOREIGN LEGION

CHAPTER I

HASSAN ALI

IT WAS nearly six months from the day that Jim Lingard having run through a fortune handed down by a long ancestry of distinguished soldiers had sent in his papers and left the Service of the smart 31st Hussars where one simply must have money or withdraw. He was seated on a bench in that little garden in Paris which nestles between the railings of the Avenue de La Motte-Picquet and the old gray wall of the Invalides. He was still well and carefully dressed, but a close observer would have noticed that his collar was frayed at the edges, that his boots were worn, and also that there was a drawn look at the corners of the mouth.

He had had a violent quarrel with his uncle, Colonel Lingard, when he announced the fact that he had sent in his papers, and had been forbidden the gloomy old house

in South Kensington. Jim had few acquaintances in London, and since he had left the Service had not troubled about them.

It was now five o'clock, and Lingard awoke to the fact that he was extremely hungry. For the past week he had gone without his midday meal from motives of economy, making his morning "café complet" take the place of breakfast and lunch, and having an early dinner at one or another small restaurant, of which there are so many in Paris. He had taken up his quarters at a small hotel in the Avenue Bosquet close to the *École militaire*—the great military quarter in Paris—and used to spend many hours hanging about outside the barracks of the two regiments of Cuirassiers stationed there, instituting mental comparisons between the French and English cavalryman—to the detriment of the former.

Lingard left the little garden and turned

up the Avenue de La Motte-Picquet. At the top he hesitated for a moment, then turned into a café, and seated himself at a table outside. When the garçon appeared, Lingard ordered an absinthe, lit a rank French cigarette, and then tried to forget his thoughts in one of those boulevard papers which purvey the news of the day before yesterday under tomorrow's date. The effort was not a success, and after a few minutes he placed the paper on the table, and stared gloomily in front of him, thinking. £25 in the world! That was the burden of his thoughts. Jim Lingard since he had left the Service had—as many a better man has—found out the bitter truth that a man without money is an excrescence on the face of our modern social system.

There had been that scene with Cissie Morton in London, for instance. Jim flushed and drove his heel angrily into the pavement at the bare recollection of it. Miss Morton was one of the minor lights of a minor West End theatre, and managed to subsist very comfortably, in an atmosphere of Savoy suppers, motorcars, and furs, on a salary of some £3 a week. Jim Lingard had met her about a year before his *débâcle*, and during that year Miss Morton had seen to it that he had contributed liberally to the pleasures of her life. On hearing that he had left the Service she had been extremely sympathetic, but on learning of the state of his finances her sympathy had suffered an abrupt eclipse, as had her interest in him. Jim's nerves had been raw, and their relations had culminated in a scene at Miss Morton's flat, when that lady, under the stress of emotion, had remembered the Hoxton from whence she was digged, and descended thither.

Lingard was aroused from his thoughts by a voice saying, "*Monsieur permet?*" and a man leaned over from the next table for the discarded paper. Jim answered politely, and then nodded as he recognized a French officer who occupied the room next him at his hotel. The Frenchman nodded in turn, making a remark about the weather, and the two chatted for some time on various subjects. At last the subject of the difference be-

tween the French and British armies was brought up, and the Frenchman remarked:

"*Eh bien*, Monsieur, it appears to me that the great difference between the French and British armies is that ours is essentially democratic, whilst yours is essentially aristocratic. I do not mean to say that the British army is officered mainly by aristocrats, as the German is, but to me all your officers seem to have the aristocratic cast of mind. Now, in the French army, quite half the officers are sprung from the people. Take my case, my father is a small farmer in Normandy—a peasant—and yet I had my commission at twenty-eight, and at forty-five am in command of a battalion. Now, would that be possible in the British army? Understand, I speak of the system, not of my own case, because that had special features."

Lingard thought for a moment.

"Well," he replied, "it might be possible, certainly, but not very probable. As you say, Monsieur, the officers of our army are almost all of one class, and rankers are rather the exception than the rule. But did you get your commission in the ordinary way, through St. Cyr, or through the ranks?"

The other laughed. "Oh, through the ranks," he replied, "and that was pure luck. After I had finished my Service in France I went home—but, *merci*, I could not stand the life on my father's farm, and so I joined the *légion étrangère*. Well, there is always fighting *là-bas*, and chances to be taken, and I took mine.

"But," remarked Lingard, "I thought the *légion étrangère* was a *foreign* regiment with no Frenchmen in it?"

The other shook his head. "*Anyone* can join the Legion," he answered, "Frenchmen as well as foreigners; only a Frenchman must have done his Service at home before he makes his engagement. The life? Oh, the life is a hard one, and a poorly paid one, but it is a man's life, after all. The prospects? Well, that depends on the man. Some men are born to rise, and some to sink. For myself, I had fifteen years of the Legion in the ranks and as an officer—and I wish I were back there! Well, monsieur, I must say *bon soir*.

Many thanks for our interesting conversation!" He rose, put on his *képi*, picked up his sword and left the café, with a parting bow.

Lingard watched him disappear down the street, and lit another cigarette. He was thinking hard, but his thoughts were not the same hopeless ones of an hour ago. The Frenchman's words had given him an idea. He had heard vaguely of the French Foreign Legion before, but only vaguely, and had had an idea that it was a regiment of criminals commanded by brutes of officers who were practically warders. His late companion had certainly seemed neither a criminal nor a brute, and if he—a Norman peasant's son—could arrive at a commission through the ranks of the Legion, surely it must be easy enough for a man who had held a commission before to do the same. Anyhow, it would bear thinking about. Jim paid for his drink and turned into the November evening. As the damp cold bit through his clothes he shivered. Well, at any rate, in the Legion—if he ever got there—it would be warm; not like this infernal hole of a Paris. Jim shivered again, and walked faster to keep himself warm. He was bound for a little restaurant which he knew of in the Rue du Bac, where one could get a filling, if not satisfactory, dinner for a franc, with a wine included—a wine which turned everything it touched a brilliant blue. As he went down the Avenue de La Motte-Picquet, and crossed the great Esplanade des Invalides, the idea of the Legion took hold of him more and more. As things stood he would be *décavé* in a very short time—he had learned by experience how very short a way £25 will go toward keeping a healthy young man with ingrained expensive tastes—and this Legion idea might conceivably lead to something. Anyhow, he would have a look round to-morrow and see, and until then—well, he was young and hungry, with enough money to buy a dinner and to-morrow might take care of itself.

As he entered the small, low-browed restaurant in the Rue du Bac, he noticed that at the table where he usually sat, and opposite his place, was seated a tall, thin, dark man in a black frock-coat, and with a

white muslin turban around his head. Lingard looked at him without any special interest. He had been long enough in Paris to become used to the many strange types which one sees in her streets, and put the stranger down as an Oriental of some kind, of narrow means, in Paris for business or pleasure. The stranger was, as far as Lingard could see, making a meal of a large plate of salad and a glass of water; and, beyond lifting his eyes for a moment when Jim seated himself at the table, took absolutely no notice of him, but continued his meal with a grave and preoccupied air. Lingard ordered his dinner, and proceeded to eat it with the appetite of a man who has eaten nothing since the morning, while the stranger, having finished his, ordered a cup of coffee, and proceeded to smoke a cigarette slowly, evidently in deep thought.

Jim made a fairly satisfactory dinner, and after having lit a cigarette paid his bill, and rose to go. He walked slowly up the Rue de Grenelle on his way home, feeling rather more contented than he had an hour or so previously. As he debouched on to the Esplanade des Invalides, however, he was roused from his thoughts by a couple of reports in quick succession, and a scuffle under the trees some thirty yards away.

Jim ran forward, just in time to see a man go down under the assault of two others. Farther back, leaning against a tree, and holding his left arm, was another man. Jim swung up his stick and threw himself into the fray. One of the men, who was bending over a figure on the ground, straightened himself with a jerk, and turned on Lingard with a long blade shining dully in his hand, to go down, with a grunt, from a drive of the ferrule of the latter's stick, delivered bayonet-wise about the third button of the waistcoat. The other man leaped backward, and bolted like a hare through the trees disappearing in the direction of the Gare des Invalides, the other two staggering after him.

Jim stooped to raise the prostrate man, and to his surprise recognized the Oriental who had sat opposite him at dinner. Beyond having lost his white turban, which he proceeded to re-roll at once, the latter did not appear to be in the least damaged,

and was quite calm. "Many thanks, Monsieur," he remarked, in excellent French. "You came just at the right moment. Another half minute and one or both of those knives would have been in my throat. Again, monsieur, accept my thanks."

Jim was breathing hard. "Not at all," he began awkwardly, in English. The stranger made a gesture.

"Ah—English!" he said in that language, "on the spot, as usual! Well, sir, you have done a great service. I do not speak of your having saved my life, though that is valuable enough to me, but to a Cause, and perhaps some day I may be able to pay the debt which that Cause owes you. In the meanwhile, if I might make a suggestion, I think we had better move from here. There have been shots fired, as doubtless you heard, and the police will probably be here soon—too late as usual. Well, sir, my road lies this way," pointing toward where the great mass of the Invalides stood out against the dark sky, "and before we part, again—many thanks." He bowed and turned to go; but wheeled and came close to Jim and looked him in the face, and then spoke again. "We shall see each other again," he said. "My name is Hassan Ali of—well, of all the world—and yours? Lingard? Yes, I shall remember that. Well, Mr. Lingard, *au revoir!*"

He turned and vanished among the trees, and Jim Lingard, after watching him a moment, also turned and crossed the Esplanade on his way to his hotel and bed.

CHAPTER II

AMONG THE LOST SHEEP

JIM LINGARD opened the door of the barrack room, and entered.

It was more than two years since he had joined the Legion, and the ex-subaltern of Hussars was hardly recognizable in the corporal of the *légion étrangère*. He was thinner, and a short dark beard covered the somewhat heavy jaw, but the great difference was in the eyes and bearing of the man. Lingard had been a smart young officer when in the British army; that is, he had belonged to a class of which

the members, in clothes, appearance, and manner, in every detail, in fact, except that of features, conform so closely to type, that they might almost be turned out of the same mould. The corporal of the Legion was a person so far removed from the ex-Hussar that they might have been two different men. The eyes were harder, with the reckless look in them of the Legionary who lives for the day, and who never knows when he rises from his bed in the morning, if he will pass the next night in it or under the desert sand.

Jim Lingard had not been unlucky in the Legion. His previous experience had stood him in good stead, and so far he had been fortunate enough not to arouse the enmity of the officers. The adjutant Vaubourg had certainly punished him on the slightest excuse since his arrival in the company, but that was the general lot, and Vaubourg had never given any sign of singling him out for special attention. When the adjutant honored a man in this way, the lower regions at their worst would have seemed a pleasure resort, and the archfiend himself a kindly master, in comparison, to the victim.

No. 2 Company had been at Ain Sefra for some time, and was feeling anything but contented with itself. For the past two months, punishment—always frequent in the Legion—had almost doubled itself. Vaubourg had arrived from Sidi-bel-Abbés where he had been suffering from fever. He was completely restored to health and there was a three months' arrears of forced abstention from "discipline" to make up—which he proceeded to do with ardor.

And there were other miseries. It was the hot weather. The sun beat down day after day from a brazen sky, and the nights were nearly as hot as the days. The unfortunates condemned to the police station spent their nights sweating and gasping in its stifling cell, of which Vaubourg would take good care every evening that its one window was tightly closed. In the daytime Vaubourg himself would generally take the *peloton de chasse*, or punishment squad—not with the benevolent intention of relieving the sergeants and corporals from an irksome duty, but from plain love of cruelty. He would halt his squad—

LOST SHEEP

dressed in full marching order—in a temperature of 110 degrees, in the shade, right opposite a whitewashed wall reflecting the rays of the Algerian sun, which roasted their eyeballs, while at the same time it smote down and grilled their necks. Then he would give them manual exercise “by numbers,” keeping them in the most constrained positions for five minutes at a time, while he stood in the shade and smoked a reflective cigarette. Before a man came on the punishment parade “the Swine” would open his tunic to see that his underclothing was according to regulation and that the blue cotton cravat was wound twice around his neck, and with the regulation degree of tightness. The least infraction of regulations on these points led to extra and savage punishments. Two men were struck by the sun during *peloton de chasse*, but this brute gloried in having “given them something to remember,” and redoubled his attentions to the others.

Then the swearing ceased in the rooms and men began to brood in corners, or to talk quietly in groups. At last a resolution was come to—Vaubourg must be put out of the way. But how? At last a scheme was hatched. One night, when he was taking the rounds, as he was passing a barrack-room, “the Swine” heard a tremendous noise inside—men shouting, cheering, and laughing. If Vaubourg had listened a little more carefully it might have struck him that the laughter was hardly natural, but the only thing which penetrated to his mind was that here was an infraction of rules, and an occasion for inflicting the punishment which his soul loved. He hurled himself at the door like a charging bull, intent on taking the men inside by surprise. But it was he himself who got the surprise. As he entered the door the lights were extinguished, and with a simultaneous yell of “kill him!” the men inside threw themselves on him. They were stripped stark naked in order that no mark on their clothes might betray them, and they were armed with their Lebel bayonets. Vaubourg was no coward. He had given proofs of that often enough, but the sight of the naked, yelling men with the steel in their hands, dimly seen by the light of the lantern he carried,

was too much for his nerves, and he turned and fled. It was simply and solely owing to his swiftness of foot that he escaped being cut to pieces by the infuriated company.

As Vaubourg's flying footsteps died away the men halted and looked at each other, and then one said, “No luck! The devil has got clean away. Now comes the reckoning. The guard will be here in a minute. This means *Biribi* for all of us.”

He was mistaken. That night Vaubourg reported “nothing unusual,” and for days afterward the men awaited the inquiry which never came. But from that night on the *peloton de chasse* was less frequent, and the punishments less heavy. Vaubourg's conscience was non-existent and therefore impossible to touch, but the escape he had had of being pulled down and hacked to pieces had shaken his nerve, and the men of No. 2 Company enjoyed a respite for a time.

Aïn Sefra, as a town, was beneath contempt, consisting as it did mainly of the fort and a few scattered houses, mostly enclosed and roughly fortified. This was very necessary. Aïn Sefra is on the very edge of the desert and therefore within easy reach of Touareg raiding parties. Three times within the last fifteen years had raids in force been delivered on the town, and each time the raiders, if not entirely successful, had got clear away into the desert, carrying with them shrieking women, and leaving behind them burning houses and dead men. The strategic importance of the place lies in its central position, for it forms the centre of the web of outposts which France has flung along the fringe of the desert. Beside the houses and the fort, there is nothing whatever except a dozen palm-trees and the “Village Nègre,” or native quarter, which every military post in Algeria possesses: a huddle of foul huts inhabited by Arab and half-caste women, and the Spanish Jews, who hang like jackals to the flanks of the Legion, and will persist in doing so as long as the Legionary continues—as he will do—to risk six months' prison for selling articles of his equipment to those scoundrels for a few pence in order to satisfy his perennial thirst.

To the ordinary mind a place of this

kind would be one to avoid at all hazards, but, on the southern stations of the Legion, the appalling monotony of life in barracks is such that the men welcome distraction of any kind whatever, and will run any risks to get it.

Lingard one evening had dressed himself and had gone alone into the town. This was a practice which was frowned on by the authorities—if not absolutely forbidden—owing to its danger. A prowling Arab will not interfere with two Legionaries, but, given the opportunity, he will be only too glad of attempting to stab a solitary man in the back for the sake of his bayonet and sash. Jim had made arrangements to go out with another corporal, but the latter had during the day attracted the notice of Vaubourg, with the usual result. Lingard had asked two or three other *sous-offs* to come with him, but for one cause or another had been refused, and so found himself faced with the alternative of spending an evening in the fort, or going alone. The sick disgust of the Legionary with his normal surroundings was on him with its full force; and, forbidden by the iron discipline of the Legion to be seen walking with a private, he decided on taking the risk, and going alone.

It was about eight o'clock on a summer's evening, and Jim walked through the "town" and sat down under a palm-tree, watching the gorgeous Algerian sunset, as it flamed scarlet, orange, purple and pink over the desert. To the left stood a few palm-trees, looking almost as if they had been cut out of black cardboard, and stuck against the blazing sky. In front of him stretched the desert, for the moment almost as red as the sky, and to the right were the black figures of some Arabs going through their evening devotions, and looking like the figures in a shadow play.

Jim Lingard's thoughts were very bitter as he sucked at his rank cigarette. What a fool he had been—what an accursed fool ever to come to this triply accursed Legion. He had thought it would be at least a man's life, but it was that of a dog—a life that no dog would put up with. Adventure? Glory? What adventure or glory was there to be found in a stinking hole like Aïn Sefra? The very Arabs at their pray-

ers there were better off than he was. At least they had something to believe in and had never known anything better than this life; and they were their own masters, without brutes like Laplote and Vaubourg over them. Damn—and damn—and damn the Legion, and everything connected with it! And, especially and in particular, damn Jim Lingard for ever having been fool enough to go near it.

Jim recognized that the *cafard*—the terrible insane depression of the Legionary—was taking hold of him, and he knew, by what he had seen, what that might lead to unless it was fought down. With a final comprehensive curse at himself and his surroundings, he rose, hitched his bayonet round, so that in case of need it might be ready for a quick draw, and turned off into the Village Nègre. Even if he did get into trouble there, it would be a change; if he did happen to get his throat cut or a knife in his back, he would be no great loss to any one; and, wherever he might find himself subsequently, at least neither Laplote nor Vaubourg would be there. In any case, Jim had been long enough in the Legion to feel the Legionary's supreme confidence of being perfectly capable of looking after himself under any conceivable circumstances which might arise.

The Village Nègre, as usual, was just beginning to wake up after sunset. In the daytime it was a conglomeration of filthy huts, hermetically sealed, and which, for any sign of life about them, might be tenanted by corpses, but with sunset it woke to its foul life. Lights appeared in its hovels, and figures appeared at their doors, while others, white-robed and furtive, flitted in and out. Jim walked up the narrow, tortuous street and then stopped before a hovel a little larger and more pretentious than the rest, but, if anything, a little dirtier. He knocked twice, then once, and after a moment or two the door opened, and he entered.

The stench of the place took him by the throat. It was a mixture of unwashed humanity and the smoke from a fire of camels' dung, which smouldered in the centre; mixed with these was another peculiar, acrid smell which Jim knew well. It was that of hashish, the drug which is to

Algeria what opium is to China, and the smell of which strikes the olfactory nerve of the European in varying density from Oran to the Persian Gulf.

Seated round the fire and, to all appearance, not in the least incommoded by the smoke which was making Jim's eyes water to such an extent that he could hardly see, were two or three figures which might have been either male or female, but which looked more like bundles of dirty linen than anything else. On an *angareb*, or native bedstead, in a corner of the room, was stretched at full length, with her brawny arms folded behind her head, a huge Negress. In the dim light of the solitary lamp which struggled to light the place she looked like a statue carved from black basalt, showing as she did no sign of life except the regular heave and fall of her body from her breathing, and an occasional flash of white eyeballs or teeth. The place looked and smelt like an antechamber of the infernal regions, with a party of damned souls waiting their turn for torture, and a black fiend keeping an eye on them to see that they did not escape. In reality, as places in the Village Nègre went, it was comparatively respectable. It was kept by an old Frenchwoman known as Mère Julie, who supplied dubious liquors, and other commodities of the nature of which there was no doubt at all, on a strictly cash basis to men of the garrison.

As Jim advanced to the fire, one of the shrouded figures rose and threw back the cloak which covered its head, revealing the face—yellow, and horribly marked with small-pox—of an old woman. The teeth were mostly absent, but the eyes were large, dark and bright, and full of intelligence. This was Madame Julie, the proprietress.

"*Eb bien*," she remarked, "one of my boys to see the old woman!" Then peering forward, and noticing the stripes on Lingard's sleeve, she continued, "and a corporal too! Well, M. Corporal, what can Mère Julie do for you to-night. Is it a glass of *ba pédi*¹ or absinthe, or is it—?" and she jerked her head toward the corner.

¹ Fig-spirit.

Jim laughed. "Neither, *ma mère*," he said; "just the pleasure of a chat with you, and a glass of wine if you have one."

Mère Julie looked at him sharply. "Have you any money?" she remarked drily. "We want no empty pockets here!"

Jim took out a franc piece and tossed it on the table.

The old woman shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps," she said indifferently, "and perhaps not. In the Legion all things are possible. No matter. Now, tell me why did you come here to-night?"

"I don't know," returned Jim. "To kill time, and get away from the fort, I suppose. If one stays too long there one gets *cafard*, and that is bad, but where else is one to go?"

Mère Julie cackled with laughter. "Where indeed?" she said. "Still, there is one place in Aïn Sefra where a *beau garçon* like you would be better employed than talking to Mère Julie. *Ohé, caporal*, a face! and a figure! and red lips! As I had once!"

Jim looked at her.

"Oh!" he said. "And where may all these be found?"

The old woman extended her hand.

"Twenty sous," she suggested, but Jim shook his head.

"Money finished," he said again. "Come Mère Julie, tell me, and I will give you two francs next time I come—if what you say is true!"

The old woman leaned forward and whispered. "The house with the red shutters," she said. "Go there and try your luck. *He* is away. Mind, two francs!"

Jim rose and buckled his belt. Here at last was the chance of a little excitement.

"All right," he said, "two francs—if you are not fooling me! *Bon soir*, Mère Julie."

He turned and left the hut, and leaving the Village Nègre, turned toward the scattered houses near the fort, in search of whatever adventure Providence might send him.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE IN THE GARDEN

As HE left the Village Nègre Jim Lingard's step took on a new elasticity. Even

if there was only a substratum of truth in what Mère Julie had told him, at least there was the chance of a few minutes' excitement in indulging the pleasures of imagination. He knew the house mentioned quite well by sight, but had never been near it. As he walked along, he felt a certain amount of mild surprise at Mère Julie's unwonted communicativeness, but concluded that that lady must have had some reason of her own. The reputation Mère Julie held was not precisely that of an open-handed philanthropist; indeed quite the contrary. While never known to have robbed a Legionary, she was well known to exact the uttermost farthing for any services required of her, and Jim was rather at a loss to account for her unsought information, and still more for the surprising ease with which she had allowed the payment to stand over until a future occasion—cash in advance being her invariable rule.

However, Lingard had not been a young gentleman to trouble himself much about other people's motives at any time, and was still less so after almost three years' service in the Legion. He was quite prepared to take any goods the gods might send him and enjoy them as long as they might last, leaving any question of the motives of the persons who had put the said goods in his way, and any consequences which might accrue from the enjoyment of them, to take care of themselves until the time came for payment.

By this time Jim had arrived quite close to the house which Mère Julie had told him of. Climbing the mud wall which surrounded it, he slipped through the ragged, untidy garden, and found himself close to the veranda. The house was like most of its kind in Algeria: square, with a flat-topped roof, and a veranda running round it. The place was in darkness, with the exception of one window, and Jim, approaching silently as close as he could to it, looked in. There were two people inside, by their gestures, engaged in a heated argument. One was a woman. She was in Arab dress, but without the veil, and very good to look upon. She was tall—nearly as tall as Jim himself—and slim without being thin. She was dark with

the darkness of the South, but Jim knew at a glance that she was no Arab woman. She stood and faced the man she was speaking to, as one who gives orders which they expect to be obeyed, and not like an Arab woman who has been a man's possession from her childhood. Jim had seen many women—some of them with a name for beauty—but he had never seen one to approach this one. Her black hair was dressed high on her head, and the bracelets on her bare arms clinked as she emphasized her remarks with swift expressive gestures.

The man had his back turned to Jim. The window was open, but the pair were speaking Arabic, and Lingard could understand very little of what was being said. As far as he could make out the woman, or rather girl, was vehemently urging some course on the man, and the latter was explaining and excusing his failure to carry it out. Twice Jim heard him say, "Not yet," and twice the woman bore him down with a scornful storm of words. It was quite evident that the man was not in the least convinced, but was agreeing, or pretending to agree with the girl, in order to quiet her.

Then he turned to the window for a moment and, with an impatient gesture, pushed back the *gaik* from his forehead. Jim stared, and then gasped. Beyond any possibility of a doubt it was the man whom he had saved from the Apaches' knives in Paris—Hassan Ali.

Jim almost whistled aloud. What on earth was Hassan Ali doing in Aïn Sefra, and what was a woman like that doing there either? Jim could not place her. Arab she certainly was not, and European she did not seem to be. Also, in the East, women who carry themselves like queens and fling curt orders to men are by no means common. Jim Lingard forgot that he was a corporal in the Legion, forgot that he was in a place where he had absolutely no business to be, and that he was eavesdropping, and bent closer to the window.

After nearly three years in Algeria he had a fair knowledge of the local Arabic, but the language which the two were talking seemed to be of another kind.

Arabic of a sort it certainly was, for every now and then, in the flood of words, he could distinguish a familiar one, but it lacked the thick throatiness of the Algerian accent. Jim was tired of the conversation, which he was quite unable to follow intelligently, but his interest in the girl was unabated. He could not understand the source of Mère Julie's information. How on earth could an old hag like her know of, or have anything to do with, a girl like this. With the subtle affinity which gentle blood has for gentle blood the world over, Jim recognized that the girl before him—whether European or not—was an aristocrat of the aristocrats, and had been used to command all her life. It was nearly three years since Jim Lingard had seen a woman of his own class, and quite apart from the curiosity which he felt regarding Hassan Ali, this girl's mere presence kept him rooted like a stone in the garden. For the moment he was no longer Corporal Lingard of the Legion, and a social outcast, but Lieutenant Lingard of the 31st Hussars, and the equal of any man or woman on the face of the earth.

He peered forward again. Then something dark came over his eyes, something else which hurt abominably was forced into his mouth, his feet were plucked from under him, and some one knelt heavily on him and bound his hands behind his back. As he twisted and struggled, something fell heavily on his head behind the ear. He saw a blaze of colored fire, felt a sickish, sweetish feeling at the back of his throat, and then—nothing.

When Jim Lingard came to himself again, the first thing he was conscious of was a racking headache, and the second was that his jaws were propped apart, so that he could not even groan; and, when he tried to raise his hand to remove the obstruction, he also found that he was bound hand and foot. He was lying on his back in a corner of a room, and seated by him on the floor was a huge Negro, with a *flissa*, or yataghan, in his hand. Jim moved his head, and tried to make a sound, but without result. The Negro turned to him, and raised the *flissa* threateningly; then, turning toward some one in the corner, he poured out a torrent of sounds,

which were not words, but rather grunts and clicks, and with another threatening gesture toward Jim, re-seated himself.

The man whose attention he had called rose leisurely, walked over to Jim, and looked down on him for a moment. Then he said in excellent French, "*Eh bien, M. le légionnaire!* Now you see what curiosity leads to! May I inquire what brought you here, and what you expected to find in this poor house?"

The words were polite enough, but were spoken in a tone which conveyed to Jim that an answer was expected, and that it would be the better for his health if it were given at once. He shook his head. Speak he could not, nor make a sound, with the gag dislocating his jaws.

His questioner saw this, and made a sign to the Negro who bent over the prisoner, and removed the impediment. Then the man spoke again.

"Perhaps Monsieur can speak now," he said, courteously. "As soon as Monsieur can do so without inconvenience, I shall be glad of an answer to my question."

Jim swallowed two or three times, and moved his lips without speaking. His mouth was so painful from the gag that the mere movement of his jaws was torture, but besides this he felt a certain diffidence in beginning. It was not a very easy thing to explain to a man—even if that man was in Arab dress—that one had invaded his property in search of a girl on information supplied by an old hag in the native quarter of a small Algerian town. Besides, what would the girl think? He could not see her, but had an uneasy feeling that she was in the room and watching him, and he could guess her opinion of him. Never in his life had Jim Lingard felt so small. He lay on his back, and turned over in his mind explanation after explanation, each less satisfactory than the preceding one.

Then the man who was watching him spoke again.

"Well, Monsieur," he said quietly, "your explanation, if you please?"

For the second time it was borne in on Jim that his position was a serious one. The man's words were not in the least menacing, but behind them was a deadly quietness of tone and manner, which con-

vinced Jim that his life was in the balance. His Negro guard had already shown that he was not likely to stick at a trifle, and Jim knew well how easy it was for any white man—Legionary or otherwise—to disappear in Ain Sefra, and to leave no more trace behind him than does a stone flung into deep water. There was no excuse to give, and he resolved to tell the truth.

"I must offer my excuses, Monsieur," he began. "I came—here—well, to tell you the truth, I came here—well, out of curiosity!"

The other nodded. "Out of curiosity—yes," he said. "Continue, Monsieur."

By this time Jim had taken hold of himself and the habitual recklessness of the Legionary had begun to assert itself again.

"Yes, Monsieur," he repeated. "Now will you be good enough to order your servant to unbind my arms and feet? This position is uncomfortable, and I would remind Monsieur that we of the Legion are not used to this treatment."

The other smiled a tight-lipped smile and bent forward. As he did so, his hood fell back, and Jim saw that he really was the man whose life he had saved in Paris. Hassan Ali recognized Jim at the same moment and his face changed.

He gave a curt order to the Negro, who severed the bonds which confined the prisoner's hands and feet, and then, in obedience to another order, withdrew.

Hassan Ali turned to Jim.

"Well, Mr. Lingard," he remarked in English, "one good turn deserves another. All the same, you seem to have a curious notion of curiosity. You come into my garden out of curiosity; you listen to a private conversation out of curiosity. May I inquire if it is out of curiosity that you are wearing that uniform?"

Jim smiled rather ruefully.

"Well, hardly," he answered; "needs must, you know, when a certain personage drives. For the rest, I fear I must plead guilty to, and beg you to forgive me for entering your garden. As regards listening to your conversation, I certainly heard you speaking, but did not understand a word you said!"

Jim thought, but was not sure, that an

expression of relief passed over Hassan Ali's face.

"Ah," he said, "you do not speak Arabic, then? Well, Mr. Lingard, I am sorry you were so roughly treated, but you must admit that it was largely your own fault. Still, I am not master here, and I must consult with—with the proprietor before I can give orders for your release." He bowed, and passed behind a curtain at the far end of the room, and Jim could hear his voice in conversation with some one else, evidently a female.

Jim pulled himself together, straightened his uniform and looked around. The room was well furnished in a mixture of European and Oriental styles, but the carpetless floor and the cracks in the ceiling showed that the house had not been inhabited for some time. The air, too, smelt dank and musty, as if the windows had not been open for months, and altogether the place had an air of not being so much inhabited as used temporarily for a purpose.

Jim could still hear the voices behind the curtain, but this time he was determined not even to listen, so turned to the window and looked out. After a moment or two, however, he turned with the uneasy feeling which one has when watched by some one else. He looked round for a moment, and then noticed the same Negro who had been sitting beside him when he recovered consciousness standing in a dark corner, still armed with his *flissa*, and regarding him steadfastly.

Jim was beginning to feel rather bored with the whole affair. His head still ached and he had an uneasy consciousness, which he hesitated to acknowledge even to himself, that if he got out of his present position without any further adventure, he would be a great deal luckier than he deserved to be. It seemed to him that by some chance he had intruded into matters which were no concern of his, and which the interested parties intended to keep private at all costs. Now that he had time to collect his impressions he had not liked Hassan Ali's manner at all. It was polite enough—a great deal too polite to be quite healthy, Jim thought. In any case his leave was nearly, if not quite, up, and it would only mean further trouble at

barracks if he came back late. The voices were still rising and falling beyond the curtain, and he determined to see if he could not leave the house without waiting for Hassan Ali's or "the proprietor's" permission.

With this object in view he walked up to the Negro, and said in French, "I wish to go out—let me pass."

The other made no reply but still stared at him and as Jim repeated his sentence, he pointed to his mouth and shook his head. Then Jim tried signs. He pointed to himself, and then out of the window, and made motions to suggest opening a door, but with no further result than a continuance of the stare and repeated shakes of the head. At last, in disgust, he turned and walked toward the curtain at the far end of the room, only to find his way barred by the Negro, who, with a swiftness surprising in one so heavy, had leaped in front of him, and was barring his passage with his *flissa* raised threateningly. Jim's hand flew down to his left side in search of the long Lebel bayonet which ought to have hung there, but came away empty. The scabbard was there, but the bayonet was gone.

Jim accepted the situation with philosophy. He was reckless enough, but he did not see the use of tackling a man armed with a razor-edged sword with his naked hands. If he had to fight later on, well and good, but the future could take care of itself. After all, if these people had wanted to kill him they could have done it quite easily before he recovered his senses, and in any case he could not see any reason why they should want to do so at all. He looked the Negro straight in the eyes, then turned and walked over to the window again with a somewhat exaggerated indifference, and looked out of it, humming softly to himself. The Negro, on his part, retired to his corner, and beyond continuing his surveillance took no further notice of his prisoner.

For another quarter of an hour the voices continued behind the curtain, then Hassan Ali appeared, and beckoned to Jim. "Will you kindly come this way, Mr. Lingard," he said: "I—we have something to say to you." Jim followed him through the curtain.

The other side was furnished much more luxuriously and in a quite different style from the other half of the room. Whereas the latter was a blend of the East and West, here everything was purely Oriental. The room was furnished with several small, low tables and lit by a silver lamp hanging from the ceiling. At the far end was a great divan of scarlet cushions, and half seated, half lying among them was the girl Jim had seen through the window. She was dressed in a silk robe the color of a ripe apricot, with broad black bands on it, and to Jim's eyes looked like a wasp seated on a great scarlet apple. She was unveiled, and as Jim entered looked him full in the face, with the glance of one well used to meet men's eyes. Then for the first time Jim really appreciated her extraordinary beauty. She was tall and slim, but well and strongly built, with, as far as he could see for her robe, the figure of a Greek statue.

Her eyes were large and dark, and at the moment held a mocking gleam which Jim found annoying. For the second time that night he realized that he was not appearing in exactly a brilliant light.

He set his teeth a little and bowed to the girl on the couch, a proceeding of which she took not the slightest notice.

Then she spoke to Hassan Ali in some dialect which Jim did not understand, and the latter turned to Jim.

"Her Highness says," he remarked, "that you have only yourself to blame for what has occurred to-night. She also wishes me to say that, under the circumstances, and as you have probably had a lesson, she has no wish to detain you. But let me tell you, Mr. Lingard, that you have had a very narrow escape to-night! The best thing you can do is to forget all about to-night's adventure, and especially and in particular to forget that you have seen me, or that such a person as Hassan Ali exists. This is not intended as advice—it is a warning. And now—if you will follow me?" He opened a small door in the wall, and Jim followed him, pursued by the glance of those mocking eyes from the couch, a glance in which he fancied that the mockery was tinged with interest.

Hassan Ali walked with him as far as the

garden gate, and then pointed to the barracks.

"My turn to-night, Mr. Lingard," he said. "You saved my life in Paris—I saved yours to-night. Her Highness is not fond of intruders. By the way, here is your bayonet. One is sometimes tempted to do rash things when one is armed. Well, good night—and remember my warning. I assure you that it will be worth your while to do so!"

He bowed and turned back to the house; while Jim walked toward the barracks, thinking a great deal less about his night's adventure than about the girl with the mocking eyes.

CHAPTER IV

VAUBOURG'S EXIT

JIM said nothing about his adventure in the town to any of his comrades. Quite apart from the fact that in his own mind he was conscious that he had not cut a particularly heroic figure, there remained the memory of the girl he had seen, and it seemed to him that it would be a kind of profanation to discuss her.

He mooned about the barracks a good deal, and spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the unknown. As a matter of fact, this was the best thing which could have happened to him at the time, as it took his mind off his immediate surroundings, which were not exactly healthy.

At Aïn Sefra the *cafard* season was in full swing. The *cafard*, as a disease, is the specialty of the Foreign Legion. It must be remembered that everywhere in Algeria, except, perhaps, on the smallest desert outposts, liquor is both plentiful and ridiculously cheap. For a franc a man can buy ten bottles of fiery Algerian wine, and for fifty centimes ten *absinthes*. Every glass of this latter which the Legionary drinks is an hour taken from his life. He knows this—and perhaps for this very reason drinks the more of it. The absinthe drinker's brain is affected in a curious way. The man who suffers from *cafard*, and who is almost invariably an absinthe drinker, compares the feeling in his head to a small beetle—which is

common in Algeria and known as the *cafard*—wandering round inside his brain.

The *cafard* takes its victims in many ways. To one, it may suggest that he is persecuted without cause by his superiors; to another, it will whisper ideas of suicide; and will push a third to open murder. In other cases the *cafard* shows itself by mad pranks, very often not lacking in humor. The symptoms of *cafard* are always the same. When a man of the Legion sits on his bed, speaking to no one, but twisting his fingers and looking straight in front of him, that man requires watching. He may do nothing, and come out of this state without ill effects, but it is more than likely that he will seize his bayonet and run amuck his comrades, finally having to be shot down like a mad dog. It is no exaggeration to say that fully *one quarter* of the effective strength of the Foreign Legion in Algeria suffers more or less from this disease—the offspring of ennui and alcohol.

That year, *cafard* was fearfully common at Aïn Sefra. Men would walk away into the desert, undeterred by the ghastly photographs of the bodies of Legionaries after the Arabs had finished with them, which hung in every barrack-room to discourage desertion. If they were lucky they wandered about for a few days and then returned to give themselves up—as a rule to be dealt with lightly. The officers of the Legion are very tolerant to *cafard*.

Vaubourg was always Vaubourg and lived up to his reputation. Laplote was an uncertain quantity, who either gave ridiculously heavy punishments or none at all, according to the state he happened to be in, while Morsec, as far as possible, avoided having anything to do with the *livre de punitions* and passed it on to his seniors.

Jim passed the time as best he could but not without running foul of Vaubourg who reported him one day simply because Vaubourg had caught the reflection of the sun full in the eyes from Jim's shaving glass. He wanted to get into the town. The girl he had seen at the house had taken extraordinary hold on his imagination, and he wanted to see her again. How he was going to do so, or why he wanted to, he did not know very clearly. He had

never exchanged a solitary word with her, but the mocking smile in her eyes had piqued him considerably.

In any case, the desire to see this girl again had become very strong. In the ordinary course of things he would have accepted the totally undeserved four days' arrest which he had received from Vau-bourg, and any supplementary punishment which it might please Lieutenant Laplote to add to it, with the customary shrug and the formula "*C'est la légion,*" but, as it was, the occurrence annoyed him extremely. If it had not been for the certainty of being detected, and as certainly being reduced to the ranks, he would have taken matters into his own hands and broken his arrest; but he valued the freedom from petty annoyances and unpleasant duties which his rank of corporal gave him, and so he decided to see what would happen. As it turned out, it was the best thing which he could have done. Lieutenant Laplote was away for a couple of days, and Morsec, following his custom, passed on the punishment book to Captain Faës.

Jim was seated on his bed that evening, engaged in the eternal *astiquage*, the cleaning of the black leather pouch and belt of the French soldier, when the orderly sergeant entered.

"Corporal Lingard," he said, "the captain wants to see you—now—at once."

Jim looked up from his work. "All right, sergeant," he said, "coming. I say, do you know what for?"

The sergeant was sarcastic.

"Oh, yes," he said, "the captain told me all about it. He always does. It seems that the Government is dissatisfied with the Governor-General of Algeria and wants to offer the post to you. No, don't stop to change. Go as you are. The captain said he wanted you at once!"

Jim put on his *képi* and departed, wondering what fate had in store for him. He crossed the barrack square, knocked at the door of the company orderly room, and, in reply to the shout of "*Entrez,*" entered. Captain Faës was sitting at the table with the punishment book in front of him. Standing beside him was Lieutenant de Morsec. Jim saluted and stood to attention. Captain Faës responded to the sa-

lute by raising his forefinger a fraction of an inch toward the peak of his *képi* and then remarked to Morsec.

"Look, Morsec! this is the gentleman who collects the rays of the sun in a glass, and throws them with violence—I repeat with violence—in the faces of his superior officers." Then to Jim. "Well, what have you to say for yourself? Eh?"

"Captain," the other began, but the captain cut him short.

"Look here, corporal," he said, "don't trouble to give long explanations. What I want to know is, exactly how this happened?"

Jim repeated what had occurred, and the captain nodded.

"Punishment remitted for having thrown sun violently in superior's face," he said briefly. "Two days for having answered stands. You have been long enough in the Legion, corporal, to know that under no circumstances does a soldier answer his superior officer unless told to do so. Remember this in future. Now, I understand that you have served elsewhere and understand mounted drill. Is this so?"

"Yes, Captain," answered Jim.

"Very good, then," continued the captain. "We are going to form a mounted section to which in future you will be attached. You will do a month's preliminary drill here—and then go back to Douargala with the rest of the section to join the mounted company there. That is all I have to say to you. Dismiss."

Jim went back to his room feeling rather relieved. He knew that it was considered rather an honor in the Legion to be picked out for service in the mounted companies, which are stationed on the edge of the desert, and who beat the Arab marauders at their own game of lightning raids and forced marches. Those sent from the Legion for this duty declare that they are picked as the best men from every company, while those who are not declare that the mounted companies are made up of those who can be most easily spared from ordinary duty. The reader can take his choice from either theory.

If it had not been for the encounter in the house Jim would have been unfeignedly glad to get away from Aïn Sefra on

any terms whatever; as it was, his feelings were somewhat mixed. As he entered the barrack room, and proceeded with his *astiquage*, his mind was largely occupied with the eyes of the girl whom he had seen in the house, when suddenly a terrific noise at the other end of the room brought him to his feet.

There was a crash as a bed-cot went over, confused cries of "Look out—rush him!" a man's scream, and more confused shouting. Jim pushed his way through the crowd. Standing over his broken bed-cot, with a bloody bayonet in his hand, was an old Legionary—one Badinaud—and lying at his feet with the blood pouring from a severed artery in his neck was another man. The murderer's face was congested and he was shouting a confused gabble of words: "*Ab, tas de saligands,*" he was yelling, "come closer, let me get at you." Then as he noticed Jim's stripe, "A corporal—let me get at you, corporal, and I'll rip you up from the fork to the breast-bone! Ah!"

Jim knew what was the matter. It was *cafard* in its worst form—that of homicidal mania—and he also knew what was his duty. He lowered his head, and hurled himself at the maniac's legs, with the flying tackle of the old Rugby player. Both men went down together, the bayonet flying out of Badinaud's hand. Then as the madman wrenched himself clear and rose to his feet Jim did the same and swung hard and true for the angle of the jaw with his fist. The blow landed true to a hair and Badinaud swayed, and then pitched face down to the blow—knocked out. Before he came round he was bound hand and foot and removed to the guard-room, while his victim was taken to hospital. Badinaud was found dead in the guard-room the next morning. By some means he had got one of his hands loose and strangled himself with the strap which had confined them. *Le cafard* had claimed its first victim of the season at Aïn Sefra.

Life with the mounted company was much more supportable than in the battalion. There was still hard work, and plenty of it—*that* at least is never lacking in the Legion—but the dead monotony of barrack life, only broken by marches of

thirty or forty miles, in full marching order under the Algerian sun, was absent; and there was an instant and appreciable improvement in the *morale* of the men who had been picked for this duty. The mounted soldier of the Legion is not a cavalryman, but a mounted infantry man, pure, and simple. The mounts of these companies are mules, and a man who has to render one of these interesting animals amenable to discipline, and to look after his well-being generally, has quite enough to do to keep him from brooding.

The mounted section at Aïn Sefra had its full share of work. Some days after Jim was transferred to it the mules arrived, and there followed two days of something approaching pandemonium. In many cases the animals were quite unbroken, and in the majority only half so, but without exception they made up for any defects in their education by the natural grace and ease with which they used their hoofs and teeth. They were taken over by their new owners from their escort of Spahis, or native cavalry, who were unanimous in informing their new owners that their late charges were the offspring of devils and people who are not usually met within really good society. Several of the Spahis also, while caressing tender places on their limbs, expressed a desire to defile the graves of the said progenitors. After a considerable amount of time and trouble, however, the animals were installed in their stables, and then the really exciting part of the work began. A mule can live on very little, at a pinch, but he cannot do without a certain amount of food and water, and once the mules were in the stable, for any one to enter it was—to say the least of it—a somewhat risky proceeding. A man would sidle along at what he considered a safe distance, with a feed or bucket of water for his mount, the said mount watching him with ears laid back, and an eye which seemed to consist mostly of white. Then at the psychological moment a pair of heels would shoot out, and there would be another man considerably injured in body as well as in feelings.

However, after a time, both mules and

men came to understand each other better. Ideal mounts the former never became, but given a reasonable amount of care in approaching them, and a tight seat when once they had been mounted, they answered the purpose for which they were intended—that of conveying men from place to place in a shorter time than the latter could perform the journey on their own feet.

Many of the men of the mounted detachments were ex-cavalrymen, and soon got on some sort of terms with their mounts, but most of the others had never ridden before, and required considerably more tuition than had been counted on by the officers. This was lucky for Jim. He had always been a fine horseman with a "way with him" so far as anything equine was concerned, and he had very soon reduced his own mount, a great, gray animal with a tired eye, to something approaching docility. One day he had picked up one of the men of his squad who had come off very much the worst in an argument with his mount, and was explaining to him that, if a mule's neck had been meant for its rider to hold on to, it would doubtless have been furnished with handles for the purpose by a beneficent Providence, when Captain Faës passed. He said nothing at the time, but some days afterward, meeting Jim alone, he stopped him and remarked, "Ah, corporal, I understand that it was you who disarmed the Legionary Badinaud."

Jim saluted. "Yes, captain," he replied.

"And you understand mounted infantry work," pursued the captain. "Have you ever served with the cavalry?"

Jim replied in the affirmative.

Captain Faës nodded. "Very good," he said, "we want men with the mounted company who understand the work. For the present I promote you sergeant, subject, of course, to the colonel's approval. I hope you will prove worthy of my recommendation."

He returned Jim's salute and departed, leaving the latter rather astonished. He had been glad enough of his promotion to corporal, but had never expected, or indeed tried to rise higher, and now it seemed that promotion was coming his way un-

asked. On the whole, he was very glad. He would have more responsibility, but on the other hand he would also have a great deal easier time in other ways.

For some reason, since his visit to the house in Ain Sefra, Jim Lingard had not been satisfied with himself. Before that he had been in danger of developing into the typical Legionary, the man with no ambition for the future and no regret for the past; but since he had seen "the girl with the eyes," as he called her in his own mind, regret for the past had entered his mind, and with it ambition for the future. Other men had got commissions in the Foreign Legion through the ranks and had risen to high command, so why should not he? Because he had made a fool of himself in another army, was that any reason why he should stay down all his life?

Life as a sergeant in the Legion was very much more tolerable than it had been either as a private or a corporal. For one thing the adjutant of the newly-formed company, a Russian named Sevonikoff, an ex-officer of the Imperial Guard, was a decent fellow who did not bully his subordinates, and for another they were free from Lieutenant Lapote's drunken caprices, that officer having been transferred to Sidi-bel-Abbés. Altogether, Jim was very much happier than at any time since he had been in the Legion. Captain Faës understood his Legionaries, and did not interfere with them, and Lieutenant de Morsec, who had also been transferred to the mounted company, had visions of glory to come, and took far more interest in his work than he had done when with the battalion. Also it was a pleasant change to Jim to find his opinion asked occasionally, and even deferred to. Captain Faës was a splendid officer, but he was first and foremost an infantry man, and knew very little about mounted work. However, he was far too good a soldier and too just a man not to recognize that several of his non-commissioned officers and men who had served in cavalry regiments knew more about this branch of his work than he did, and was also—luckily for his subordinates—far too large-minded to harbor petty jealousy or refuse to learn what they had to teach him.

Jim had seen very little of his company commander when he was with the battalion. Owing to the size of the Legion company—250 men—the company commander can only exercise a general supervision over it, and of necessity has to leave a great deal to his subordinates. Captain Faës had been quite aware of the peculiarities of Lieutenant Laplote and Vaubourg “the Swine,” but at every attempt to alter things he had been thwarted by that fetish of the French army—system. Now, however, that he had comparatively a free hand, things went very smoothly, and Jim found himself developing a strong liking and respect for his captain.

However, if things were going well in the mounted detachment, the men who had remained in No. 2 Company were having a very fair foretaste of the infernal regions. With Lieutenant Laplote transferred, and the other two officers with the mounted company, the command of No. 2 had devolved on the adjutant during the interregnum before the arrival of a new commanding officer, and he used his power to the full. Punishments had been frequent before, but now they were constant. Unfortunately for himself, a man named Chuard who had enlisted at the same time Jim did had not been one of the men transferred, and Vaubourg, who for some reason had taken a special dislike to him, had deliberately set himself to make the unfortunate man’s life a hell. Chuard could do nothing right. He spent his days at the *peloton de chasse* and his nights in the guard-room, and began to lose flesh visibly. Things were moving to a climax.

When the end did come it came quickly. Chuard was undergoing a sentence of three days’ *salle de police* for some trivial “crime,” a punishment which carried with it *peloton de chasse*. Now on this special occasion Vaubourg had followed his usual pleasing custom of taking the punishment drill himself, and was acting according to his habit. That is to say, he had picked out the very hottest corner of the stifling square, and had arranged the punishment squad opposite a whitewashed wall in such a position that they had the full benefit of every ray reflected from it. This had gone on for two days. The day before Jim had

seen Chuard casually, and had had a few words with him. Chuard had been in an extremely nervous state, and had spoken to Jim on the subject of the adjutant as a private should not speak of one non-commissioned officer to another. His speech was as follows: “Ah, *Dieu de Dieu!* You cannot imagine what I have to stand from that Vaubourg—another three days for nothing, plank bed at night and *peloton de chasse* with the square as hot as the lord ever made hell in the daytime. Let him take care of himself. I say it—*Il!*”

Jim had spoken to him soothingly, telling him not to be a fool, but the next day he remembered Chuard’s words.

Vaubourg had picked out a shady spot for himself, rolled and lighted a cigarette, and was putting his squad through the manual exercise “by numbers.” He would inhale a mouthful of smoke, expel it, and then give the order—“Present arms!—one!” Then he would walk up and down in the shade a little, look at a lizard on the wall with interest, and finally give the word—“Two!” and after an interval of almost a minute—“Three!” and then looked at his victims with a benevolent smile, as much as to say, “Well! at last we have got the arms presented. Are you satisfied now!”

This had gone on for half an hour when the adjutant introduced a new gambit into the game. He had kept the men standing rigidly to attention, and now gave the order—“Fix bayonets!” This being accomplished he proceeded to put them through the bayonet exercise, still by numbers. Having gone through it twice, however, his invention not being equal for the moment to devising any new form of torture, he repeated the same exercise. He had got the men in the position of “On guard,” with the legs bent and the full weight of the body on them, and the rifle with the long, deadly Lebel bayonet on it pointing forward, when for some reason the fancy took him to go in front of the men to see if the rifles were held at the correct angle.

The adjutant walked down the line and halted in front of Chuard.

“Do you call *that* on guard?” he in-

quired, "why a child could push you over—like *that!*" and he seized the barrel of the rifle, and pushed it violently, almost knocking Chuard backward. The action released the suppressed hate in the heart of Chuard, as a touch will release a compressed spring. His bayonet shot forward with the full weight of his body and rifle behind it, and took the adjutant full in the throat, going through it, and shivering itself against the wall. Vaubourg went down in a heap and never spoke again, and Chuard bent over the dying man and spat in his face. "*Payé*" he said, and that was all. He surrendered himself without a struggle to the guard, and was marched away with his head hanging and his feet dragging like an old man's.

Two nights afterward Chuard made his famous escape from the guard-room at Ain Sefra, an escape which is still historic in the Legion.

About two o'clock in the morning the sergeant of the guard was awakened by a violent knocking on the door of the cell where Chuard was confined; and, on demanding what was the matter, was informed in piteous accents that the prisoner felt as if he were going to die. The sergeant was a humane man and opened the door in order to render assistance—to be instantly knocked senseless by a terrific *coup de savate* under the jaw. Then Chuard seized the prostrate man's bayonet, ran through the guard-room, and was past the sentry and through the gate of the fort before any attempt whatever could be made to stop him.

Here his connection with the 1st *régiment étrangère* ended. His subsequent adventures only became known long afterward, partly through reports brought in by Arab policemen, and partly through a letter written by the deserter himself to a comrade at Sidi-bel-Abbés nearly a year after his escape.

CHAPTER V

THE SECOND VISIT TO THE HOUSE IN THE GARDEN

ONE evening, about a fortnight after his promotion, Jim left barracks. He had received late leave from Captain Faës, and,

without any very clear idea of how he was going to do so, meant to see "the girl with the eyes" again. He walked through the Village Nègre two or three times, then left it, and sat on the sand by the edge of the desert, smoking and turning over ways and means in his mind. He was quite determined that this time he was not going to enter the house where he had met her in the same condition as the first time. He desired extremely to remove that mocking look in the dark eyes, and he was quite aware that the best way of creating a favorable impression on a young woman was not to be carried bound hand and foot into her presence after having been knocked out by one of her servants.

As to Hassan Ali and his advice, he gave very little thought to either. If the girl were there he was going to see her again, speak to her, if possible, but in any case to see her; and it was how to do this which was exercising his mind.

Non-commissioned officers and men of the Legion are not exactly welcomed as callers in Algeria, whether by natives or colonists, and Jim knew quite well that a complaint of his presence about the house in the garden to the authorities would mean the loss of his newly-gained stripes, if not more severe punishment.

On the other hand, he did not think that any such complaint was likely to be made. Hassan Ali had given him the impression that he did not wish his presence or that of the girl to be known to the authorities, and under the circumstances Jim dismissed the idea from his mind. To the personal danger involved, which he was quite aware might be considerable, he was serenely indifferent. The Legionary has taken a leaf from the book of the Arab, and is a confirmed fatalist, and no fear of any conceivable consequences is likely to deter him from an adventure. Still Jim realized that the fewer people besides himself who were aware that he had any object of interest in the house in the garden the better, and for this reason decided not to seek any further information from Mère Julie. That lady, while possibly able to give information on the subject, was hardly trustworthy, and as a matter of fact was quite capable of furnishing him with it for a

consideration, and then warning Hassan Ali for a further honorarium.

Jim was resolved to chance it, and to get his interview unaided or not at all. He rose, dusted the sand from his white trousers, and passed into the town, halting at the wall of the garden which surrounded the house. He looked and listened, but the whole place seemed quite deserted. Once he thought he saw a flash of light at a window, but it was gone so quickly that he concluded that it must be imagination or due to strained eyes. Then he climbed the wall, and stepped cautiously forward through the thick undergrowth until he found himself within a few yards of the veranda. The house was very dark and still, and Jim worked his way through the bushes until he was close to the window through which he had looked before. This time, however, it was tightly shuttered, and he began to think that the tenants were gone.

He stepped forward a little and then halted as if he were shot. He was almost certain he had heard a laugh quite close to him.

He looked into the darkness all around him, but could see nothing, and had begun to put the sound down to imagination also, when a voice from a window above his head inquired calmly: "*Ohé, là-bas*, what do you want?"

Jim stepped back and looked up.

Framed in the window above him was the upper part of a body, and a face, the outlines only of which he could make out, but which he was almost sure belonged to the girl whom he had seen on his previous visit.

He cleared his throat.

"Mademoiselle——" he began rather nervously.

But the voice above cut him short. "*Mon Dieu!*" it said, "another of those Legionaries! What are you doing here? If you do not answer instantly I will call my servants and have you flogged away from my house!"

Jim Lingard, where women were concerned, had always had a considerable store of what some of them called audacity and others impertinence, and now it came to his rescue.

"Not another Legionary, mademoiselle,"

he said, "the same one! In reply to your question, as you see, I am standing in the garden!"

There was a gasp from the window, and then the voice came down again. "What have you come here for?" it said. "Kindly answer me at once."

Jim bowed.

"Well" he said, "I came here to see somebody. As a matter of fact, mademoiselle, I came here to see you!"

There was another gasp from the window, but this time the voice was much less angry.

"To see me," it said; "and may I ask, *M. le légionnaire*, what possible interest I can have to a corporal of the Legion?"

"Sergeant," corrected Jim cheerfully.

"Well, to a *sous-off*, then!" continued the voice rather viciously. "I must confess I am quite at a loss to imagine what possible interest I could have to any one in the Legion, of no matter how exalted a rank."

Jim stepped forward right under the window.

"Ah, mademoiselle!" he said, "surely you can guess! Has no one who has seen you once ever desired to see you again? I can only beg you to forgive my presumption, mademoiselle, but since I saw you the first time I have been thinking of you so much that I had to see you again. But I will go now."

There was a sound suspiciously like a smothered laugh from the window, and the figure above bent forward.

"You are very polite, *M. le légionnaire*—I suppose I ought to say *M. le sergent*," remarked the voice. "Still, you can hardly say that you have seen me this time, can you? Perhaps if you would look up——?"

Jim did so. The window was not very high above his head, and he could see the face of the figure framed in it quite distinctly. It was the girl whom he had seen on his previous visit. She was leaning forward from the window with her hands on the sill, and her face bent downward. Also, to Jim's intense surprise, she was laughing—not aloud, but softly, very much as a child laughs who is doing something which it knows it has no earthly

business to do, and for which it will be severely punished if caught.

The girl at the window looked at Jim for a moment, and then nodded approvingly.

"My compliments, Sergeant," she remarked. "I see you have removed your beard. I must say it improves you. And now—since this time you really have seen me, perhaps——" and a white arm made a vague gesture toward the barracks.

Jim bowed and turned, but as he did so a flower thrown from above struck his cheek, and he turned again.

"Sergeant," remarked the girl, "a very little sight of my face appears to be enough for you. Or perhaps you have just remembered that Hassan Ali—you remember him—told you that coming here had its risks?"

Jim felt himself flush, and turned to the window again. "No," he said. "What M. Hassan Ali told me had entirely escaped my memory, and M. Hassan Ali himself for that matter. I thought that you wanted me to go——"

The girl laughed again.

"I wanted you to go," she repeated. "*Ma foi*, Monsieur, it matters nothing to me whether you go or stay. Only, as has been already pointed out to you, staying here is attended with certain risks—which it would be as well for you to consider."

Jim deliberately stepped back, and sat down on the ground under the window.

"Risks?" he said. "Oh, one has always to risk one's life or peace of mind or some little thing like that—it is only a question of whether it is worth while or not. In this case, I think it is, and therefore the risks can take care of themselves for the present. And so with your permission, mademoiselle, we will continue our chat!"

The girl rested her chin on her hands and looked down at him.

"I have always heard," she said, "that the Legion do not attach much importance to their lives and I am beginning to believe it now! Seriously, do you know that if you or any Frenchman are found here, that nothing—nothing at all can save your life?"

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"I did not know it," he confessed, "but now that I do know it I do not feel any more inclined to move. Besides, you are making a slight mistake, mademoiselle. I happen to be English—not French."

"But," the girl interrupted, "you are a soldier of France?"

"Soldier of the Legion," corrected Jim. "English none the less for that. But tell me, mademoiselle, why is it so dangerous for me to be here?"

The girl shook her head impatiently. "I will tell you nothing—to-night at least," she said. "Some other time perhaps. Now you must go!" Jim shook his head, and she stamped angrily. "Oh, you are stupid," she said, "see now, I ask you as a favor to go. I—I—do not wish to see bloodshed. And if you want to come again—perhaps—well, I promise nothing, but perhaps you may! But now you must go, and quickly!"

Jim rose, saluted, and slipped through the bushes, on his way to the road. He was in a state of extreme jubilation. The "girl with the eyes" had at least shown no special repugnance to his presence; on the contrary, she had mentioned, however tentatively, another visit. What Jim could not understand was that his life should be endangered by his visits to the house in the garden. He knew quite well the extreme jealousy of their womenkind shown by Arabs—and for that matter by all Mohammedans—but as far as he could see, the "girl with the eyes" was no Moslem woman. Moslem women would as soon, or sooner, let any man not their husband see them nude as unveiled; and this girl not only wore no veil, but looked men in the eyes, and talked to them as equals. Also she seemed to be very much the mistress of the house. In the conversation which he had heard, but not understood, between her and Hassan Ali, the latter, though manifestly against his will, had taken a minor part—a thing unheard of in the East between man and woman.

Jim could not understand the state of affairs at all. He determined to wait the march of events, and to keep his eyes open, at the same time making up his mind to apply for further leave as soon as he decently could, a privilege which was much

easier to come by since his promotion to sergeant.

With this laudable object in view, Jim applied himself to his work with considerably more ardor than he had done at any time since his arrival in the Legion. Under the régime of Laplote and the late Vau-
bourg, no matter how well a man performed his duty it was utterly impossible to escape punishment and consequently stoppage of leave, but in the mounted detachment things were very different. Captain Faës, while down like steel on malingerers and skrimshankers, was indulgent to men who performed their duty well, and Lieutenant de Morsec followed his lead.

The Legion as a regiment is always sure of a considerable amount of fighting, but the mounted companies usually receive the brunt of any that is going.

The detachment at Ain Sefra had been worked very hard, and, being consequently very fit, were now expecting their removal to Douargala any day. Jim began to get rather nervous. Twice he had tried for leave, and twice—the company being short of *sous-officers*—had been refused. Then a couple of Legionaries who had shown a special aptitude for the mounted work were promoted, and duty being now rather easier he tried again, obtaining leave for one night.

This time he waited until dark and went straight to the house in the garden. It was as dark as before, and he made a circuit of it without seeing a sign of life, when suddenly he felt his arm touched. He turned quickly. By his side was a veiled woman, who still kept her hand on his arm, and placed the fingers of the other on where Jim judged her lips to be under the veil for silence. Then she motioned him forward, and opened a door which had escaped Jim's notice in the wall of the house, entering herself, and beckoning him to follow.

He seemed to be in a sort of passage, but could not be quite sure. As it was almost pitch dark, however, he contented himself by pulling the belt of his bayonet forward, ready for a quick draw should it prove necessary, and delivered himself to the will of his guide.

His guide went along the passage, as one

sure of her way in spite of the darkness, never taking her hand from Jim's arm. At last she stopped and knocked in a peculiar manner on a door, which was almost immediately opened.

Then his guide pushed Jim inside and disappeared.

He looked round for a moment, dazzled by the light after the darkness of the passage. Then his eyes became used to it and he saw that he was alone in the presence of the "girl with the eyes!"

CHAPTER VI

AMINE

SHE was half sitting and half lying on a pile of gorgeously hued cushions, on a sort of divan which took up most of the end of the room, and was clad in a robe of scarlet silk, cut low at the neck, and leaving the arms bare to the shoulder. With those wonderful eyes blazing underneath level, dark brows, she radiated a certain exotic atmosphere which Jim found strange, and could not for the life of him determine whether he liked or not.

There was a carved table beside her, and lying on the divan was an open book.

Jim removed his *képi* and bowed, a proceeding which the girl on the sofa acknowledged by a flash of white teeth, and a wave of a slim hand.

"So, monsieur," she said, "you have found it worth while to come to this poor house again?"

Jim bowed.

"Yes, mademoiselle," he answered, "but I greatly feared to find it empty. If your servant had not seen me I should have been left in despair. As it is——" he made a gesture intended to show his appreciation of the present state of affairs.

The girl nodded. "Ayesha has good eyes," she replied coldly, "she needs to have. If my servants cannot use their eyes—well, they are better without them! I find that, with my servants, tongues are superfluous luxuries, but eyes are needed!"

Jim stared at the girl. Who and what was she? She spoke cultivated French, and was evidently an aristocrat, but to talk of eyes being useless in her service unless they were good ones!

"Oh," he replied lightly, "good eyes are useful in every walk of life, but surely bad ones are better than none at all, and as to tongues—well, if tongues were considered superfluous in the Legion I should hardly be enjoying this delightful conversation, should I?"

The girl on the couch made a petulant gesture. "Oh, you *Roumis* weary me," she said. "Such consideration for your servants and work-people! Such magnificent wages while they are young and strong enough to work! If a man works hard he can earn enough for food to make him strong enough to work next day to earn a little more food! Now where I come from our servants are ours, and we do as we like with them; but you did not come here to talk of servants, did you? Come and sit beside me and let us speak of more interesting things—yourself, for instance."

She made a gesture toward the couch beside her, and Jim sat down. He was feeling slightly confused. During his first and second visits he had felt absolutely at ease and quite careless of any risk of steel or bullet, but now there was a certain atmosphere about the room and about the woman who reclined on the couch beside him, which woke a vague but none the less very real uneasiness in him. It was not so much a sense of physical danger as a kind of spiritual oppression, as if he were in the presence of some one who was in touch with Powers which he, felt vaguely were more hostile than friendly to him.

Jim Lingard was not a particularly imaginative young man, but at the present moment he was feeling far from comfortable without being able to give any definite reason why he should be so, even to himself.

Then he was roused from his thoughts by the girl's voice.

"Well, Monsieur," she said, "you do not seem talkative! I have heard that the English are a silent nation, still I wish to be amused to-night. Tell me about yourself. First—what is your name?"

Jim told her, and she nodded.

"And rank?" she continued, "sergeant in the Legion! But, pardon me, M. Lin-

gard, you do not look like a man who was born to be a sergeant? Perhaps in your own country——?" and she paused suggestively.

Now it is not exactly the custom in the Foreign Legion to put questions, leading or otherwise, to men on the subject of their pasts, and in any other circumstances Jim would have been furiously angry. Considerably to his own surprise, however, he found himself answering the girl's somewhat pointed query without any feeling of resentment whatever.

"Yes," he answered, "I held a commission in my own country, but that is over and done with. At present I am in the Legion, and likely to stay there."

The girl looked at him again from under her level brows, and again Jim felt that to answer her was the only natural course.

"Why did you leave it, then?" she queried.

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "Money," he answered, "or rather want of it! A man cannot stay in the army in my country without that, and so——"

"And so," the girl interrupted, "you came to the Foreign Legion in search of money! They say, in the South, of a fool that 'he searches the desert for water.' They ought to have one in your country, M. Lingard, that he came to the Legion for money!"

Jim flushed rather angrily. "I did not say that I came to the Legion for money," he replied. "I said that I came to it because I had none. It is not quite the same thing, you know!"

The girl beside him bent forward and looked in his eyes.

"Do you want money?" she said.

Jim thought for a moment.

"Not particularly," he said at length. "N—no! Money is not much good to any one in this country, and——"

But the girl laughed.

"Money no good in this country!" she repeated. "Well, M. Lingard, I have never yet heard of the country where money is not good. But tell me, since you do not want money, what do you want—glory?"

Now Jim Lingard had been more than three years in the Foreign Legion, a force

which during its eighty years or so of existence has covered itself with "glory," in a military sense, as no other force has done since the days of Rome's Tenth Legion, and this was the first time since his arrival in Algeria that he had heard the word used. He was perfectly familiar with the stories—which were common gossip of the barrack-room—of acts of almost mad bravery done by men and officers, and had known men who had taken part in them; but neither the participants nor any one else had seemed to think that there had been anything specially heroic in them.

Besides all this, he had all the reluctance of the soldier who has seen service to talk of glory in the abstract, but once again the girl's compelling influence asserted itself.

"No—well, yes, I suppose so," he admitted reluctantly. "That is to say, I want to do as well for the regiment as I can; not disgrace it, you know"—his English horror of fine words asserting itself—"in fact"—here he floundered again—"well, naturally, I want some of it if I am lucky enough for it to come my way!"

"And," the girl replied, "if it does come your way, what have you to look forward to? A Cross? A breastful of medals? Will they fill you when you are walking the streets? Even if you should be given a commission it only means that you will retire as a major or a colonel to plant cabbages on a few hundred francs a month! Well, M. Lingard, I wish you joy of your ambition!"

Jim was getting angry. What business had this girl to interfere in his private business? Also the fierce pride of the Legionary in his corps was beginning to wake in him, and his voice was very coldly polite as he replied.

"Pardon, mademoiselle" he said, "but you are mistaken. The officers of the Legion do not retire to 'plant cabbages' as you say. Once a Legionary always a Legionary, and most of our officers stay with the regiment. When they leave it at last, they leave life as well! As to what you say of a pension of 'a few hundred francs,' surely the shame of that belongs to the politicians in Paris, who have voted themselves fifteen thousand francs a year,

and grudge his pension to a man who has given his life to France. Still, nothing we can say or do will alter the nature of politicians."

The girl smiled.

"You are proud of your regiment," she replied, "but suppose I told you of work—work with glory and money attached to it, and that it was yours for the asking, what would you say?"

"I would say," Jim answered, "that I am a soldier of the Legion, under contract for five years, and that, until the five years are finished, in the Legion I stay. After that—I am a free man."

The girl put her lips close to his ear. "Listen," she whispered, "down there"—and she pointed to the South—"there is work for men to do. Why should you hold to the Legion. They treat you like a dog and work you like a convict. We—they want men in the South. Will you come? I ask you!"

She turned her eyes full on Jim's and again he felt that his will was not his own, and that he was under the influence of some power which was compelling him to act as it wished. He pulled himself together with a wrench which was almost physically painful, and answered almost roughly:

"Impossible, mademoiselle! I am a soldier of the Legion, as I have said. I regret to refuse your request, but—" and he made a gesture of helplessness.

The girl looked at him with a certain admiration in her eyes.

"You are very strong-willed, or shall I say obstinate?" she said. "Still, we shall see what happens. Perhaps you will go South sooner than you know."

"Probably," Jim answered, "so far as I know we may get orders to go to Douargala almost any day now, and that certainly is South."

The girl wrinkled her brows. "Douargala?" she queried.

"Yes," explained Jim. "A little station right on the edge of the desert, a sort of jumping-off place for Lake Chad and the centre of Africa generally. I'm sure I don't know why they are sending the Mounted Legion there. It is hardly Touareg country; still they do raid that way a little, but the Government is not

very communicative or fond of giving reasons for moves!"

The girl frowned a little. "Your Government seems to be fairly well informed," she said. "Well, perhaps you will find Douargala interesting, M. Lingard!"

Jim laughed.

"Oh, hardly," he said. "I was there before, and it is about the last spot which the Almighty ever made. There isn't a single thing there except about a dozen palm-trees and some wells. No, I can't think what the Government is about."

The girl beside him hesitated a moment as if she were making up her mind to say something against her own judgment.

"Have you ever heard of the Senussi?" she then asked abruptly.

Jim thought for a moment.

"I have heard the name," he said at length, "but I don't quite remember what it is. Isn't it some sort of a Mohammedan secret society?"

The girl nodded.

"Yes," she said, "if you like to call it that, but the Senussi is only called 'secret' by the French officials because they are too cowardly to acknowledge its existence.

"They know that their native regiments are full of its adherents, and they know too that one day France will have to measure her strength with it, and they fear what will happen when that day comes!"

"But," interrupted Jim, "what is the Senussi exactly?"

"The Senussi," the girl replied, "is the Power that is going to rule Islam, and not only Islam, but the East! When the time is ripe it will strike, and all the European nations who hold Islam under will be swept away like dust before the wind. France—England will go. Nothing can save them!"

Her eyes were shining, and she had raised her voice, but she suddenly stopped as if she realized that she had been saying too much, and turned to her companion.

"I am afraid you are having a dull evening," she said. "Tell me, now, since you have seen me as you wanted to, what you think of me."

Jim looked at her. "I think you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," he returned, with conviction, and then felt that he had made a clumsy blunder,

but the girl laughed, and was obviously well pleased.

"Do you?" she said, "and yet you must have seen many beautiful women in your own country. Still, others have told me that!"

Jim was rather astonished. The girl beside him seemed to take his homage to her beauty as a right, and a right to which she was well accustomed. He looked at her again. She was lying back on the couch, and smiling. Then her hand dropped close to his, and after a moment touched it. Jim's heart was beating furiously. He leaned over toward the girl, took her hand and slid his arm round her waist. She let it remain there for a moment without resistance, and then shook herself free.

"You go too fast, my friend," she said, with a laugh. "Do you think I am yours for the asking, then?"

Jim's hand closed on hers again; there was an instant's silence, and then the girl continued:

"Just now I told you that there was gold and glory waiting for you in the South, if you cared to take them. Now if I told you there was something else—and gave you an earnest of it—would you still refuse it?"

The blood was throbbing in Jim Lingard's head, and his hands were shaking. He had known this girl beside him for perhaps an hour to speak to, and already he felt that in her company he was not his own master. He did not mistake the nature of the offer made to him. He could not divine the reason of it, but he knew that with every fibre of his being he wished to take advantage of it. After all, what was the Legion to him? Why should he be bound to it? Other men deserted, with no prospect in front of them except recapture or death—why should he not go? Then he pulled himself together.

"Yes!" he said, "I stay with my regiment until my time is finished!"

He rose from the couch, went over to the other end of the room, and walked up and down two or three times. He felt that the further away he was from the couch and its occupant the more chance he had of remaining cool and he did not

wish to lose his head or be tempted any further. He knew quite well how very little more of his companion's influence was needed to scatter all his scruples to the wind.

But he had the British officer's strong sense of duty toward his regiment, whatever that regiment happened to be, and at present he considered that his duty was toward the Legion. The girl on the sofa rested her chin on her hands, and looked at him without speaking for a few minutes.

"We want men like you," at last she said slowly, "men who know how to be faithful to their word. I have always heard that the English are that, and now I believe it! Let me tell you, M. Lingard, that there are few who would have refused the offer you have had to-night!"

Jim turned. "I did not refuse it," he said, rather hoarsely, "I refused the conditions which went with it!"

"Nevertheless," the girl said, "you will come South—and before long!"

Jim laughed rather arrogantly. "Probably," he replied, "the Legion goes everywhere, and if it is sent South, South it will go—to the Pole if it is ordered!"

The girl rose from her divan.

"I must send you away now," she said, "it is not very safe for you to stay longer here. Ayesha will show you how to get out—or stay, I will!"

She extended her hand, and Jim raised it to his lips. At the same time with her other hand she extinguished the lamp on the table beside her, and Jim was conscious of a pair of warm arms round his neck, and lips against his own. He was young and only human, and he had been very highly tried that night. His arms went round the girl, and he returned her kiss with interest.

After a while the girl released herself, and relit the lamp and turned to him.

"My compliments," she said with a laugh; "you are not quite so much of a stone as most of your nation have the reputation of being! and now you must go. But what an Englishman you are! You have never even asked my name!"

Jim stammered. It was quite true. He had never asked the girl's name, or

spoken to her by any other title than that of the formal Mademoiselle.

The girl sighed. "See how bold I have to be with you," she said. "Well, in case it may interest you, you may call me Amine."

Jim bowed. "Amine," he repeated. "I will remember that. My name is Jim."

The girl looked puzzled. "Jeem," she said, "Jeem—what a strange name! Well, I will remember it also. And now promise me one thing—come down here to see me before you go. I know you will come South before long, and there is something to be done for you first; and now, Jeem, follow me!"

She took his hand and led him down the passage, and a minute or two afterward Jim found himself outside in the hot, scented night, with his lips still tingling and his head singing as if he were in liquor.

CHAPTER VII

A CONVERSATION WITH DESROLLES

AFTER his visit to the house in the garden, Jim found it difficult to settle down to his duty. He felt vaguely ill at ease over the whole episode, and felt very much inclined to curse Mère Julie for having put the thought of it into his head in the first place. Think it out as he might from all points of view, he could not come to any satisfactory conclusion. Why had the girl Amine harped so on gold and glory to be won in the South, and, even supposing it was true, what special reason could she have for offering them to him? Also he was much exercised in his mind as to who or what the said Amine was. She spoke perfect French, and yet she was not French; she was civilized, and at the same time showed flashes of primitive passion which no woman of the Western races would do. Jim felt rather uneasy over the whole affair. Amine fascinated, and to a certain extent dominated him when he was in her presence, but when he was by himself, and had time for cool reflection, the more he looked at the whole business, the less he liked it. It did not seem quite natural, somehow.

At this time also he was extremely hard

worked, so much so, in fact, that he had little or no time for thoughts about love affairs. A draft had left Aïn Sefra for Sidi-bel-Abbés *en route* for Tonkin; consequently the garrison was short-handed, and the mounted company, greatly to its disgust, had to take its turn of guards and fatigues with the rest, in addition to its other work. Desrolles, a Parisian who had enlisted at the same time as Jim, was one of the men who composed the draft. He had continued his habit of deserting at every possible opportunity, never misbehaving himself in any other way, but simply finishing his punishment for one desertion, and then on the very first occasion which offered itself repeating the offence. He never got far enough away to come to any serious harm, being invariably captured by a native policeman or friendly Arab within an hour's walk of the station, but the authorities were beginning to get a little tired of this special form of diversion, and decided to give him a change of air and scene, in the hope of curing his special form of *cafard*.

For one thing there was a standing reward of twenty-five francs offered for every deserting Legionary brought in, and after Desrolles' third or fourth escapade of this kind, his *chef de bataillon* began to look on him in the light of a somewhat expensive luxury, and thought that somebody else might as well have the guardianship of him for a little.

One day, just before the draft left, Jim entered a barrack-room casually, and found Desrolles sitting on a bed. Although Desrolles had not received, or seemed to desire any promotion, the two had remained excellent friends in private, and in public also as far as the discipline of the Legion, which sternly represses any intimacy between non-commissioned officers and men, permitted, and Jim greeted Desrolles with a friendly nod.

"So we are going to lose you, Lunettes," he said. "How are you going to like Tonkin, do you think?"

Desrolles favored him with a beaming smile.

"Yes, you are going to lose me," he replied. "Tragic for the battalion, isn't it. Still, the old man thinks I want a

change of air. So do I—I've thought so for a long time. And I'm not going to like Tonkin at all, because I'm going there, not at all."

"You'd better be careful," Jim replied. "If you try desertion on the voyage you'll get shot, and if you try it when you get to Tonkin the Chinese will get hold of you, and crucify you or cut you to little bits."

Desrolles wrinkled his nose. "The Chinese are barbarians," he remarked. "They revolt me. So do the Arabs. So does the Legion."

"Oh, by the way," said Jim, "you've had a better education than I've had, can you tell me what the Senussi is?"

Desrolles looked rather surprised.

"The Senussi," he repeated. "I don't know very much about it—no white man does, I take it. But what do you want to know about it for?"

"Nothing much," Jim replied, "just curiosity. I heard the word mentioned—sort of secret society, isn't it—and thought you might know something about it."

Desrolles considered a few minutes.

"It's a sort of Mohammedan secret society," he then said. "It got started about eighty or ninety years ago with the object of purifying the Moslem religion—sort of reformation, you know—and since then has been growing steadily. No one knows how many members it has exactly, but there must be millions of them. In the time of the last chief, Senussi-el-Mahdi, they didn't do much except proselytise, but now they have another chief; who he is nobody seems to be very certain of, but anyhow the Senussi is waking up, and the authorities know it. The Turks don't like the movement either. You know, the Senussi say the Turks are a rotten lot—bad Moslems, and all that—and as the Sultan is a sort of pope to the faithful he doesn't care to be criticized. And there's a story going about some woman who has a lot to do with the Senussi at present. Whatever it is, it seems to have caught on with the Arabs. They say this woman can work magic and has all the djinns of the desert at her command. Anyhow, there'll probably be trouble with the Senussi one of these days, and I think, when it comes,

that we're going to be very sorry for ourselves!"

Jim looked at Desrolles admiringly.

"Where did you get hold of all that?" he asked.

Desrolles laughed. "Oh, Bim told me most of it," he said, "and I found out the rest by keeping my ears open."

"And," asked Jim, "who may 'Bim' be?"

"Bim," returned the other, "Oh, Bim is Abdullah ben Ibrahim. I call him Bim for short. He likes me. So does his daughter. Bim gets twenty-five francs from the Government every time he brings me in, and I believe he's getting to look on me as a kind of investment. I expect he'll miss me when I go. He tells me lots of interesting things. You'd be more valuable as a *sous-off*, if you tried to improve your mind like me, instead of hanging round barracks."

Jim grinned. "You're a wonderful chap," he said, "and I wouldn't be surprised if you did something big some day, unless you come to a bad end first, which you probably will. Well, I must get off. Good luck, old fellow, and mind the Chinese don't get you!"

As he went back to his own quarters he was thinking about what Desrolles had told him on the subject of the Senussi. He had been quite long enough in the East to know that almost any one who sets himself up as a prophet can obtain disciples, and that his power for mischief to the established order of things is only bounded by the number of these he can obtain and his personal influence over them.

The desert Arab lives in hope of a "Jihad" or holy war against the infidel—less on religious grounds than because it seems to his untutored mind to open up an endless prospect of loot. What Jim could not understand was, a woman being mixed up in the affair. As a rule, in the East, woman is kept severely in her place, and only emerges to take the lead perhaps once in a thousand years. Still, Jim knew what a reputation for occult powers will do for its possessor—be the same male or female—in the East. To the Arab the wildest happenings of the Arabian Nights

are not only possible, but under certain circumstances probable; and any would-be Mahdi who can make a sufficient show of knowledge of magic can command an enormously greater degree of influence than one who bases his claim simply on the support of Allah and the Prophet. Still, if there was going to be trouble with the Senussi or any one else, so much the better, Jim thought.

The Legionary is the modern equivalent of the mercenary soldier of the Middle Ages in everything except pay, and he thrives on active service as he does on nothing else. Under its influence *cafard* vanishes as if by magic, and men who in barracks are little better than monomaniacs become almost sane again, and with most of the men it disappears altogether.

In one way the Legionary is like an animal of the jungle. Put him in barracks with their monotony, and he becomes surly and dangerous to himself and others, place him in his proper surroundings—the march, or battlefield—and he becomes what he is by nature, the soldier *par excellence*.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROTECTION OF "THE OTHERS"

ABOUT a week after Jim's conversation with Desrolles the order came for the mounted company to proceed to Douargala. The men were rather glad of it than otherwise. True, Douargala was a hole—the last place God made, the back of beyond—but there was always the chance of active service, and for that the Legionary will forgive much discomfort in his surroundings. Besides, with the exception of a company of native levies, there were no other troops there, and discipline would probably be slackened. Captain Faës was a wise man, and saw no use in holding his men on a tight rein when there was no reason for it. The Legionary is an adept at getting into mischief when there is the slightest chance of doing so, but a station like Douargala taxes even his ingenuity in this respect. Also, fond as the Legionary is of going *en pompe*, in the face of a prospect of active service, however remote, he generally prefers to endure the hardships of his lot, keeping the

other excitement as a treat until quieter times.

For two or three days Jim had been very busy seeing to saddlery and distribution of cartridges and new kit. By this time the mules were broken to their work, and the mounted company were beginning to shape well. It was noticeable that they had begun to look down, with the scorn of the mounted man for the foot-soldier, on their comrades who were remaining with the battalion, and already there had been several fights on the subject, and relations were, to say the least of it, becoming strained. Altogether, in the interests of peace, it was just as well that the move was taking place.

One evening, Jim was returning to his quarters from the quartermaster's store, where he had been drawing saddlery for his squad. As he was approaching the *quartier* or barracks, of the mounted company, he noticed that he was being followed by an Arab, who was wrapped from head to foot in a dirty white *haik*. Just as he was entering the gate of the *quartier*, the Arab drew level with him, and regarded him keenly.

"El Sergeant Lingardi?" he queried.

Jim nodded, and the Arab fumbled in the breast of his robe and produced a scrap of paper which he handed to Jim, remarking as he did so, "Ins'allah."

Jim took the paper and looked at it. There was no address on it, and he turned to the Arab.

"For me?" he queried.

The Arab nodded vigorously.

"El Sergeant Lingardi," he said, and then, apparently as an afterthought, "bacshish?"

Jim gave him a couple of small coins, and he disappeared into the gathering dusk.

Jim slipped the note into his pocket, and waited until he found himself alone before he read it. It was very short. "Come and see me to-morrow night," it ran, "come without fail. I want to see you before you go to Douargala." The note was written in pencil, and signed simply "A," but Jim knew whom it was from.

He frowned rather irritably. He was not at all sure that he wanted to visit the house in the garden again. Amine was

certainly extraordinarily fascinating—the most fascinating woman he had ever met—but he felt vaguely that there was something wrong with the place, as if it were being used as a habitation by some one or something whose presence was not quite natural—or at any rate not natural in ordinary surroundings. Also he had not liked the power which the girl Amine had shown of extracting information from him. In response to her questions he had told her all his most secret thoughts and aspirations—thoughts which he had only half acknowledged even to himself, and he could not understand why he had done so, and was inclined to be angry with himself on the subject.

Still he felt that he wanted to go. He did not like the house, he did not like the atmosphere, he did not like the secrecy of the whole business; and he was far from certain that he liked the girl Amine; but still he could not conceal from himself that he wanted to see her again.

Jim found considerable difficulty in obtaining leave even for one night. His quartermaster-sergeant, who had counted on his assistance in preparing lists of equipment need, waxed blasphemous on the subject; Lieutenant de Morsec showed keen curiosity as to what attraction he could possibly find in Ain Sefra, and even implored him to reveal "who the lady was," and Captain Faës was unsympathetic, but after a great deal of trouble Jim obtained his leave, accompanied by awful warnings of what would happen if he overstayed it by one half minute.

Still, Jim had got his leave, and the next evening, soon after sunset, found him at the house in the garden.

The night was very dark, so dark that Jim had to grope his way through the shrubs, and actually found himself touching the wall of the house before he had any idea that he had arrived at it.

Amine had mentioned no time for his visit, and he waited for a moment in the veranda, hardly knowing what to do or where to look for an entrance. Then a window close to him opened noiselessly and a voice whispered, "To the right, and open the door."

He moved a few steps along the veranda

and after a few moments' search found a door, which opened to the pressure of his hand. He entered, and found himself in a passage which was in darkness. Then another door further up the passage was opened, and the darkness was lit by a lamp which was carried by Amine. She drew back into the room behind her, motioned Jim to follow her and, placing the lamp on the table, seated herself on the divan. Jim followed and closed the door behind him.

Amine smiled. "So you have come," she said. "That is very good of you. I wanted to see you before you left. You go to Douargala to-morrow, don't you?"

Jim nodded. "Yes, so far as I know," he said.

"Yes," said Amine. "The mounted company go to Douargala to-morrow, and they are sending other troops there as well besides the Goumiers. The Government is going to make a large camp there!"

Jim looked at her in surprise.

"Are they?" he said, "What for? Douargala is of no importance to any one as far as I know; I don't even know why they are sending us there."

The girl laughed.

"Oh," she said, "the Government is not altogether foolish—at least not always. Douargala is of no importance now, but suppose, mind, only suppose, an enemy was coming up from the South and East, what then?"

Jim considered a moment. "Oh, in that case," he said, "it might be rather important. You see, it more or less controls the caravan route. But I don't see what danger there is from the South, except the Touaregs, and they are always there. Any danger is far more likely to come from the West—from Morocco."

"Nevertheless," the girl returned, "the Government knows more than you think it does, and I think you will not find Douargala as dull as you think it is going to be. There are other people in the desert beside the Touraegs who do not like the Government."

She motioned to him to come and sit on the divan beside her, and he crossed the room and did so.

It struck him that she was amazingly

well informed about the plans of the French Government. Beyond knowing that a mounted company was going to Douargala in the ordinary course of duty, there had not been a whisper at Ain Sefra of any movement of troops or formation of a new station. He concluded that news had filtered from the officer's mess through native servants into the town, and that probably Amine had in turn received it from her own servants.

"Well," he said, "anywhere will be better than Ain Sefra, and if they send more troops there we shall have all the lighter time."

The girl turned toward him.

"I do not think you will have a very easy time," she said, "not for long, at any rate. Now, I want to know, do you trust me?"

Jim was rather surprised.

"Trust you?" he repeated; "Yes, of course I do. If I did not trust you I should not be here alone. Why?"

The girl leaned forward and took his hands.

"Because," she said, "I want you to trust me absolutely. You are going to Douargala to-morrow, I know that you will be in danger there, and I want to give you the Protection, but I can only give it with your own consent."

Jim looked at her in surprise.

"Protection?" he echoed, "what Protection?"

The girl made a gesture of impatience. "Oh, you *Roumis!*" she said rather angrily. "You always want to know what and why. I mean the Protection of the Desert, and I want you to have it—because—because—oh, because of this," and Jim felt her lips warm against his. "You will let me give it to you?" and she looked into his eyes.

Jim thought for a moment. If the girl had meant him any harm, she could have done it to him on either of his previous visits. As to the mysterious "Protection" of which she spoke, he knew quite well the value attached by Arabs and also by many men of the Legion to certain charms and amulets, which were supposed to bring the happy possessor much luck.

"Oh, yes," he said. "But what have I got to do?" The girl stood up.

"You must take off any metal you have on you," she said. "Yes," as Jim took off his belt and bayonet, "your boots too, and any money you have in your pockets. Now watch me."

Jim saw her go over to a brazier which was smouldering in a corner of the room, take up a small box that was on a table beside it, and sprinkle something on the fire. Almost instantly the room grew full of a thick, greenish smoke, with a most peculiar but not unpleasant odor.

He found a difficulty in breathing and could feel the pulses in his ears throbbing like engines. Then the room seemed to grow strangely dark—darker even than the smoke had made it—and it seemed to him that he was moving backward, away from himself, at a tremendous pace. As he expressed it afterward: "I was sitting there, and all the same I was miles away." Then all sense of motion stopped, and he seemed to be in darkness, a darkness filled with a noise as of the beat of mighty wings, and when that noise died down he was conscious of nothing except darkness, of darkness which was almost tangible, and which closed and enveloped him on all sides.

The girl left the brazier, crossed the room, and looked at the divan. The man on it was lying back with his teeth clenched, his eyes wide open and vacant, and beyond a slight, a very slight movement of breathing, absolutely motionless. She put her hand on his forehead, looked in his eyes and, turning, clapped her hands sharply. Almost immediately the door opened and a man entered. He was very small, very old, and walked feebly with the aid of a stick. As he entered, he made a profound obeisance. The girl pointed to the figure on the couch.

"This is the man," she said, "now do what you have to do."

The old man approached the sofa, looked, and turned to the girl.

"Highness," he quavered. "I cannot give the Protection to a *Roumi*—an Infidel—I—" but the girl interrupted.

"Cannot?" she echoed. "You will do as I say—you forget who I am. I wish

this man to have the Protection as far as you can give it to him."

The old man shook his head again.

"I dare not," he said. "If my lord Hassan Ali ever knew what I had done, or that a *Roumi* had been here—"

"You would die in a very unpleasant fashion," the girl returned. "Well, Hassan Ali will not know. Even if he did you would find it better to obey me. There have been people who preferred their own wishes to mine, Abs'laam, and—well, as I say, there have been those foolish people. Do you know where they are now, Abs'laam? Now, get to your work."

The old man trembled, and turned again to the couch.

"Your Highness will protect me?" he queried.

The girl nodded. "I will hold you safe," she answered. "Now do what you have to do, and quickly!"

Abs'laam bent over the figure on the divan.

"Protection against lead and steel I can give him," he said, "but not against the diseases which Allah sends. Power the Great Ones have, but no power to interfere with the decrees of the All-mighty, the All-merciful."

The girl stamped her foot.

"Stop prating," she said, "and get to your work, time presses!"

The old man removed Jim's tunic, and opened his shirt at the neck. Then he took something from the breast of his robe, and, going over to the brazier, scattered several handfuls of some substance into it. Instantly the smoke rose thicker than ever, filling the room from side to side like a solid wall. Like a wall, too, it divided the room into two parts. On one side was the divan with the prostrate figure on it, and on the other was the wall of rolling smoke, changing almost every moment from red to purple, and from purple to green. The bent figure of the old man had straightened, and he was standing with his arms outstretched, uttering words which seemed to fill the room—Azimah, Danhausch, Naviroth, Elbazan, and other names—and behind the wall of smoke the air seemed to be full of the rush and beat of mighty wings.

Darker and darker grew the room, and louder and louder grew the sound of wings, as if the owners of the names were hastening to answer some one who had called them.

The room became quite dark, with the exception of one ray of light, which rested for a moment on the figure on the divan, then the darkness lifted again and the room was as it had been, except for a few wreaths of strange-colored smoke, which drifted toward the roof.

Both Amine and the old man were shaking.

Abs'laam turned and bowed toward the girl.

"I have done what I could, Highness," he said. "The others have been here—you heard and saw?"

Amine nodded doubtfully. "I heard—yes——" she said. "As to seeing, I do not know. Still, he," and she pointed to the couch, "has the Protection?"

"He has the Protection against enemies," answered the old man, "also neither steel nor lead can hurt him for a year from now. I have done what your Highness asked, so far as I had the power—I have your Highness' promise to hold me harmless from my lord?"

The girl pointed to the door.

"Go," she said, "and rest easy. Those who serve Amine of the Senussi have nothing to fear. Go quickly; he is waking."

It seemed to Jim Lingard that he traversed millions of miles of dark space, and that now he was coming at a dizzy speed back to Something, which he vaguely realized was partly himself. The two selves seemed to merge into each other like two drops of water and the two become one self, and then he opened his eyes. The whole room was full of a strong smell that took him by the back of the throat and made his eyes water.

Jim sat up and looked around at Amine sitting beside him, and looking at him anxiously.

"So you have come back?" she said.

Jim put his hand to his forehead.

"I did not know that I had been away," he said. "I must have been asleep. What has happened?"

The girl smiled.

"Nothing," she said. "You have got what I wanted to give you. And now you must go. It is not safe for you to stay here any longer."

Jim was struggling into his tunic. His head was still rather giddy.

"I don't understand," he began, but Amine stopped him.

"Do not try to," she said. "Only remember that from this on you have the Protection of the Lords of the Desert. And now you must go!"

She stepped up to him, put her arms around his neck and kissed him again, then pushing him into the passage, led him along it and through the door.

"Good-bye," she said; "not good-bye, though, for I shall see you again soon. To-night I go South to my own people, and before long you will come South too. The Lords of the Desert will bring you to me safely!"

Once more her lips met his, and then he was alone in the garden. He could never tell how he got back to his quarters that night. He remembered leaving the garden, and the next thing he had any clear recollection of was the Ta-ra-ra-rapp of the trumpet as it sounded the réveillé next morning.

As the first clear notes of the trumpet cut the air Jim swung himself off his cot on to his feet. He had not the remotest recollection of how he had returned to barracks. His head was clear enough now and he was feeling perfectly well, so he concluded that he could not have been drunk the night before. But what on earth had happened to him in the house in the garden, he wondered? He remembered distinctly sitting on the divan and watching Amine, and then everything had gone dark and the next thing he remembered was that he had woke up on the couch, with half his clothes off. Had she tried to rob him, he wondered, and then laughed at the idea, Legionaries as a rule do not carry anything worth taking on them. And what had Amine meant by the talk about the "Lords of the Desert?" Jim was extremely puzzled by the whole affair, but at present had no time to give any further thought to it.

A corporal entered the room, saluted hurriedly—in the French army, sergeants are saluted by men of a lower grade—and remarking, "The captain wants you, sergeant," disappeared at a run.

Jim followed him. Some of the men were getting the mules out of the stable, others were overhauling their kit and saddlery, and others who had finished were keeping a watchful eye on their belongings to see that none of their comrades who happened to be short of articles of equipment "decorated" themselves at the last moment.

Captain Faës and Lieutenant de Morsec were both on the parade ground. The younger officer favored Jim with a sympathetic smile delivered behind his superior's back, but the captain looked stern.

"Well, sergeant," he began, "I cannot compliment you on your appearance this morning! You look as if you had been out of bed all night. However, as it is our last night in a town for some time, I suppose it is to be excused. Get your *peloton* saddled up and on the march as soon as you can, the sooner we get away from here the sooner we get to Douargala."

Jim saluted and turned away to carry out the captain's orders. By this time most of the men were fully dressed and equipped, and it did not take long to get the saddles on the mules and the men mounted. Jim reported "all present and correct" to Lieutenant de Morsec, and the advance party started, pursued by rude remarks from the men of the battalion which remained behind, and who had turned out to see the departure of the mounted detachment.

As it made its way through the town, the column passed the house in the garden, and Jim noticed that, although it was by this time comparatively late in the morning, the windows were closed, and that there was no sign of life about it.

The column cleared the outskirts of the town, the command "March at ease" was given and scraps of conversation in many tongues began to be heard. The Legionary on the march is a cheerful person, even when encumbered with from sixty to eighty pounds of kit, besides a rifle and ammunition, and marching on his own

feet under a temperature of 100° in the shade, and now the men of the mounted company were very pleased with themselves. They had not to march, the morning was reasonably cool, and they were going on what might quite likely prove to be active service. Added to this, they were getting away from the detested garrison duty, and after a little time voices began to rise in the marching song of the Legion, *Le Boudin*, the whole column taking up the chorus:

"Tiens voilà du boudin
Voilà du boudin
Voilà du boudin

Pour les Alsaciens, les Suisses et les Lorraines
Pour les Belges il n'y en a plus!"

And then the old song inspired by the deplorable headgear of its first commander, General Bugeaud:

As-tu vu la casquette
La casquette
De Père Bugeaud?"

"Père Bugeaud," as his Legionaries called him, has been dust these seventy years, but the fame of his cap—that cap which was ever in the forefront of the hottest fight—still lingers in the regiment which he loved so well.

CHAPTER IX

THE SENUSSI SHOW THEIR TEETH

LIFE at Douargala was very much the same in all essentials as at Ain Sefra, but with the iron discipline considerably slackened. So far no other troops had arrived there, and consequently beyond the ordinary routine of camp life there was very little to do. Captain Faës, however, was too good a soldier to let his men rust, and drill and marches into the desert were constant. Beyond a plentiful crop of rumors, there was no excitement of any kind. These latter came in every day, and if they did nothing else, provided topics of conversation: The Moors had declared a Jihad against the infidel, and were over the frontier in thousands. No, it was nothing of the sort, Germany had declared war on France and the Legion

en masse were going to the front immediately! Both the speakers were liars. Another man had absolutely authentic information, France had at last declared a protectorate over Morocco, and the Legion were going there!

As a matter of fact, the whole of Algeria seemed to be plunged in profound and devastating peace. Even the Touaregs of the desert forbore to raid north, and confined their operations to districts outside the French sphere of influence. Men began to say that life in the Legion was not what it used to be. It is a strange fact that life in any regiment never is. The men of ten or twenty years ago are always supermen compared with their degenerate descendants of the present day!

Then came the first hint of trouble from the South. For two days the wireless had been flashing and cracking, and Captain Faës had been going about looking anxious, when early one morning an Arab on a camel had ridden in, rocking and swaying in his saddle, with a bloodstained bandage round his head, and demanded to see "*El Kaid*." He had been closeted with Captain Faës for the best part of an hour, and then the latter had despatched an orderly for Lieutenant de Morsec.

As the lieutenant entered the captain's quarters, he found the latter bent over a large map of Southern Algeria, and occasionally shooting sharp questions at the Arab who had come in.

Morsec saluted, and the captain turned to him.

"There is news," he said, "serious news. This man, Achmet Ali, a native officer of Goumiers, has just brought it in. He says this Senussi trouble in the South has come to a head at last. It seems that the Senussi feel themselves strong enough to try a fall with us. No, not a Jihad," as Morsec hazarded an observation, "at least not yet. That will come later. What has happened now is that they, or a strong party of them, have raided north, and at present are camped in the oasis of El Rasa, about fifty miles south. Achmet Ali says there are about four hundred of them. The Government have known this business was coming for weeks, but they've

hesitated to send troops because the Senussi doesn't exist officially, and if they did exist would be friendly—also strictly officially. The consequence is we are short of men here. Now, I want you to take your *peloton* at once, and go to El Rasa to find out the state of affairs there."

Morsec's face lit up hopefully. "And turn them out of it?" he suggested, but Captain Faës shook his head.

"No," he answered, "this is no job for one *peloton*. Douargala must be held, and a whole company isn't enough. I have sent a wireless to Ain Sefra for reinforcements, but in the meanwhile I want to know what strength the Senussi really are in at El Rasa, so I am sending you to find out. 'Go—look—see,' as they say in Tonkin. By the way, isn't that Englishman Lingard in your *peloton*?"

Morsec nodded, and replied in the affirmative.

"Well," continued the captain, "he seems a fairly good man, and he certainly knows the mounted work. I am going to promote him to adjutant, temporarily at any rate, and, if he behaves himself and does his work well, we shall see what the colonel has to say about confirming him in his rank. I must keep Sevonikoff here. Now go and get your men ready, and get off as soon as you possibly can. There is no time to be lost."

Morsec saluted and withdrew. A few minutes afterward mules were being saddled, and men were packing their belongings in preparation for the expedition.

Jim was excessively pleased with his temporary promotion, the news of which was conveyed to him by Morsec in person. Even if his grade were only temporary he knew that with luck it would be made permanent, and he also knew that in the French army, and especially in the Legion, it is not a very far step from adjutant to commissioned rank. He had returned his rifle and bayonet into store, obtaining a sword and revolver in exchange for them, and as he moved off with the company, riding on its flank, he felt more like Jim Lingard of the 31st than at any time since he had joined the Legion.

The men were in high spirits at the pros-

pect of active service, and were laughing and joking among themselves like school-boys. Lieutenant de Morsec also was extremely pleased with himself. It was that young gentleman's first independent command, and he had visions of glory and promotion, and of a triumphal return to Paris. His captain's orders not to fight troubled him not in the least. The Senussi, or Arabs who chose to call themselves Senussi, were at El Rasa, where they had no business to be. Very good, it was his—Lieutenant de Morsec's—business to see that they did not stay there a moment longer than he could help. Arab nature being what it was, he was quite convinced that if the Senussi saw his party that the attack would come from them, and thus relieve him of all responsibility.

As the little column wound its way into the desert, Morsec reined back and spoke to Jim.

"*Mon Dieu*," he said, "at last we have something to do! What do you think of this *razzia*, adjutant, or do you think there is anything in it at all?"

Jim shook his head. "I don't know, lieutenant," he answered. "One can never tell in the desert. When every one thinks there is going to be a big flare-up nothing ever happens, and when everything is quiet suddenly something big comes along."

Morsec laughed. He was an amiable young man, and did not in the least see why he should stand on his dignity with his new adjutant, a man very little older than himself, and who had obviously belonged to the same social grade.

"Well," he said, "I hope there is something in it this time. I've had just about enough of garrison duty, haven't you? I thought when I came to the Legion that there was going to be plenty of active service, but so far!" and he shrugged his shoulders. "Now, perhaps we shall have a little fun. The captain is mad to be out of it, but he daren't leave the station to look after itself. Luck for you, too, that we were short-handed at Douargala, adjutant!" Jim was privately of the same opinion, but he did not say so. He hazarded a remark on the subject of the ex-

pedition instead. To his cavalryman's eye the whole line of march seemed to be wrongly arranged. Morsec had sent out an advance-guard, but no flankers or rear-guard, and the advance-guard itself was riding at ease with rifles slung. Jim pointed this out, and Morsec shrugged his shoulders cheerfully.

"Oh, if you think it necessary," he said, "have them out. I don't know much about this cavalry game, but we aren't anywhere near El Rasa yet!"

Jim pointed away to the left, where the flatness of the desert was broken by rolling sandhills seamed with gullies.

"One never knows with *Arbis*, lieutenant," he said. "Anyhow it is better to take no risks; better send out flankers, I think!" Morsec assented with another shrug of his shoulders and gave the order, and two sections from the front galloped off to the flanks.

It was very hot. The sun was high, and beat down as if the sky were made of molten iron. The desert stretched away in front, yellowish gray, only broken by the sandhills to the left front. Beyond the line of the column, which at a distance looked like a snake writhing its way over the desert, the whole landscape was absolutely without sign of life. The men were sitting loosely in their saddles with their rifles slung, and chatting to each other in half a dozen different tongues. Every now and then a man would begin to sing, and the others would take up the chorus.

Once Jim thought he saw a flutter of white drapery among the sandhills to the left, but on looking closer could see nothing and concluded that his eyes were dazzled by the glare from the sand. He found Morsec an entertaining companion. For months he had been living with men who had few interests in life, and fewer topics of conversation outside their profession, and it was like a breath of Paris to him to find some one who had seen life as he understood it. Without showing any offensive curiosity Morsec had found out that Jim had held a commission in an English regiment and from that moment he dropped his rank, and spoke to his adjutant as an equal. Both men were perfectly aware

that this attitude was only temporary, and that as soon as the expedition was over they would revert to their usual position, but in the meanwhile they were two young men with very similar tastes, in each other's company on an expedition which promised at least a chance of excitement.

Morsec was perfectly frank about himself. He gave Jim to understand that he was only in the Legion until the dust of the escapade which brought him to Africa had blown over, and that then he would apply for a transfer to a French regiment. In the meantime his main idea in life was to get as much sensation as possible out of it, and in the course of an hour's conversation he sketched at least three schemes of bringing his detachment into action before their return to Aïn Sefra.

He had just sketched a scheme for rushing the oasis of El Rasa by night, killing or capturing its tenants, then marching on the Senussi stronghold, acting on information received from prisoners, and returning to Aïn Sefra to receive the envious congratulations of his commanding officer, and thereafter high rank.

He had arrived at the stage when he had received command of the Legion, with Jim—also honored by a grateful country—as his second in command, and was in the midst of an impassioned burst of eloquence, when suddenly he stopped, shading his eyes with his hand.

"What's that," he said, "there to the left front. The flankers have seen something. Look! They're coming back as hard as they can lay legs to the ground. *Dieu de Dieu!* Look there!"

Jim looked. The flankers were spurring back, crouched forward on the necks of their mounts, and behind them came a confused mass of men and camels, heading straight for the column.

Then Lieutenant de Morsec showed that if he could talk, he could also act promptly in an emergency.

"Sections about! Gallop!" he shouted. "Form on the sandhills to rear, and dismount!" The men swung their mules round and rode for their lives. It was the only thing to do. Some little distance in the rear was a line of low sandhills which

might conceivably be held by dismounted men against cavalry.

Where the column was, there was nothing but open desert without a scrap of cover of any description, whether for man or mule. The men of the column were armed only with rifle and bayonet; and a Lebel rifle, with a twelve-inch bayonet, while an excellent arm for an infantry man, is next door to useless when the man is mounted. Under the circumstances there was only one thing to do—to get back to the cover of the sandhills, and to hold the attacking force as long as possible by long range fire. Morsec's command was outnumbered by four or five to one, and any attempt to meet the Arabs on open ground meant annihilation for it.

Morsec turned his mount and then reined to let the galloping flankers pass him.

Then he turned to Jim.

"Race you to the sandhills, Lingard," he said with a laugh, and galloped after the company, Jim riding neck and neck with him.

The Arabs were very close—within a couple of hundred yards—but the company were gaining on them. A camel will outrace a horse or mule three times over on a long journey, but in a short burst he does not show at his best. Still, Jim saw that it would be a very close thing. If the company could reach the sandhills and dismount in time, they would probably be able to hold the Arabs off; if not, they would be ridden over and wiped out. The Arabs were firing from the saddle without much effect as yet, but bullets were whining overhead, and kicking up the sand around, sometimes a great deal closer than was pleasant, and now and again the war-cry of the desert, "U-U-Allah Akbar!" would rise from the ranks behind.

Morsec was riding close to Jim on the right, and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. The main body of the company was a hundred yards ahead, by this time close to the sandhills, and tailed out in their rear, while in front of Morsec and Jim were the men of the flanking party. One of these was riding very slowly. He was a huge Swede named Erichsen, a man well known and liked in the company for his general inoffensiveness. Erichsen was

more than six feet three in height, and built in proportion, so that his mule could not keep up to the others with his weight on its back.

Then the catastrophe came. A bullet fired at random from behind struck Morsec's mule, which came down with a crash, flinging its rider clear. Morsec was on his feet again like a cat, but staggered, and subsided on the sand with a groan.

He turned with his face wried with pain to Jim, who had pulled up beside him. "Knee gone," he said between his teeth. "Get on and take command of the company and——"

But Jim was already off his mule, as was Erichsen, who had also pulled back. Erichsen lifted the lieutenant in his arms, and was carrying him toward his mule, when Jim's animal chose this extremely inopportune moment to continue an argument he had had with Erichsen's on the subject of a feed the night before. He edged quietly round until he was within distance, and then let fly two resounding kicks into the other's ribs. Erichsen's mule, surprised and hurt, retaliated in kind, and the two animals, kicking and squealing, followed their comrades over the desert, leaving their masters to the mercies of the oncoming Arabs.

Erichsen unslung his rifle, and snapped the bayonet on to the barrel, "Macache," he said, and stooping, rubbed his sweating palms in the sand so as to get a better grip. Then he settled his feet comfortably in the regulation position, and crouched behind his guard, ready for a lunge.

Jim drew his sword and revolver and placed himself astride Morsec, with his back against Erichsen's. As he did so a desire crossed his mind for the good lumbering feel of a heavy Webley, instead of the light French revolver, but there was no time left to review the comparative merits of firearms. Hardly had he got into position before the front rank of the Arabs was on top of the three men. Jim parried a savage slash from a *flissa*, and returned it. He felt his steel bite on bone, and one of the raiders passed on with his sword-hand dangling from the wrist. Then the world to Jim Lingard resolved itself into yellow camels, and white-clad figures seen

under the blade of a sword or over the sight of a revolver, a world that seemed to be fringed with flying steel, which somehow seemed to dart round or over him, grazing him by the fraction of an inch, but never touching him.

Once there came a pause, as the men round him opened out for a minute, and he had a curious, dreamlike vision of Erichsen with his yellow beard bristling, and his blue eyes blazing, swinging his rifle round his head by the barrel and then going down with a spear in his throat, and of Morsec lying on the ground and firing steadily over the crook of his arm with his revolver, but the Arabs round him closed in again, and once more his horizon was bounded by winnowing steel. Parry—thrust—parry—cut—thrust, until his arm ached, and his eyes were blinded with trickling sweat which he had not time to wipe away; and all the time a ridiculous verse of poetry, learned years ago from his Irish nurse, ran in his brain, and formed a kind of rhythmic accompaniment to every lunge and cut:

"Chip, chip, a little horse,
Chip, chip again, sir;
How many miles to Dublin?
Three-score and ten, sir."

Then something struck him on the back of the head; desert, camels, and men, all ran together in a flash of blinding light, and then went out in sudden darkness, Jim felt a hot bitter-sweetness in his throat, and then—nothing.

CHAPTER X

IN THE HANDS OF THE SENUSSI

JERK—pad—jerk—pad—jerk—pad.

The irregular yet ordered motion was the first thing that Jim Lingard was conscious of. The second was that his head felt as if it were opening and shutting from the nape of the neck to the top of the skull, and the third was that he felt violently sick in the stomach. Then some one close to him said in French, "Are you feeling better?" Jim tried to answer, but could not. The pain in his head seemed to spread through his whole body with every

jerk, and then a black curtain seemed to descend on him and for a while he felt nothing further.

After what seemed millions of years he became conscious of the jerk—pad—jerk—pad again, and also of the pain in his head, but this time he had more command over his bodily powers, and with a great effort opened his eyes, only to close them again with a groan after a moment.

In that moment, however, he had gathered a very fair idea of his surroundings. He was on the back of a camel—lashed there, as he could feel now—and all around him were other camels with white-clad figures on them. On his right was another camel, and seated on it was Lieutenant de Morsec, looking considerably dishevelled, but otherwise normal. Jim could see no sign of Erichsen. Morsec bent over and spoke. "I thought they had done for you."

Jim moved his tongue, and at last managed to speak.

"What happened?" he asked feebly.

"What happened?" returned Morsec, "they rode over us. Erichsen got three of them before they put a spear into him, and then somebody hit you on the head with the butt of a gun, after you had accounted for a couple. I'm not hurt, thanks to you, my friend; at least only my knee where my brute put me down. I thought you were done for. The blow that fetched you down would have stunned an ox."

"And the company?" Jim asked.

"The company's all right" returned Morsec, "at least I think so. They got to the sandhills all right, and these fellows tried a frontal attack. I think they wish they hadn't now! See"—and he pointed to a score of camels with empty saddles—"that's what they got out of it. Anyhow, they're in full retreat, taking us with them, as you see. They were just going to put a spear through you and me after you had gone down—it wasn't necessary with Erichsen, poor fellow, he had had his affair already—and then some one who seemed to be in command stopped them, I don't know exactly why. Anyhow, they just bundled us into a couple of empty saddles and took us with them."

"Do you know where to?" inquired Jim.

"Not I," returned Morsec. "All I know is that we are going South. But I do know one thing. This lot are the Senussi who were at El Rása. They must have got information about us coming; and, instead of waiting for us to come to them, came out to meet us."

He broke off suddenly as an Arab beside him struck him sharply in the ribs with the butt of a rifle, at the same time giving an order in Arabic, which Morsec rightly interpreted to mean silence.

Jim had hardly taken in all that his companion had said, but his brain was working by this time, if but slowly. If they were prisoners in the hands of Arabs, whether Senussi or not, the prospect was not exactly cheering to contemplate. The Arab is a slave dealer, both by heredity and choice and, given the opportunity, a European is as marketable a commodity to him as a Negro. If they were being taken South, it probably meant that the rest of their lives would be passed in slavery in Morocco or Kordofan, and as absolutely out of reach of any chance of rescue as if they were in the moon. Theorists who form their ideas of the stubborn pride of the European—and especially from that of the particular branch of the European race to which they happen to belong—may laugh to scorn the idea of any white man ever stooping to become the chattel of an Arab or Negro, and may state with much wealth of detail what they themselves would do in such circumstances, but the fact remains that the whip and hot iron have a wonderfully calming effect on even the proudest soul; and, given the free use of these instruments of persuasion by a man who only sees in them the normal means of reducing a refractory slave to his senses, the heir of all the ages fits into his place as a slave as quickly as does a cannibal from a West Coast village.

At present, however, their captors did not seem inclined to adopt any disciplinary methods. Beyond a thump from a rifle butt, or spear shaft, whenever they tried to converse, and which seemed to be administered more as a matter of form than anything else, they were not ill-treated.

Twice an Arab, in obedience to one of his leaders, handed a waterskin to Jim, and each time he drank freely, and felt the better for it. His head was still aching badly, and his hair and tunic collar were covered with dried blood, but his brain was working clearly now, and he did not seem to have taken any very serious hurt. So far as he could see, any attempt at escape was absolutely useless. They were riding in the centre of the Arabs, and on each side of them rode a man with an extremely business-like spear, the point of which was always kept in close proximity to the prisoners.

Jim had a good look at his captors. Many of them, by the long black veils which covered their faces from the eyes down, were Touaregs—professional brigands of the desert—but the others seemed to be made up of many races. There were several full-blooded Negroes, and many others who to Jim's eyes seemed to be almost white—Kabyles from the Atlas. Besides these there were others, men with fair or red beards and blue eyes—Berbers from the North.

The march of the party was that of disciplined men—very different from that of the disorderly mob which constitutes the usual Moorish, or Arab *barka*. The troop marched in sections of fours, keeping excellent dressing, and with flankers and ground scouts thrown out on each side and ahead.

As far as Jim could see, they all wore a sort of rough uniform consisting of a green *djellab*, or blouse, covered by a long white cloak, and every man, in addition to sword and lance, was armed with a rifle of European pattern. What struck Jim most was that all the rifles seemed to be of the same pattern. In an Arab raiding party the members as a rule are armed according to their own fancy or means, one man carrying a six-foot matchlock, another a Remington and yet another a Martini. Under this system a man's ammunition is useless to any one except himself, and when it is finished he is of no further account as a member of the firing line. When men become armed with rifles of identical pattern, a man whose ammunition is finished can replenish his store from that

of a killed or wounded comrade; but owing to the rigid system of patrols to prevent gunrunning into Northern Africa, maintained by several European Powers, it is more than rare to find any large body of natives armed alike. Jim knew this, and wondered vaguely where the last great gunrunning coup had been brought off, and where the money to pay for it had come from, for as far as he could see, the rifles were modern ones, and in excellent condition.

It was getting late in the afternoon now, and Jim was wondering if the party were going to continue their journey during the night, when Morsec spoke.

"El Rasa," he said, and nodded his head forward to indicate a point ahead.

Jim looked and saw a few palm-trees, the only green things within sight in the yellow expanse of sand.

"Where we are going?" he queried.

Morsec nodded again.

"Yes," he replied, "where we ought have been by this time, if it had not been for this cursed ambush. I wonder how many more of them there are there. And I'd give something to know who has been drilling them. They march as well or better than our native troops, and whoever is in command knows his business too! See the way he's got his scouts and flankers out; he doesn't leave much to chance!"

"I expect the Government would give something to know that too," returned Jim, "who has been drilling this lot, I mean, and where they got their rifles from. If they've got more of them and start raiding North, they are going to give the posts on the edge of the desert a bit of trouble, I fancy!"

Morsec laughed rather savagely.

"Oh," he said, "it is easy enough to say where they got their guns. Without any offence to you, my friend, from England, or through English sources! Nine out of ten of the rifles that get into the hands of the Arabs come that way!"

Morsec said no more than the simple truth, and Jim knew it.

"True bill, I'm afraid," he said. "The English business man is a strange creature and his ideas are strange too. To sell

gas-pipe guns to natives—that's business. They can't do much harm with them to any one except themselves, and your business man salves his conscience that way. Then your native finds out that there are other sorts of guns, and doesn't want gas-pipes any more. Very well. The British merchant just sees supply and demand, and provides modern rifles. He calls it 'business,' and business must be moral, as long as it brings a profit. If it doesn't, then it's immoral. He doesn't care a damn whom the rifles are going to be used against, that's not his affair, and to do him justice, he provides just as obsolete guns as he can induce his customers to take, but that's only because he makes more profit on them!"

He broke off as the troop, in obedience to an order from their leader, broke into a trot. The walking pace of a camel is not conducive to conversation, but its trot renders it impossible, and for some time Jim had quite enough to do to keep in the swaying, jolting saddle.

After half an hour or so the party arrived at the oasis, and Jim could see that it was full of men, all well armed, and dressed in the same way as his captors.

The troop entered the oasis, the camels knelt and their riders dismounted. Then Morsec and Jim were hustled forward into the presence of a man who was seated under a palm-tree.

He addressed a few sentences to them which neither of them understood, the Arabic used being some dialect that they had never heard. At last he gave an order to a man beside him, who went away, and in a few minutes returned with another. The latter listened respectfully to the chief, and then turned to the two prisoners.

"The Emir wants to know," he said, in very fair French, "what rank you hold?"

Morsec gave the required information, which the interpreter conveyed to the chief, and after a brief conversation with him, turned again to the prisoners.

"The Emir says," he remarked, "that you are Infidels, and enemies of our lord, El Senussi, and that therefore you deserve death. But he says also that perhaps your Government will pay ransom for you, or you may be useful to El Senussi, and so he

is going to take you with us. He bids me say that, if either of you give any trouble or try to escape, he will turn both of you into meat for jackals."

The Emir made a sign and the prisoners were led away. They were placed under a tree in the centre of the camp, the lashings which bound their hands were loosened, and some food and water were given to them, after which they were supplied with a cloak apiece, and left alone except for the presence of an armed guard.

There was nothing to be done except make the best of the situation, and this both men proceeded to do. Escape was utterly impossible. Even if they had not been guarded, Morsec's wrenched knee prevented him from doing more than limping about, and that with difficulty, and Jim still had violent nausea from the blow on his head.

The Arab guard wrapped himself in his burnouse, placed his back against a palm-tree, and settled himself down to watch the prisoners.

From the rest of the camp the sound of voices was rising, and fires began to be lit for the preparation of the evening meal.

Morsec finished his food, took a draught of water, and turned to his companion.

"That's better," he said. "I feel more like myself now. Question is, what's going to become of us, and where this lot are going to take us?"

"God knows," returned Jim. "They may be going to do anything with us. Anyhow, they haven't hurt us yet, and they don't seem inclined to. The only thing is to hang on and see what happens."

Morsec agreed.

"We can't get away, and there's no use trying. Besides I don't want to be turned into jackal's meat. I object. Well, we may as well try to get a sleep now; and, if a chance comes later of getting away, take it. You never know what's going to turn up."

He rolled himself in the cloak which had been given to him, and stretching himself out was asleep in five minutes.

Jim tried to follow his example, but could not. His head was still aching and he felt sick, and seemed to have no control over his thoughts. Every time he closed

his eyes, vivid pictures of his past life from his childhood on would rise before him, only to vanish as quickly as they came, and to be succeeded by others.

At last he gave up the attempt to sleep, and, placing his back against a palm-tree, reviewed his position. On the face of it, it appeared rather hopeless. They were prisoners in the hands of Arabs who were followers of a new Mahdi or prophet—one of those who make periodical appearances in the East, and whose success is measured by the fanaticism with which he can inspire his followers. The Senussi sect had the reputation of possessing this quality of fanaticism in a high degree, so much so that they looked on orthodox Moslems as heretics and traitors to the faith of the Prophet—in much the same light, in fact, as Cromwell's Ironsides regarded members of the Established Church. Under these circumstances, neither the men by whom he was surrounded nor the Senussi leader himself was likely to have much consideration for a mere Christian.

As he sat brooding with his back to the tree, he became aware of a white-clad figure approaching from the camp. As it came closer he could see that it was that of a huge and very evil-looking Negro. He walked up to the prisoners, and, after having regarded them for a moment in silence, spat on the ground. Then going over to Morsec, he shook him roughly, and holding a knife before his eyes, to emphasize what would happen if he resisted, proceeded to despoil him of his rings and watch.

The guard rose to his feet and protested angrily, but the Negro turned on him with a snarl, and then proceeded to march back to the camp with his booty. The man on guard, however, seized him, and the two struggled for a moment. Then there was a flash of steel in the Negro's hand, and the guard went down with the blood pouring from a nasty stab in his shoulder. But the camp had been alarmed by the struggle, and the whole oasis was full of figures running toward the scene of it. In obedience to the command of a man who seemed to be a sort of *sous-officier*, the Negro was seized, bound, and disarmed, and thrown down beside the other two

prisoners, where he spent the rest of the night alternately straining at his bonds and calling down curses on those who had bound him. Then the wounded guard was carried away, a new one posted, and shortly after the camp was silent except for the regular footfalls of the sentries on its outskirts.

CHAPTER X

DESERT JUSTICE

AT DAWN the next morning the encampment woke again to life. Camels bubbled and squealed over their feed, smoke began to rise from camp fires, and men began to move about.

Both Jim and Morsec were very much the better for their night's rest, and were inclined to view their situation in a much more rosy light than they did the night before. They were given a further supply of food and water and informed by the interpreter that the party would set off in an hour. No destination was named, and when Morsec asked where they were going no answer was vouchsafed.

Before the journey commenced, however, they were to have their first insight into the methods of the Senussi. The Negro who had tried to steal Morsec's watch was still bound hand and foot, and was lying glaring about him like a trapped animal. The camels were being saddled when two Arabs approached the prisoners, and loosening the cords which bound the Negro's feet, jerked him upright and marched him off to where a group of white-clad figures stood under a palm-tree. The Negro was forced down on his knees, and a few sentences passed between him and one of the group, in which the other two prisoners recognized the Emir. The conversation was very short. The Emir uttered a few words and made a sign, with the result of causing the other to cast himself with a yell at his leader's feet, and attempt to embrace them. Then two men seized him, and he was carried back with his eyes rolling, and his black face a dirty gray, to where Morsec and Jim lay.

Then half a dozen Arabs, after selecting a young palm-tree on the very edge of the desert, proceeded to chop it down to a height of about five feet. The two white

men watched them with interest, but the other prisoner hid his face, and kept up a continuous moaning.

When the tree had been cut down it was trimmed to a sharp point, and then the Arabs went away to saddle their camels, leaving their handiwork looking like the sharp snag of a broken tooth.

By this time the party was ready to start, and two Arabs approached Jim and Morsec, ordering them by signs to come with them, and then pointing out two camels, which, again in obedience to signs, the prisoners mounted.

As they did so, they heard terrific yells and the sound of a struggle behind them. Turning round, they saw that the would-be thief of the night before had been seized by four men who had torn his garments off him, leaving his great black body bare, and were dragging him, in spite of his struggles, toward the lopped tree. Arrived there the prisoner was thrown to the ground, and trussed hand and foot in the position known to boys as that of cock-fighting. Then his four executioners lifted him, struggling and screaming, and impaled him on the sharpened trunk of the palm-tree.

The screams of the tortured man were appalling, and seemed to annoy the Emir, for, as the executioners joined their comrades, he turned and gave a sharp order to one of them. The man went back to the writhing figure on the tree trunk, bent over it for a moment, and the screams ceased, to be replaced by a thick, slobbering groaning, which, if it did not carry so far, was almost worse to hear. The Emir had stopped the noise by the simple expedient of having the offender's tongue cut out.

The Arab who had carried out his chief's order mounted his camel, and wiped his streaming knife on its neck, before replacing it in its sheath. The party started, but as they did so the Emir said a few words to the interpreter, and the latter approached the two prisoners.

"The Emir says," he announced, "that this is what happens to men who disobey orders. The orders given were that nothing of yours was to be touched, since both you and they belong to our lord, El Senussi, who will dispose of them as he sees fit. Nevertheless, take warning, and do not

give any trouble, or attempt to escape. If you do, the Emir has our lord's authority to act as he sees fit, and as that man is, so will you be!"

He held out Morsec's watch which the Negro had taken from him, and reined his camel back.

The last sight which Jim Lingard had of the oasis of El Rasa, was the green palms set in the yellow-gray desert, and that tortured black figure on their edge.

High overhead a speck wheeled in great descending spirals toward the oasis, and from all quarters other specks came to join it. The vultures had marked down their morning meal.

Morsec turned to his companion. His face was very pale, and he was shaking.

"What brutes," he said, "*Mon Dieu*, what a death! Look," and he pointed toward the descending vultures, "they will get at him long before the breath is out of his body. *Aurghb—*"

"It's a warning to us not to try any games," Jim answered. "If we try to escape and they get us, it will be the same thing for us. I believe they would like to do it anyhow, only they've got orders from somebody, whom they don't dare to disobey!"

"Yes," returned Morsec, "very probably. And it must be some one that they're very much afraid of, too. It's not in *Arbi* nature to spare *Roumi* prisoners after a handling like that man got from the company. I wish to God I knew if our men managed to get back all right, and what's happening at Douargala! I'm afraid we've got too long a start for any pursuit, and even if our people did pursue and catch up this lot would probably cut our throats first thing."

By this time the sun was high in the sky, and the heat was becoming unbearable to the two white men. The Arabs, used to it from birth, however, scarcely seemed to feel it, and the march continued.

There was not a sign of life of any sort in the landscape. Behind, ahead, and on each side stretched the desert, and overhead was an absolutely cloudless sky. It was too hot to talk, almost too hot to think coherently, and after a while the two prisoners pulled up the hoods of the cloaks

which had been given them the night before over their eyes, to shut out the glare from the sand, and rode wrapped in a stifling darkness.

Jim considered. From what he could make out they were heading due southeast, which, as far as he or any other white man knew, led directly into the terrible *Tanezrafet*, or utterly waterless desert portion of the Sahara. Beyond that, the only thing known of the country was that it consisted of more desert, and beyond that again lay the Ahagger Tasili, the range of unexplored rocky mountains which covers the No-man's-land between southern Tripoli and Algeria.

What he could not make out was where his captors had come from. Judging from their arms and equipment they had a well-supplied base somewhere, and by the freshness of their camels it could not be so very far away. Unless there was some hitherto undiscovered oasis in the *Tanezrafet*, he could not for the life of him understand it. Then he remembered the Ahagger. That gloomy wilderness of rocks and stones had never been properly explored, and might hide anything in its recesses.

He threw back the hood from his head. Better be blinded by the glare from the sand, he thought, than slowly stifled in a sweaty *haik*. For a moment or two, dazzled by the sudden burst of light, he could see nothing, and then a little distance ahead he saw the green of palm-trees. They were evidently approaching another oasis.

Jim bent forward and touched Morsec's arm.

"I think we halt here," he said.

Morsec threw back the hood from his face, and gave a great sigh of relief.

"Thank *le bon Dieu*," he remarked piously.

"How long do you think we shall be on this journey?" asked Jim.

"Don't know," returned Morsec tranquilly. "Depends on where they're going to take us. I don't know much about this part of the desert except by repute. It's a bit out of the Legion's beat. What direction are we going?"

Jim told him, and he whistled thoughtfully.

"That means the Ahagger," he said. "I wonder was there anything in what Laplote told me?"

Jim looked at him interrogatively, and he continued.

"Oh, Laplote told me one night when he was sober, I mean Lieutenant Laplote told me"—he corrected himself as he remembered the other's rank—"that there was a story about a great castle somewhere in the Ahagger, built ages ago by no one knows who. The Arabs say it was built by djinns and devils. Anyhow, there are all sorts of stories about this place. They say that sometimes it is invisible, and that it is never twice in the same place; but of course that's all Arab lies. But if there should happen to be a place like that in the Ahagger, it would make a very nice convenient base for raiding parties, like this one, for instance. And it would be the devil of a job to turn any one out of it who wanted to stay there at all badly. Well, we shall see what we shall see. We are going to halt, I think, and I can do with a drink, can't you?"

As he spoke, the order to dismount was given, and a few minutes afterward both captors and captives were washing the desert sand out of their throats with draughts of cool water from a well in the little oasis.

CHAPTER XII

PRISONERS

ALL the rest of the day they remained in the oasis. The Senussi seemed to be satisfied that they were in no danger of pursuit, and therefore, following the wisdom of the desert, which has been tried and proved for thousands of years, rested themselves and their camels before continuing their journey.

As before, neither of the prisoners was molested in any way. They were given a handful of wet dates apiece, and as much water as they could drink, and left to their own reflections. Whether the Senussi Emir thought that the spectacle which they had seen at the last halt had had a salutary effect on his prisoners, or, as was more probable, recognized that they had realized the absolute hopelessness of any attempt to escape, at any rate they were not bound,

and beyond being constantly followed by an armed guard were left very much to their own devices, and even allowed to wander about the camp, so long as they did not try to approach the tethered camels. Any attempt at doing so was met by a levelled rifle, and a peremptory gesture ordering them to keep their distance.

The Emir of the Senussi did not mix with his men. He sat apart under a palm-tree, where his meals were brought to him, and appeared, once his men had settled down, to take little interest in them. The men themselves seemed to be well disciplined. Both the prisoners remarked that they were told off into troops exactly as if they were a regular regiment, and that the *sous-officiers* looked after their sections and performed their duties as if they were well practised in them. Although there seemed to be no fear of attack, sentries were thrown out and relieved at regular intervals, and the men without exception took their turns of duty. In the ordinary Arab or Moorish *barka* it is generally the least considered member of the party on whom the brunt of the work falls.

Jim took careful note of all these details. In the unlikely event of his ever getting back to his regiment, he knew that they would be of interest to the authorities. A well armed, and, above all, a disciplined hostile force on their southern border was going to add enormously to the difficulty of France's task in Algeria, already difficult enough. Although Algeria is a French colony and officially plunged in profound peace, the men of the desert look at things in a different light, and see to it that the troops on the desert stations do not suffer from lack of work. The work of France's frontier is done in silence, and the men who fall in guarding it go to their graves in the desert sand, knowing that their death will only be chronicled in an obscure corner of an official journal. This is where the great utility of the Foreign Legion lies. French soldiers have relatives and friends in France, and, if they die in battle in a country officially at peace, awkward questions might be asked; and, horrible to think of, certain Ministers' careers might even be spoilt. The Legion

belongs to no one except the French Government, and the Government uses them with a truly royal profusion.

Still a really big defeat could not be hidden and would inevitably lead to questions—things that Governments loathe—and Jim knew that a timely warning of the danger would be appreciated, and possibly rewarded by the gods of officialdom.

CHAPTER XIII

INTO THE AHAGGER

THE next morning the camp was astir early. There seemed to be every prospect of an arduous march. The Arabs drank their fill at the one small well in the oasis, and the skin water-bottles were carefully filled. As the party was starting, the Arab who acted as interpreter, and whose name Jim had discovered to be Ahmed, came up to the prisoners and gave them each a long narrow strip of cloth.

"Bind this round your loins," he said. "To-day we ride hard and those who are not used to camels will suffer."

Jim and Morsec did as they were told. They both knew what a long ride on camels meant, and they had heard stories of men who had burst asunder in the midst like Judas during long desert rides. The camel is not an easy-paced beast, and the Arab saddle is not an easy seat. Basin-shaped and with a horn in front to crook the leg round, it requires a lifetime to get used to, and already both the white men were saddle-sore and aching in every limb. Then the order to mount was given and the party started.

Forbidding as the country they had already come through had been, the stretch that they were traversing now was infinitely more so. They were at the extreme eastern edge of the *Tanezrafet* where it narrows toward the Tripoli frontier, and the Emir Abd-ul-mâlek, instead of skirting it, was taking the party right through. It was a nightmare of a journey. All around stretched the yellow sand unbroken by even a rock or a stone, and without even a lizard moving on its surface. Overhead stretched a sky like bluish-white metal, from which the sun struck down with a force that seemed to roast the living flesh on the bones

and to dry every particle of moisture out of the system.

Even the Arabs seemed to feel the heat, and the Kabyles and coast-bred Berbers suffered from it as much as the two Europeans.

Once Jim asked Ahmed for how far this ghastly stretch endured, but he only made a vague gesture to show his ignorance.

"Allah who created it alone knows," he said. "Still the *Tanezrafet* was once fertile country."

Jim looked surprised.

"Fertile?" he said; "it looks as if it had been sand and sunned forever. What happened to it?"

"Allah cursed it," replied Ahmed, "on account of the sins of men. Once, thousands of years ago, it was a fair and fertile land, ruled over by a king, named Ad. But the king and his people deserted the worship of the One God, and followed after idols. Allah was very patient with them, and waited for a long time until their deeds became so evil that at last even his patience became exhausted. Then the rain ceased to come in the country of Ad. Day after day the sun shone in a blue sky as it shines now, but never a drop of rain fell, and the trees drooped, and the harvest never came, and the cattle died of drought. But still the wicked King Ad and his people refused to leave their idols and turn to Allah.

"At last after the drought had lasted three years King Ad called his counsellors around him and told them that if the rain did not come the people must perish, and asked their advice. So one said one thing and one another, and at last they determined to go to the Old Ones of the Ahagger yonder." Here Ahmed made the sign of the Horns, against evil old as the world itself—if he had been a Catholic he would have crossed himself—and continued:

"They chose three of the king's counsellors, old and very wise men, and they left the land of Ad to go to the Ahagger, taking the best of the beasts and the king's only son with them as a sacrifice to Those. Then deep in the Ahagger one night they did what has to be done before the Old Ones will speak, and waited for what might chance. Before long, a great voice came to them telling them to look at

the sky in the morning and to choose one of the three clouds they would see there. So in great fear they waited until the dawn, and then high up in the sky they saw three clouds, one white, one red, and one black.

"They thought that the black cloud must surely contain rain, and they chose that, and again the voice answered them saying that their wish was granted. Now all this time Ad and his people had been waiting for the rain which never came, but one day at dawn, out of the eastern sky, came a small, black cloud, which grew and spread until it covered the face of all the heavens.

"Then King Ad and his people cried aloud, praising their idols, while the sky grew darker and darker, and then at last the cloud burst. But there was no rain in it, nothing but thunder and lightning, which smote down and destroyed both man and beast, and after the thunder came a great wind. When the sky cleared again the land of Ad was as you see it now, and since then never a drop of water has Allah sent to it. Yet men say that somewhere in the *Tanezrafet* the city and palace of Ad still remain. Men have seen it from a distance, but when they try to approach it vanishes away. This is the story of Ad the Idolater and what his idols did for him. There is but One God and Mohammed is His prophet!"

Jim and Morsec listened with interest to this wild legend. Ahmed was a vivid story-teller, and while he was speaking they had almost been able to see the black cloud coming closer and closer to the thirst-smitten land, and bearing only destruction with it.

Then Morsec asked:

"But who were the Old Ones whom you speak of, those to whom King Ad sent to for help?"

But Ahmed turned on him angrily. "Hush!" he said, "no good comes of speaking of Those! How do I know who they were—or are? All that any one knows is that they are—were there, and that they built the House of the Stones long ago. Remember, no good comes of mentioning the Old Ones!"

He was obviously in earnest, and Morsec did not pursue the subject.

As a matter of fact, he had very little inclination to talk on that, or any other subject. The heat was terrific, and seemed as if it made the very brain boil and seethe. Twice the party halted, but only for the very shortest time necessary to give rest and refreshment to men and camels, when the march was resumed. Then against the Eastern sky rose the tops of mountains and Ahmed, riding up beside the prisoners, pointed forward. "El Ahagger," he said briefly.

Both Jim and Morsec looked forward. They were too far away as yet to see more than the shape of the mountains ahead, but they seemed to be of considerable height, and to follow no special direction. They looked as if some huge child had taken a heap of stones of all sizes and shapes and thrown them down carelessly, and then left them. Several of the summits shone blinding white in the sun, but for the most part they were simply gray rock, with no sign of vegetation on them whatever, and Jim thought that the Arab name for them, "*El Ahagger*"—the stones—described them perfectly. Stark and bleak they stood up against the sky, seeming like a barrier between one world and the other. Even in that blinding sunlight they appeared without form and void, and as if they belonged to another and infinitely remote age.

However, the sight seemed to put fresh life into the Arabs. The pace was increased and within three or four hours they arrived under the shadow of the outlying spurs of mountain range. This in itself was a relief. In comparison with the open desert the shade of the mountains seemed absolutely chilly, and men unloosed their face-cloths and drew in great breaths of the cooler air.

In the desert there had been no wind, only dead stillness and the pitiless sun, but under the mountains there were little cold breezes constantly springing up and dying away again, as if they had come out of Nowhere and then passed into Nothingness.

For an hour the party rode along the face of the mountains, and then suddenly the Emir, who was riding ahead, turned his camel into a narrow defile between two rock walls, and the rest of the party followed him.

For some way the gully was wide enough

for four men to ride abreast, but it gradually narrowed until there was not six inches between the camel's flanks and the rock wall when the party was in single file. It was late in the afternoon, and the rock walls towered up on each side, shutting out what light there was, and the party rode forward in a darkness which was only broken by stray gleams which filtered down from above, in places where the sides of the gully were lower than in others. It was impossible to see what the ground was like, but judging by the easy pace of the camels, it was firm and level.

For another two hours the journey continued through the gully. Owing to the continual twists and turns which it took the two prisoners found it impossible to maintain any sense of direction, and rode on in silence, following the men in front of them.

Somehow the atmosphere of the Ahagger did not tend to promote conversation, and Jim and Morsec did not speak to each other. Then, as the narrow patch of sky which they could see above the walls became dark, the gully suddenly widened out and they found themselves in a large, open space, roughly circular in form, and from which on every side gullies, apparently exactly the same as that by which they had come, stretched away. So alike were the entrances to these that Jim had difficulty, on looking round, in picking out the one they had come by.

He mentioned this to Morsec who laughed.

"I thought of that," he said. "Had a good look at the place as we came out of it. Most of the rocks are gray, but a few yards down there's a red one that stands out a bit. It was too dark to see very well, but I was quite close to it and had a good look. It may come in useful if we ever get a chance to get out of this damned stone heap."

Jim did not feel hopeful on the subject. The Ahagger did not seem an easy place either to get into or out of, and he said so to his companion, but Morsec refused to be daunted. A southern Frenchman is apt to be either plunged in the depths of despair or else extremely sanguine, and the optimistic side of Morsec's nature was in

the ascendant for the moment. He was in progress of sketching a scheme of escape to Jim, which according to himself was absolutely infallible, when his camel, following the example of the one in front of him, knelt down, almost shooting its rider over its head, and the latter half of Morsec's scheme was lost in a pointed discourse which he delivered on the subject of the camel and its disadvantages as a means of locomotion.

The Arabs did not seem pleased at the halt. They had brought a supply of dried camel's dung—the fuel of the desert—with them, and before even they had unsaddled their camels they lit a fire of it. Then they saw to their mounts, keeping as close together as possible while doing so, and, having accomplished this duty, lit several more small fires, as close as possible to the centre one, and huddled round them. They also showed solicitude for the prisoners, one of them signing to them to come up to a fire. Even the Emir Abd-ul-mâlek abandoned his policy of aloofness and came over and seated himself at a fire, in company of several of his *sous-officiers*.

Jim found himself seated close to Ahmed, the Arab who acted as interpreter, and, being curious as to the cause of the general thinly-veiled uneasiness, asked him what was the cause of it.

The Arab looked behind him before answering.

"This is a bad place," he said, "a very bad place. There are ghouls and Afrites who wander by night in the Ahagger, and lead men to destruction both of soul and body. And besides there are the Old Ones. It is a very bad place, and I wish the Emir had not halted!"

His comrades seemed to be very much of the same opinion. Instead of settling down to sleep as usual they crouched over the fires, huddling as close to each other as possible and ever and again looking nervously over their shoulders.

The place where they were encamped was full of noises. Every now and again a little wind would blow, and the flames from the fires would leap up, throwing their light on the dark faces grouped around. The wind would die again, there would be dead silence for a few minutes,

and then would come sounds from the mouth of one or other of the gullies which led off the open space, like people talking continuously in a low voice. Once Jim could have sworn that he heard a laugh close behind him—a most unpleasant laugh—made up in equal parts of contempt and evil desire, but there was nothing to be seen. All the same he was almost certain that the Arabs had heard it as well, for several of them, at the same moment, and moved apparently by the same impulse, proclaimed aloud that there was no God but Allah, and that Mohammed was His prophet.

Altogether it was rather a nerve-trying night. Whether the fears of his companions communicated themselves to him in some subtle way, or whether the atmosphere of the place got on his nerves, Jim felt somehow that there was something indefinably wrong with the place and the night, something, as it were, vaguely hostile and malignant in close proximity which only refrained from manifesting itself in tangible shape for reasons of its own.

At last the men around the fires composed themselves to sleep, and the two prisoners followed their example. Morsec, as usual, was asleep in a few minutes, but try as he would Jim could not get off. As a rule, he was anything but a nervous man, but to-night the atmosphere of the place where he was seemed to lie on his nerves and to prevent him sleeping. He found himself listening for sounds during the intervals of silence and trying to locate them, but without success.

Suddenly one of the fires close to where he lay leaped up in a momentary burst of flame, and on the other side of it he saw a figure. It was that of a woman, and in the flickering light Jim saw her distinctly. She was very tall, and dressed in a black robe, which seemed to be much torn, for through the rents of it the light of the fire shone on her bare body. But it was her face which held Jim's attention. It was the face of a young woman but dead white—as white as that of a corpse—and with vivid red lips. The woman passed over to the other side of the fire, and bent down over one of the Arabs who was sleeping there. Then suddenly far away

a cock crew, the figure of the woman seemed to waver and grow indistinct, and to Jim's amazement she was gone.

Almost immediately afterward the men around the fires began to move, and shortly afterward Morsec awoke.

Jim told him what he had seen, but he was incredulous, though interested.

"Nonsense," he said, "you were dreaming. How are women going to get here? I wish there were some. No, you thought you were awake—one often does when one is soundest asleep—but anyhow a dream woman is better than no woman at all!"

After a while Jim put down what he had seen to the same cause. His nerves had probably been on edge, and he had been unable to distinguish between the sleeping and waking states—and he dismissed the experience at that.

However, when the Arabs proceeded to saddle their camels for the day's march, one of them—the man whom Jim had seen the female figure bending over—found that his neck was sore and swollen. Jim mentioned his "dream" to Ahmed, and that worthy went grayish-green under his dark skin.

"That was one of the accursed ones—a ghoul," he said. "If the cock had not crowed she would have torn in pieces and devoured that man, but, by the grace of Allah, the Things of the night, have no power after the cock crows! I told you this was an evil place!"

Jim laughed, but not with entire conviction. This was the twentieth century, and he was a soldier of the Foreign Legion, wearing clothes made in a modern workshop under modern conditions, but it was being borne in on him that neither the place where he was nor the people among whom he found himself had anything modern about them, with the exception of their weapons.

Then far away the cock crew again, and the first rays of the sun lit the summits of the Ahagger.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE OF THE STONES

FOR the next three or four hours the way which the party followed led through

another gully. There was much more light now, although it was broken and diffused, and Jim was able to form an idea of his surroundings. The passage lay through great rocks, in places higher than others, and was still very narrow. After a while, however, the character of it changed. So far both the gully which they had traversed on entering the Ahagger and the one in which they now were, were obviously the works of Nature, but it was plain that the passage, while in part natural, in places owed something to human aid. The rocks at the side were smoothed away, and on looking down Jim could see that the floor of the gully was paved with great slabs of stone. Then the road began to lead upward, gradually at first, but more and more steadily, until at last it assumed the proportions of a steep slope. The rocks, too, at each side were much lower, and seemed to have been levelled off to a more or less uniform height, giving a glimpse of mountain peaks ahead and at each side. Once the Arab, Ahmed, who was riding in front of Jim, turned in his saddle and pointed forward.

"The House of the Stones," he said briefly.

Jim looked, but, except several rocky peaks half visible over the walls of the gully, could make out nothing remotely resembling a house. Then as they turned a corner the peaks in front seemed to shape themselves into the towers of a great castle, with walls and battlements.

Jim looked again and decided that it must be fancy, for seen from a different angle the towers seemed to reshape themselves into rock pinnacles. However, just then the party halted for a moment and, in obedience to an order from the leader, two Arabs approached the prisoners and blindfolded them tightly, afterward pulling the hoods of the *haiks* down over their faces to make assurance doubly sure.

Then the march recommenced, always in an upward direction, as Jim could feel from the pace of his camel.

There was another momentary halt, and voices gave and received question and answer; then, blindfolded as he was Jim could feel that they were no longer in the fresh air. The pad-pad of the camels

seemed to echo back from the vault of an arch and the air around had the curious stagnant quality of a confined space. Once he put up his hand in an attempt to feel the wall, but only succeeded in receiving a smart blow of a spear shaft on his arm from one of his escort, accompanied by a sharp order, which he interpreted to mean that he should keep his hands down.

For nearly half an hour the march continued through this passage, then suddenly there was a feeling of fresh air and the camels halted and knelt. The cloths which covered the eyes of the prisoners were twitched off, and they could look around them—which they proceeded to do with interest.

The place where they found themselves was a sufficiently curious one. They were in a vast square surrounded on all sides by mighty walls, pierced in places on the level of the ground by arches, which led away into dark tunnels, and higher up by windows. The walls around them stretched upward to a vast height, and indeed the scale of the whole building, courtyard, walls and arches seemed to be absolutely titanic.

From the archways men began to stream out, all clad as Jim's captors were, in green *djellab* and white *baik*, and began to fraternize with their returned comrades. One of them, who seemed to be an officer of some kind, greeted the Emir Abd-ul-mâlek respectfully, and entered into conversation with him, the Emir seemingly asking for and receiving information.

Then he called an order, and Ahmed and another Arab, unslinging their rifles, took charge of Morsec and Jim, escorting them through one of the archways and up a flight of steps, which were on as large a scale as the rest of the building. They were of stone, worn and polished by the tread of millions of feet, but what struck Jim most was the height of the steps. Every step, instead of being at the most six or eight inches high, was fully eighteen and the whole flight, though not long—consisting perhaps of thirty or forty steps—was terribly arduous to men who had just finished a long journey on camels. He noticed, too, that the walls were built of great square blocks of stone apparently fitted to each other without the aid of

mortar, and so closely that it was only with difficulty that any joint could be seen.

At the top of the stairs the prisoners and their escort turned sharply to the right along a corridor, walled and floored with the same great stones, and lighted dimly at intervals by lamps attached to the walls. This corridor was cut at intervals by others in which Jim caught occasional glimpses of white clad figures moving about, but although he saw a good many of these the size of the place seemed to engulf them, much as a street in a town with a hundred or so people in it seems to be almost empty. As a matter of fact, the House of the Stones seemed to be more in the nature of a town, walled in and roofed with stone, than a house or castle.

The party traversed several corridors and at last halted before a great door which Ahmed opened and then motioned Jim and Morsec to enter.

They did so, and found themselves in a vast and lofty room, furnished only with a couple of *angarebs*, or native bedsteads. Along one side of the wall for a distance of about twelve feet ran a ledge, evidently meant for a seat, for at each side of it were arm-rests, but it was built on the same huge scale as everything else in the building and a man of average height sitting on it would have found his feet at least a foot from the ground.

Ahmed saw his charges safely inside the room, and then telling them briefly that food and water would be sent to them, departed, closing the great door behind him with a heavy clang.

The two looked at each other and then round them. With the exception of the two bedsteads the great room was absolutely bare of furniture, and was lighted only by a couple of evil-smelling oil lamps of primitive design.

Then Morsec seated himself on one of the beds, and loosened the collar of his tunic.

"Well," he remarked, "here we are in our hotel at last! What do you think of it, my friend?"

Jim looked round again. "It's a bit bare," he said, "but did you ever see such a building in your life? Where on earth did they get the stones for it, and how did they get them on top of each other? Look

here," and he indicated a huge block in the wall, which must have been some thirty feet square. "See there's no mortar and yet it fits so closely to the one next it that one could hardly put a finger nail between them. Ahmed said that the Old Ones built this place. I wonder who they were!"

"Question is," answered Morsec, "where are we, and how we are going to get out of it, and not who built this place. If you'll give me some idea of what you think is going to happen to us, and what chance there is of getting out of this damned catacomb, I'll argue about anything else you like afterward. At present we are absent from our garrison without leave, and our duty to the regiment, let alone our duty to ourselves, is to get back as soon as possible!"

"I know that," replied Jim, "but I don't see what there is to be done. We are shut up here just about as safely as if we were in the centre of the earth, and the only thing that I can see to be done is to wait until somebody fetches us out. They are sure to come for us presently."

Morsec grunted.

"I wish they would," he said. "This place gives me the creeps. It feels a lot too like as if it had been dead for a thousand years or so to be healthy. And those people we saw in the corridors looked like a lot of white ghosts. No—give me somewhere a bit smaller and cosier than this to live in. Hello! here's some one coming!"

The door opened and Ahmed and another Arab entered carrying two great skin water-bottles, and two metal basins, which they placed on the floor. Then Ahmed turned to the prisoners.

"Wash yourselves and do not be long over it," he said. "Our lord, El Senussi, desires to see you, and he does not love to be kept waiting!"

Both Jim and Morsec were only too glad of the order. Since they had left Aïn Sefra, water had been a precious commodity—far too precious to be used for cleansing purposes—and their personal appearance had suffered considerably during the journey. Besides this, the collar of Jim's tunic was glued to his neck by the dried blood from the blow on his head which he had received when he had been captured,

and the cold sting of the water made him feel like a new man. Then both men got into their sorely dilapidated clothes again, and after having made each other look as respectable as possible followed their guide.

The way led through more stone-paved passages, and seemed to be almost interminable. Passage succeeded passage, now to the right, now to the left, and after a quarter of an hour's walk neither Morsec nor Jim had the least idea in what direction they had travelled, or how far they were from their original starting-point. At length the party halted before a great stone door, on which Ahmed knocked in a peculiar manner. The door swung open quite noiselessly, and as Jim passed it he could see that it was less of a door than a solid slab some four feet thick, which some hidden mechanism had moved out of the wall, and which, when they had passed in, closed as noiselessly as it had opened.

The place where they had entered was a huge hall, so huge that to Jim's eyes it seemed at first to contain only a few people, but, when he had time to look around him and his eyes had become accustomed to its vast size, he saw that there must be at least two hundred there, almost all, with the exception of a small group at the far end, armed men ranged in perfect rank along the wall.

Ahmed and the other Arab handed the prisoners over to six men who stepped out from this rank, and who, placing them in their centre, conducted them up to the end of the hall, and halted in front of a dais.

On this dais was seated a man, clad from head to foot in white; two others were standing on each side. One of these was the Emir Abd-ul-mâlek, and to Jim's amazement the other was—Hassan Ali! Jim looked at the dais, then rubbed his eyes and looked again. Seated beside the white-clad figure was a woman, and Jim looked again and gasped. It was the girl Amine whom he had seen last in the House in the Garden at Aïn Sefra.

Jim Lingard had had an Irish nurse who, when he asked too many questions, had been wont to inform him that he "addled her head." He had often wondered how an addled head felt, but now he had a very fair idea. How in the name of all that was

fantastic had the girl Amine and Hassan Ali got into the Ahagger? Oh, he must be dreaming, or suffering from a touch of fever, and if he only looked long enough, and steadily enough, both Amine and Hassan Ali would fade away. He kicked his ankle with the heel of his boot to see if the sudden pain would dispel the vision, and looked again. Both Hassan Ali and the girl were still there.

Hassan Ali was looking at Jim with an expression of extreme surprise on his face, and Amine was lying back on the dais in the same attitude which Jim remembered so well, and smiling her mocking smile. As her eye caught Jim's glance, however, she gave him a barely perceptible nod. Slight as it was, however, Hassan Ali saw it, and a look of black fury replaced the surprise on his face.

Then Jim looked at the other figure on the dais. To his surprise it was that of a white man—burnt by the sun to almost the tint of an Arab, but still a European. The man was old, and with a long, gray beard which swept over his white robe as far as his waist. His features were thin and aristocratic, and were even now strikingly handsome. The eyes were the peculiar feature of the face. They looked as if they were made of gray stone, so hard and without expression were they, and as they rested on the prisoners Jim felt as if he had come into sudden contact with an east wind. Then the white-clad figure spoke.

"You two," he said in perfect French, "belong to the French Foreign Legion?"

Morsec, as the senior of the prisoners, replied in the affirmative.

"Rank?" inquired the other.

Morsec gave the required information.

"I wish to know," went on the cold voice, "what is the strength of the French forces at Aïn Sefra, and its out-stations?"

Morsec laughed. "Oh, five hundred thousand men, or five thousand, or five million," he said. "You can take your choice. Enough to deal with you!"

"You are warned not to lie, or to jest," said the figure on the dais, without visible emotion. "The strength of the French forces?"

Morsec laughed again and shook his

head, and the man on the dais turned to Jim.

"The strength of the French forces?" he said quietly.

Jim shook his head as Morsec had done. He might not be a Frenchman, might be only a sergeant of the Legion with the temporary rank of adjutant, but they were not going to get any information out of him.

The old man made a languid sign; there was the *wheep* of steel being drawn, two of the guards unsheathed their *fissas*, and moved behind the prisoners, measuring their distance for a sweep.

"The strength of the French forces?" came the question again.

Neither of the prisoners answered. Jim could only hope that he was showing as calm a front to imminent death as Morsec was. The latter was standing gazing through dais and occupants as if neither of them existed, with a bored smile on his lips, and Jim wondered if he himself was concealing his feelings half as successfully as his comrade was.

He felt as if a piece of ice were laid at the nape of his neck, and was slowly extending around it. It was only by a tremendous exercise of his will that he prevented himself from turning his head, but he imitated Morsec, and looked straight in front with what he prayed with his whole heart was the correctly bored expression.

One minute went by—two—and Jim's knees were beginning to feel as if they had lost all strength. The cold ache in the back of his neck began to become unbearable, but still he stared straight in front of him.

How would it feel, he wondered, when the blow came. He wished they would be quick and get it over; he wished that white-clad image in front of him would stop staring with those damned rotten eyes of his, he wished—

And then the old man made a sign. The two guards sheathed their steel and stood back, and Morsec and Jim simultaneously rocked a little on their feet, but pulled themselves together and stood stiffly upright.

Jim's head was reeling, and a black curtain seemed to be rising and falling in

front of his eyes, but he seemed to hear his own voice speaking insistently into his ear, as if it were giving an order to some one else: "You must stand up straight! For God's sake, don't let them see you are frightened!" His nerves steadied slowly, and he saw that the old man before him was smiling coldly, and stroking his beard. Then he spoke:

"You are brave men," he said. "Still, whether a man is brave or a coward, when he is dead he is no more than a piece of clay. I will speak to you again!" He waved his hand and the guards closed in on the prisoners and escorted them down the hall.

CHAPTER XV

THE HEART OF THE STONES

THE door of their prison clashed to behind the escort, and Morsec turned to Jim and smote him hard between the shoulders.

"Good enough, old fellow," he said. "You saw that through well! I was watching you out of the corner of my eye, and if you had flinched—well, I would have gone to pieces! As it was, I felt as if my knees were made of chewed string! And," here he passed his hand tenderly over the back of his neck, "my neck hasn't got warm yet! Every second we were standing there I could feel that *fissa* going through it, just where it joins on to the backbone. And here we are after all without a scratch on our beautiful white skins!"

Jim laughed a little.

"Flinch?" he replied. "I wanted to badly enough, but I was looking at you and you seemed to take things quietly enough and—well, I didn't want to spoil the reputation of the regiment!"

Morsec threw back his head and laughed too.

"*Vive la légion!*" he said. "I wouldn't flinch because you wouldn't, and you wouldn't because I wouldn't, and it all goes to the credit of the Legion! Heavens, though that old man—El Senussi, I suppose he calls himself—did you see his eyes. They looked like gray stones. I wonder why he spared us? Judging by appearances, I shouldn't say he was a merciful person."

"He probably wants us for something

else," returned Jim, "ransom or information. And he's a white man too—French I should say."

Morsec shook his head.

"He's no Frenchman," he replied. "He speaks French, true. So do you, but you are not French, and neither is he. Whoever he is he has those *Arbis* of his under good discipline, though."

"So he ought to have," replied Jim. "You saw how they kept discipline that time at El Rasa. What I'm thinking about is, suppose they really want information, and try that way to get it out of us? Personally, I don't care for the prospect."

"They may try, but they won't get any information," returned Morsec calmly. "Look here," and he produced something from the breast of his tunic. "I slipped this into my pocket before we left Douargala—I thought it might come in useful. They didn't search me very thoroughly—there!"

Jim looked with interest at the article which his companion held forward. It was a small pistol of the automatic type, so small that it looked almost a toy, but he knew that even the smallest automatic made will let the life out of the strongest man who ever walked the earth.

"Five shots," continued Morsec, "and the magazine is full. If the worst comes to the worst, and they try torture, well, there is but one bullet for you and one for myself, but first there are three for these gentlemen. I have no wish for empalement—me!"

Jim nodded gravely. He could not yet forget that naked, contorted figure on the palm-tree, with the vultures descending on it.

"Let us hope it will not come to that," he said soberly. "If it does, well, that gives us a clean and easy death. I don't like the Senussi methods any better than you do!"

Morsec patted his automatic lovingly and replaced it in his breast pocket. Then he produced his watch and looked at it with a sigh.

"Have you any idea what the time is?" he said. "My watch has stopped, and we seem to have been here for years."

"Not the slightest," said Jim. "We

might as well be in the centre of the earth as here for anything we can see. There is no light from the outside. Look here, I'm going to have a look round. I don't suppose it will do much good, but still one never knows!" and he turned away and proceeded to make a careful scrutiny of the walls and flooring of their prison.

However, his examination led to nothing. Both walls and floor were of the same great stones, fitted so accurately together that it would have been impossible to introduce the blade of a knife between them, and after some time he gave up his task in disgust and returned to his companion, to whom he confided his opinion on the builders of the rock fortress in a few pithy sentences.

The time wore on slowly. After what seemed an interminable time the door was opened, and food and water placed inside, by which they judged that it was evening in the other world, but they received no visitors, and the food was placed before them in dead silence.

They ate and drank, and then Morsec produced a couple of battered cigarettes, one of which he offered to Jim.

"My last grain of tobacco," he said. "*Eb bien*, perhaps to-morrow we will not need it, so let us enjoy it while we may!"

He lit his cigarette, and seated himself on the bench beside the wall, Jim following his example.

Neither of the prisoners felt inclined to talk. The fear of the future was heavy on both of them, although either would have died rather than own it to the other. Both of them were young and healthy, and the prospect of violent death, with or without added torture, did not appeal to them in the least; but the fact remained that they were in the absolute power of people who would think less than nothing of applying torture as a means of obtaining any information they wished for. On the other hand, both the prisoners had made up their minds, though from different reasons, that not a word of information which might be useful to their captors should pass their lips.

Morsec was a Frenchman, and, volatile and reckless as he was, had all the French officer's pride in his rank, and would have

been cut to pieces alive rather than do anything to degrade it even in his own estimation. Jim Lingard was a foreigner serving France as a "mercenary" for a miserable wage, but he was also an English gentleman, and faithful to the duty which he owed to the country he served. The *impasse* appeared complete, and in the face of what seemed likely to happen it was not to be wondered at that neither of the prisoners was talkative. They both sat on the stone bench with their dangling feet, each smoking slowly—husbanding their last tobacco to the full—and each fully occupied with his own gloomy thoughts.

Then quite suddenly and without noise the door opened, and both men sprang to their feet as a female figure entered. Jim's heart gave a great bound which seemed to lodge it in the bottom of his throat as he realized that the new-comer was Amine.

The girl came forward toward Jim with her hands outstretched.

"I could not come before," she said, "and even as it was I had difficulty in getting away."

And she looked back over her shoulder with the gesture of one who is being spied upon.

Morsec had risen to his feet and, as the girl paused, bowed to her, but she took no notice whatever of him, and continued speaking to Jim.

"I did not dare to notice you in the hall just now," she said, "and when my father questioned you and you refused to answer—ah, then I thought I should never see you again. But the Protection against steel held. I have never known my father hold back the order to strike until to-day!"

Jim's head was in a whirl. So Amine, the girl whom he had held in his arms in the house in the garden, was the daughter of the Senussi. That was what she meant when she spoke of service to be taken and gold to be won in the South. He smiled and turned to the girl.

"You were right after all," he said, "when you said that I was coming South. I wish, though, that I could have cleaned myself before I saw you. It was rather a trying journey, and I'm afraid I am hardly fit for a lady to see!"

The girl looked at him.

"You are wounded," she said suddenly, "how?"

"One of El Senussi's—your father's men caressed and persuaded me with the butt of his rifle into accepting his hospitality," returned Jim with a laugh; "but it's hardly what one would call a wound."

Amine looked relieved. "The butt of a rifle?" she said, half to herself, "then the Protection held there too—neither lead nor steel, Abs'laam said!"

Then she came close to Jim and put her hands on his shoulders. Morsec might have been miles away for any notice that she took of him.

"Listen, Jeem," she said. "If you try to withstand my father you are in danger here, and not even I can save you. As it is, I do not know what is going to happen. My father is undecided, but Hassan Ali has told him that you and that other"—here she indicated Morsec with a jerk of her head—"would be better dead, and my father listens to Hassan Ali—sometimes!"

"But," interrupted Jim, "I don't understand. The whole thing is rather confusing. Who is Hassan Ali, and why should he want me—or us—dead?"

"Hassan Ali," Amine replied, "is the right arm, and will be successor, of my father—our lord, El Senussi! He hates all *Roumis* and he hates you, Jeem, in especial because—because"—and she put her lips close to his ear—"of Aïn Sefra. My father wishes me to be his wife, and he wishes so too—but I—no, not now! Some one at Aïn Sefra spoke. If I knew who it was they should never speak again!"

It was only by an effort that Jim prevented himself from whistling. The adventure into which he had entered so lightly at Aïn Sefra seemed as if it were going to have serious consequences; in fact there were all the materials for a tragedy ready to hand. Amine had evidently taken the episode seriously—after the manner of women whether they were of the East or West. She was the daughter of the Senussi, and neither he nor Hassan Ali was likely to show much mercy to any one who appeared likely to interfere with their plans. Added to that Hassan Ali, whose power seemed to be second only to that of El Senussi himself, had a private and par-

ticular reason for vengeance against Jim. The Oriental does not regard indiscretions on the part of his women folk, either prospective or actual, with favor.

Setting aside Amine's beauty, the marriage between her and Hassan Ali would be very much in the nature of an affair of state, and would tend to strengthen his power with the whole Senussi sect. It would not be likely to be abandoned for any reason whatever, and Jim knew that, if Hassan Ali had any idea of what had passed between him and Amine, he would be the person on whom vengeance would fall.

"And," he asked, "what does El Senussi say?"

"He told Hassan Ali," the girl replied, "that neither of you shall die—yet. The Senussi has men and guns, but he wants men to drill them, and he told Hassan Ali—I heard him—that if you two would join us your lives would be spared."

"And Hassan Ali said?" asked Jim.

"Hassan Ali said nothing," returned the girl; "he knows better than to question what my father says! But I saw his face!" She looked at Morsec, who had gone to the other end of the room and was studiously regarding the wall.

"See now, Jeem," she continued, lowering her voice, "he," indicating Morsec, "is French and a fool. But you—you are English, and what do you owe to France? Nothing. Join my father and I promise you—I, Amine—all that you can wish for—power—gold—and myself. Hassan Ali? Oh, there are ways, and I have powers to keep us safe from him. Sometimes men die very suddenly here in the House of the Stones. Your comrade? Bah! if he will not come, let him die! It will only be one Frenchman the less! Oh, Jeem, for my sake—for your own, do not refuse what I ask of you!"

Her arms were round Jim's neck, her great eyes were looking into his, and her lips were very near his own. He could feel his heart beating furiously, and the eyes in front of his seemed to be eating up his will. After all, what allegiance did he owe to France? It was different with Morsec—he was a Frenchman—but why should he refuse what the girl offered him because he had signed his name on a piece of paper

LOST SHEEP

over there in Paris? Even supposing he ever got away from where he was, what had he to look forward to except the dog's life of the Legion, and at the end of it a dog's grave in the desert, what— Then with a great effort Jim Lingard pulled himself together, and spoke gently to the girl in front of him.

"I am a soldier of France," he said simply, "and as long as I am alive I keep to my duty. I know you mean well, but—well—what you ask me to do is impossible. Let us forget it, shall we?"

The girl made a gesture of despair.

"Oh, you are foolish," she said bitterly. "Still, when my father sees you, speak him fairly, do not refuse at once. If you do you are as good as dead, and, besides, there are places here in the House of Stones which are worse than death! Now I must go. I have stayed too long already. And remember, Jeem, that as long as you are alive I shall be able to help you. Remember that, whatever happens!"

She kissed him on the lips and turned to the door; a moment afterward the prisoners were alone again.

Morsec was the first to speak.

"Nice young woman that," he remarked jocularly. "Seems to be an old friend of yours, too! Where did you run across her? I've never had luck like that since I came to this cursed country!" And then as Jim did not answer, "she seemed to have a lot to say to you, did she give you any news?"

"Yes," returned Jim. "It seems that we are going to be given the option of joining the Senussi or—" and he paused expressively.

"And she tried to put pressure on you?" said Morsec.

"Yes, you might put it like that," replied Jim.

"And?"

"I refused."

Morsec said nothing, but he extended his hand, which Jim took, and with that hand-clasp went the last vestige of temptation to do what he had been asked to. Come life, come death, he was a soldier of the Legion, and would remain so.

Almost as their hands fell apart the door opened again. An Arab entered and made a sign for them to follow him, which the

prisoners obeyed. Outside an escort was waiting, which at a word of command closed round them, and again marched them through the same maze of passages.

This time, however, the march was not so long as the former one. After a few minutes prisoners and escort halted before a door at which the leader of the escort knocked. After a minute or two it was opened, and Jim and Morsec entered, accompanied only by two guards.

A greater contrast than that between the great hall, in which they had been in the morning, and the room which they had just entered could scarcely be imagined.

The place where they were now was a small room, and was furnished in a mixture of European and Oriental styles, but with perfect taste. In one corner was a divan, piled high with cushions, but there were also several armchairs, and in the centre of the room an American desk, at which was seated a man, writing, in whom the prisoners recognized the Senussi himself.

As the prisoners entered, he made a sign, and continued writing for some time, then raised his head.

"I understand," he said in French, "that both of you belong to the *légion étrangère*—both of you are French, I presume?"

Morsec replied in the affirmative, but Jim gave his nationality.

The Senussi chief raised his eyebrows.

"English?" he said, and then in perfect English—the English of the cultured classes—spoke to Jim. "That is interesting," he said; "I was English—once. It is very long since I have met an Englishman." Then he continued in French for Morsec's benefit:

"I want you both to understand," he said, "that you are absolutely in my power—mine to do as I please with. You have seen my men—I have 50,000 more like them, and shall soon have a 100,000. Men I can have for the asking, but officers—men who can drill them—I find harder to get, and for that reason I am going to make you an offer. Join my forces, and you will be released at once. Further, after a year's service you will be free to go or remain, as you will. If at the end of that time you choose the former, in addi-

tion to your pay, which will be generous, you will be given £1000 English money or 25,000 francs, and will be conveyed to any part in Morocco you choose to name. If you elect to remain with me, well, in five years from now I shall be absolute master of Northern Africa, and shall know how to reward my friends!"

He stopped, and there was dead silence for the space of a minute or more. Then Morsec stepped forward.

"I refuse," he said.

The man at the desk turned to Jim with a look of inquiry.

"And you?" he said, and then in English, "remember you are not French, and owe nothing to France!"

Jim looked him straight in the eyes.

"No," he said, "but I am a white man. I refuse also!"

The Senussi chief nodded pleasantly.

"I feared you would," he said. "Still we have ways and means of persuasion here, and perhaps when you have had a night to think it over you will be less obstinate. We can but try. *Au revoir, mes-sieurs!*"

He gave an order to the guards, and went on writing unconcernedly as Jim and Morsec were led from the room.

Outside the escort closed around them, and the march recommenced. This time Jim noticed that they were not being taken back to their former quarters, but in a quite opposite and in a downward direction.

Gloomy and dark as what they had already seen of the House of the Stones had been, it was bright and cheerful compared with the part through which they were being taken. The way led ever downward and downward, and the walls instead of being built of squared stone now seemed to be of solid rock. At rare intervals to right and left were doors, but for the most part, as far as could be seen, there was nothing on either side but blank walls. The torches fixed at intervals in the walls grew rarer and rarer until the party were moving in a semi-obscurity, only broken by a light every hundred yards or so.

At last their escort halted at the end of a passage, narrower and darker than any of its predecessors, and ordered their arms

with a clang which echoed back from the roof.

Here they waited for almost half an hour, and then at the end of the passage there was a gleam of torches and a flutter of white drapery. As the new-comers approached Jim was considerably disturbed, but not surprised, to see that the foremost of them was Hassan Ali. The other two were Arabs, fully armed.

Hassan Ali bowed to the prisoners.

"I have come to show you your quarters, gentlemen," he said, "at least your quarters for to-night. To-morrow, if you are still of the same mind as you are now, we will find somewhere else for you. If you will do me the favor to look, I think you will have a better idea of what I mean."

He took a torch from one of the escort and held it to a small grating in the wall, at the same time motioning with his other hand to Jim and Morsec to look inside.

The first thing they were conscious of was an appalling stench, which took them by the back of the throat, and almost made them vomit.

Hassan Ali smiled suavely.

"Yes," he said, "it is a little close in there, but look; you will see better in a moment."

Both men peered through the grating, and as the light of the torch fell inside saw something move. It was a man, or rather had been a man, for now it was a thing. As it came closer to the grating Jim had to bite his lip to stop himself crying out. The face he saw was not a pleasant sight. Where the eyes should have been were cavities, the nose was gone, and the lips were cut away, giving the whole awful face an aspect of being fixed in an eternal grin. As the light of the torch fell on the floor of the cell, they could see that it was composed entirely of sharp, pointed stones, so that in no position was easy rest possible.

Hassan Ali made a gesture of introduction.

"That," he observed, "was one who angered our lord. I have merely shown him to you, gentlemen, to let you see what will happen to you should you refuse the chance which our lord in his goodness has given you. In the meanwhile, here are your quarters for the night."

He turned from the cell and its occupant, and pressed strongly on the opposite wall. As he did so a section of it, about six feet, seemed to sink into the flooring, leaving a dark square. Hassan Ali held the torch over his head, revealing a small cell, absolutely bare of any furniture, and smelling like a vault.

In obedience to an order the guards led Morsec inside, and as they did so Hassan Ali turned to Jim.

"You dog," he said, with his voice shaking with rage, "as that is," and he pointed to the grating, "so shall you be to-morrow! And when you are crawling in your filth and blindness I will bring your mistress to see you. You will not see us, but you will hear us!"

Jim laughed in his face and then yawned deliberately.

"Well," he said in English, "if you talk me to death first, you will have to forego the pleasure you seem to have promised yourself, and that would be a pity!"

Hassan Ali looked for a moment as if he would strike the prisoner, but changed his mind, and made a sign to the guards, who pushed Jim through the doorway. Then the door rose from the floor, gradually shutting out the flickering yellow gleam of the torch, and Jim and his companion were in darkness, a darkness which seemed to press in on every side like a wall.

CHAPTER XVI

BLACK MAGIC

IN a room high up in the House of Stones the girl Amine was walking up and down. It seemed as if she were waiting for the arrival of somebody and that her nerves would not permit her to keep still for a moment. Once or twice she threw herself down on a pile of cushions, but rose to her feet almost immediately and resumed her pacing. At last she turned toward the door, and in response to a light knock opened it, admitting a muffled figure which, as it loosened its wrappings, revealed itself as that of the old man Abs'laam.

Before he had time to speak the girl gripped him by the arm.

"What news?" she asked.

The old man spread his hands abroad.

"Bad news, Highness," he quavered. "The *Roumis* have refused the offer of our lord and——"

But the girl cut him short.

"They are not dead?" she gasped.

Abs'laam shook his head.

"Not yet, Highness," he said; "but they are very near death, or worse. Our lord has ordered them to be confined, down there until to-morrow. Then it will be fire to the eyes and steel to the face for them."

Amine seized him by the shoulders and shook him savagely.

"Talk like that," she said between her teeth, "and you go Below yourself! No, I know it is not your fault, Abs'laam, but I am not myself. Tell me, is there no chance of the *Roumis* yielding?"

Abs'laam shook his head.

"None, Highness," he said. "The two *Roumis* outfaced our lord, and I think will take what may befall them"—then, with reluctant admiration—"they are men."

Amine considered for a moment, twisting her fingers together.

"Where are the *Roumis* now?" she asked abruptly.

Abs'laam pointed downward again.

"Down there," he replied. "Where exactly, only our lord and Hassan Ali know!"

The girl turned from him, and paced up and down the room in deep thought for some minutes. Then she approached the old man and spoke again.

"Abs'laam 'ibn Marbuk," she said, "men say that you know more than it is lawful for man to know. That I know is true, for have you not been my teacher? Tell me now, is there any way in which I may come to these prisoners, or Any who will help me?"

The old man hid his face. When he raised it he was trembling.

"Highness," he said, "there is One who can help you. But only evil comes of His help. Be guided by me, and leave those *Roumis* to their fate."

Amine did not appear to hear the last part of the sentence, or if she did paid no attention to it. She bent over the crouching figure.

"You mean the Power?" she said in a whisper.

The old man nodded in assent.

"He, the Great One—the Breaker in Pieces—the Destroyer," he answered, "but, Highness, be warned! No good comes of his help, and for it there is a price to be paid—a price which must be paid. Highness, I, Abs'laam 'ibn Marbuk, have known you since you were a little child, and all you know of the art you have learned from me, and I say—do not do this thing! Let my lord have his will of this *Roumi*: for well I know it is only of one of them you are thinking. The Art, properly used, brings power and dominion over men, but no mortal ever accepted aid of that One without disaster coming of it. I, Abs'laam, who love you, ask you not to do this!"

Amine listened to the old man's words in silence. Then she replied, speaking more gently:

"Abs'laam," she said, "I know that you love me, and would not have me run into risk. But—I must free him. He is obstinate and will not go without his comrade. Now they are in the heart of the Stones, and Hassan Ali, who hates him, guards him. To-morrow will be too late. We must act to-night or not at all. And if that One will help me, he may destroy me afterward! Abs'laam, I must have your help. You will show me how to call him, will you not?"

Abs'laam sighed. "A woman who loves is a woman mad," he said half to himself, and then aloud, "Highness, I will obey, as I have always done. Listen now. In two hours I will come here and take you to the appointed place and do that which has to be done. And may the All-merciful have us both in his keeping to-night, for we shall need his protection!"

He turned and glided from the room, and Amine resumed her restless pacing.

Two hours afterward a knock came at the door, and Amine opened it.

She had thrown a long cloak over her dress and pulled the hood over her head so that it concealed her face, but under it her great eyes were shining like dark flame. Abs'laam was outside in the passage. He was also dressed in a dark cloak, and carried a bundle under it. No words were

exchanged. The old man signed to Amine to follow him, and turned down a narrow passage, at the end of which was a flight of stairs leading downward into a small room.

Here Abs'laam halted, and kneeling on the floor appeared to be searching for something. Then quite suddenly a section of the stone floor shouldered itself up, revealing the head of another flight of steps which led down into the darkness. From the bundle which he carried Abs'laam produced a lamp, which he lit, and then turned to his companion.

"Highness," he said, "here is the entrance to the place where the Old Ones worshipped Him at the beginning of time. Are you still resolved to seek Him?"

The girl did not answer, but stepped forward, and Abs'laam began the descent, keeping in front of his companion.

As they cleared the first few steps, the square of flooring which had lifted descended as noiselessly as it had risen, and they were in darkness except for the dim light of the lamp that the old man carried. The steps led ever downward, until at last the pair could feel that they had arrived far below the level of the rock, but still the stairs went on, and it seemed that they would never stop. At last, however, they ceased in front of a roughly-hewn archway.

Abs'laam turned to the girl.

"This is His temple," he said. "In the beginning of time, before Allah created man as he is now, here the Old Ones worshipped and sacrificed to Him. This place is very old—as old as the world itself—and it is not good to linger here, but I must speak before we enter His shrine. Remember that it is you who must call Him, for it is you who need his help. I will make the circle of Protection against the Seven Ones who guard his shrine. Whatever you see, whatever you hear, do not leave the circle. To do so is death to the body and the soul!"

He went under the archway and Amine followed him in silence.

The atmosphere of the passage was oppressive. Although a suspicion of coldness was in the dank air, it was a cold which lent no life to it, but rather devitalized it.

The place felt as if it were dead itself and belonged to the dead, and that it resented the presence of living beings.

The light of the lamp fell on the walls, and Amine could see that they were covered with strange and monstrous sculptures, of great animals, and figures which seemed human, and yet were not human. For the first time that night she trembled. The air of the place, and the knowledge of the purpose for which she had come, caused her to feel fear for almost the first time in her life.

Then another light beside that of the lamp appeared in front of them—a cold bluish light. The vaulted passage came to an end, and they emerged from it into an open space.

The place was a chamber, and, in comparison with the immense scale on which the House of the Stones was built, was small and low-browed, and was not so much built as carved bodily out of the solid rock. The walls were smoothed away, and were covered with the same kind of sculptures as were the walls of the passage through which the pair had just come. At one end of the cave was a figure, also carved from the rock. It was roughly human, and unmistakably male in outline, but below the heavy brow, where the face should have been, were no signs of features. Instead of being carved to represent a face, the rock was smoothed away from where the eyes should have been to the chin. Over the forehead a globe of light burned steadily, throwing out the bluish light that lit the chamber, and which turned Abs'laam's brown features to a livid green, and Amine's to corpse-like white.

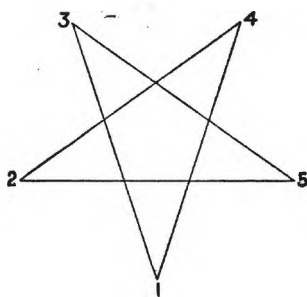
Abs'laam spoke in a whisper.

"It is the image of Him," he murmured. "None has ever seen his face, and so it is left blank. Now listen. I go to make the circle. Then I will make the Protection against the Seven and then—if you are fixed in your will—you must call on Him. We must hasten. The Seven are never far from his image, and this place is full of the strong magic of those who have built it!"

He placed the heavy bundle which he carried on the floor and opened it. From it he took five peculiarly shaped lamps,

and two or three stoppered vessels. Then he took out two white cocks, evidently, from the convulsive movements of their wings, living, but with their beaks and legs tied. Last of all, from the breast of his robe, he produced a roughly-shaped stone knife.

Going into the middle of the chamber he traced this figure



on the floor, and muttering some words lit the lamps, one of which he placed at each of the five points. Then opening the stoppered vessels, he took their contents and scattered them on the ground so as to form a circle joining the lamps. This accomplished, he signed to Amine to place herself inside the circle, in the centre of the figure, and when she had done so followed her.

Still muttering strange words, he swept his open hand, palm downward, around the circumference of the circle. As he did so, the circle on the ground seemed to spring into light under the sweep of his hand, and rise some feet into the air, completely surrounding the two with a barrier of reddish light. As the light of the circle flamed into being, that on the brow of the image dwindled and shrunk until it was no more than a pin-point of blue light, and simultaneously seven lights of the same color made their appearance outside the circle, remaining there as if keeping guard. Quiet and still they hung, but both the people within the circle could feel that from each of them emanated an intense and potent malignancy.

Abs'laam spoke one sentence only. "The Seven come," he said. Then he rose to his feet, raised his hands and began to chant. The words were Arabic—not the bastard language of Algeria and Morocco, but the

pure Arabic of Yemen—and were something as follows:

“Seven are they, seven are they!
 In the channel of the deep, seven are they!
 In the radiance of heaven, seven are they!
 In the palace of the channel of the deep, grew
 they up,
 Female they are not, male they are not,
 In the midst of the deep are their paths,
 Wife they have not, son they have not
 Ruth or mercy know they not
 Prayer of supplication know they not,
 The cavern of the mountain they enter,
 Unto Allah are they hostile,
 The throne wardens of That Other are they,
 Baleful are they, Baleful are they!
 Seven are they, seven are they, twice seven
 again are they!
 Spirit of the Heaven, remember it!
 Spirit of the earth, remember it!”

As he ceased, Abs’laam raised his hands to the roof, and stood upright, waiting. Then little by little the seven flames drew away and waned until the vault was only lit by the light from the circle.

The old man turned to the girl, and the sweat was running down his face.

“They have gone,” he said, “now it is for you to call Him—if you dare; but first we must both make libations to Him.”

He handed one of the white fowls to the girl, and then gave her the stone knife. Amine took it and holding the bird in her left hand, with a strong movement of her wrist, decapitated it. As the hot blood splashed on the floor inside the circle it seemed as if the light on the brow of the great image flared up for a moment and sank again.

Then Abs’laam, taking the knife from the girl, did the same with the other fowl, and again the light rose and fell.

“Now is the time to call on Him,” whispered the old man, “now while the blood is still warm—you know the words—call on Him and show no fear!”

He crouched down in the middle of the circle and covered his face with his robe, as the girl stood up with her arms outstretched facing the image. Then she began to speak in a slow and measured voice, again using pure Arabic.

“I invoke Thee who art in the empty wind,” ran the words, “terrible, invisible,

all potent, god of gods, bringer of destruction, and bringer of desolation, thou who hast been named the breaker in pieces of all things and the unconquered one. I invoke thee, oh, mighty one, I perform thy rites, seeing that I invoke thee through thy name which thou canst not refuse to hear!” Here the girl bowed herself to the ground and whispered a Name, and as she did so the vault seemed to heave, as if the rock had drawn a deep breath. Then she stood up again and resumed. “Come to me, oh, great one, and go forward before me, and show me the way to what I desire. Therefore perform I these rites!”

She ceased and the vault was very still. Then slowly the light descended from the brow of the image, and hung in the air just outside the radius of the circle. As it did so the light from the circle seemed to die away, leaving the place almost in darkness, save for that cold, blue light. For an instant it seemed to the eyes of the watchers inside the circle that under the light stood a Form, but as they strained their eyes it was gone, although a presence of some kind there was—a presence which was not so much an evil one as Evil itself.

Then a voice spoke, apparently from just outside the circle. “Follow the light,” it said, and that was all.

The light retreated, and went back to its original position, while the vault was illuminated by the same cold, blue light as it had been when the two entered it.

Amine turned to her companion, who was still covered with his cloak.

“Follow the light!” she said.

The old man uncovered his head and pointed toward the passage through which they had entered. Half-way through it, and apparently suspended in the empty air, hung a light, of the same bluish color as the other.

“It is the light that He sends for a guide,” said he, “follow that. All is safe now.”

They left the circle, and as they did so its glow died down to nothingness. All that was left of the ceremony which had taken place was a circle of brownish-red powder on the floor of the vault, inside it the headless bodies of the two fowls, and a pool of blood.

They turned to the entrance, Amine in advance, and as they did so the light moved forward before them. It led up the passage and then turned to the right, halting for a moment before a flight of stairs in the wall, which it slowly ascended, Amine and her companion following it. At last it stopped before a blank wall, and remained poised over a stone carved in rude spirals.

Amine turned to Abs'laam.

"What now?" she said.

The old man went forward and pressed with his hands on the stone, the light all the time burning clear and steady just over his head. Amine held the lamp, which had been relit after leaving the vault.

Then quite suddenly a section of the wall seemed to give way, leaving a dark opening, which the light from the lamp only half penetrated.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE WADY-ER-ROUMI

AS THE door closed, shutting out the last rays of light from the torches, Jim and Morsec instinctively groped for each other. It is strange what a daunting effect utter darkness has on men, even the boldest. The man who will face any danger, as long as he can see it, feels the need of the companionship of his own kind in the darkness, and the sense of that companionship is increased by actual physical contact. Since the days when our remote ancestors huddled together in the tree tops and peered, trembling into the black void below them, the Fear of the Dark has lasted, and will last until man reaches a higher stage of development than he has up to the present. Neither Jim nor Morsec was frightened, but somehow the knowledge that there was some one friendly within arm's length brought satisfaction to both. Then Morsec spoke.

"*Mon Dieu,*" he said, "we are properly in the soup this time! And it looks as if it were going to be worse for us to-morrow. Did you see that poor devil's face—Faugh!" and he made a noise of disgust in his throat. "What did that man say to you? He didn't look amiable, my friend—no, hardly amiable!"

Jim did not see any reason to enlighten

his comrade as to the reason of Hassan Ali's want of geniality.

"He remarked that if we didn't do as the old devil upstairs wanted us to that we would be the same as the man we saw by this time to-morrow," he said. "He also promised himself the pleasure of coming to see us. Nasty mind he seems to have."

Silence followed for a space, and then Morsec said gruffly:

"You know, Lingard, it is quite another pair of sleeves, your case and mine. I am a Frenchman, but you—well, you are——"

"A Legionary," returned Jim. "Look here, don't get on that strain or we shall quarrel, and it's too dark to do that comfortably."

Morsec squeezed his arm.

"Obstinate English pig," he said, but there was no anger in the words. "Well, then, since neither of us will do as they want us to, we'd better think out what we are going to do for ourselves. Listen, my friend. When they come for us to-morrow, they open the door, do you understand? Very well then. The inside of this place is as black as a wolf's throat, as you see, or rather don't see. Now we shall be in the dark and they will have torches, and will show up against the light. They can't see us. They will make a perfect target—impossible to miss at a close range, even with a short-barrelled pistol. If I dropped two of them, and that ought to be easy enough, we could grab their arms, perhaps their rifles and bandoliers if we have any luck, but in any case their swords, and *voilà!* If we once get arms into our hands, well, it will not be our fault if they take us again—alive, at least. How does the scheme strike you?"

"All right as far as it goes," returned Jim, "but can you make certain of hitting them? I mean make certain of dropping your men dead. An *Arbi* will make nothing of the bullets that pistol of yours carries unless he takes it in the head or heart; and if we want their arms we shall have to be pretty quick in getting them before their friends take a hand in the game."

"I think so," replied Morsec. "I am fairly useful with a pistol. *Sacrè sang,* man, look at the door—here they come!" He whipped the automatic from the breast

of his tunic and crouched down close to the floor so as to get the first man who entered well against the light for a shot.

Certainly a door was opening, but to Jim's senses, even confused as they were by the darkness, it seemed to be at the opposite side of the room to that from which they had entered. Wider and wider a space in the wall opened, until it left an oblong through which the light streamed, cutting a swathe out of the darkness. In the middle of the light space were two figures, and Morsec brought his pistol down with a steady aim until it pointed squarely at the breast of the foremost. Then Jim seized his arm.

"Don't fire," he said. "It's all right—I know the lady!"

The two figures advanced swiftly into the room. The foremost one was the girl Amine, and the other was a small, bent, old man.

Amine went straight up to Jim.

"You must come with me now," she said, "at once, if you would ever see the day again. No"—as Jim strove to speak—"there is no time for questions. Follow me now—you and your comrade." She led Jim through the open door, and Morsec followed, the old man bringing up the rear.

Outside was a narrow passage, only lit by the lamp which Amine carried, and further down by a small globe of bluish light which almost immediately moved away as if carried by somebody. Amine took the lead of the party and followed it.

Jim could never form a coherent mental picture of that journey. Through passages down narrow stairways, once through a great open space of which the sides and walls were lost in darkness and in which the sound of their footsteps seemed swallowed up in empty space, and again through passages so low that they had to bend almost double, the light led them. All the time there was no sign of any living thing except themselves, and no sound except their own breathing and their own footsteps. The girl in front moved very swiftly, but fast as she went the blue light kept ever the same distance in front, and moved apparently at the same pace.

The whole scene reminded Jim of a book

which he had seen as a boy in his uncle's house—the Doré edition of Dante's "Inferno." Colonel Lingard had not been a person who encouraged light literature in his house, and looked on all poetry except hymns as being immoral, but the title of the book, and the illustrations, had struck him as capable of pointing a moral, and he had relaxed his usual rule in its favor.

Jim remembered the dim light and the towering walls fading away into darkness and the progress of himself and his companions reminded him of that of Dante and his guide. The only thing lacking to complete the likeness was the presence of the damned souls and demons, and it seemed as if at any moment one or the other might quite conceivably make their appearance out of the shadows.

At last, however, the stone flags under foot gave place to loose sand, and the walls, in place of squared stones, were of rough rock. Since they had entered the archway that led into the House of the Stones there had been a curious dead quality in the air, which was missing now, and once or twice Jim thought he felt a suggestion of wind. It was more like a ghost of a breeze which had entered the labyrinth long ago, and had died there, still haunting the place, than a wind, but still it was moving air, and a comfort to feel on the face. Then straight in front of them, and beyond the guiding light, appeared another light, a pin-point only it seemed, but distinctly light, and the breeze grew stronger and the air fresher. The walls seemed to fall away a little from each side, and above them Jim could see the Algerian sky and the stars.

Jim Lingard was not a sentimental man, nor one with any great sense of the beauties of nature, but he felt his eyes tingle and a lump in his throat at the sight. Life is sweet to a young man, and Jim had made up his mind that evening that he had finished with it for good and all.

Morsec was also moved. "Well, at least we are out of that heap of stones," he whispered to Jim. "I never thought to smell the fresh air again, did you?"

The girl Amine heard him and, turning, placed her hand on her lips for silence. Then she motioned the others to remain

where they were, and went forward by herself, seemingly to reconnoitre.

When she was out of earshot Morsec turned to Jim again.

"I say," he remarked in a casual tone, "the young lady has got us out, but—what's going to happen to her? The old gentleman, her father, will scarcely be pleased with her, I imagine, and didn't she say something to us about being practically *fiancée* to some one. The gentleman who took such a gloomy view of our immediate future, I fancy?"

Jim kicked a piece of loose stone irritably.

"I don't know," he replied. "As you say, she has got us out, and if we pull through—which is doubtful—we must look after her."

Morsec smiled.

"I don't fancy the lady will want much looking after, my dear," he observed. "A more capable young person I never remember meeting! The question is if—and I admit there is a big if—we get out of this what are you going to do with her? She doesn't seem exactly the sort of girl to support life on the pay of an adjutant!" and he grinned.

Jim snarled.

"Who the devil said she could?" he returned. "Besides she doesn't want to—"

"Oh no, of course not," returned Morsec. "It was *my beaux yeux* that made her take the trouble to guide us through the inside of the earth here. But seriously, my dear—no, don't be angry, I was only joking—what on earth are we going to do with her?"

Jim did not answer. In point of fact there didn't seem to be any very obvious answer. If they ever got away there was no manner of doubt that it was simply and solely owing to the girl, and there was equally no manner of doubt that she had done what she did solely because of him—Jim Lingard.

Now Jim's feelings toward the girl were very mixed. He admired her splendid beauty, as no man could help doing, but with his admiration he carried a very wholesome respect which was almost fear of her. He felt vaguely that she had command of powers of which he knew nothing, and whose nature he could not understand; but what he could understand very plainly was the

complications which were likely to ensue if he brought her back to the Legion with him—always supposing that he ever arrived there.

However, his duty for the present was clear. The girl had saved his life, and therefore had a claim on it. It was for her to say what she wanted of him, and gratitude and chivalry both ordained that he should give it to her. After all she was no native, but a white woman, and must be treated as one.

This train of thought was interrupted by the return of the girl.

"We must hasten," she said, "already it is near the dawn, and when Hassan Ali discovers that you are gone he will pursue. He was responsible for you, and, if my father finds that you have escaped, it will not be good for those who let you go. For that reason I think that Hassan Ali will not bring many men with him. If he did it would come to my father's ears, which is what he will want to avoid—but let us go forward." She led the way down the gully and the others followed her as they had done before.

Morsec was walking behind Jim and he bent forward, speaking in a low voice.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we are nearly in as bad a hole as ever. If those gentlemen do pursue us we haven't got a weapon among us, except my pistol, and anyhow, supposing we ever do get out of this infernal heap of stones, how are we going to get across the desert? Even if my knee was all right we couldn't walk."

Jim had almost forgotten the injury to Morsec's knee. As a matter of fact, though the lieutenant had never uttered a word of complaint, he was limping badly, and was evidently in pain.

"No use crossing bridges until we come to them," he said. "Something is sure to turn up."

He spoke cheerfully, but in his mind he felt anything but cheerful. Morsec did not answer, and the journey continued in silence.

The air was fresher now, and the summits of the rocks around them began to take a more distinct shape. It was evidently close to daybreak. Then the gully which they were traversing turned into a wider one, and Amine halted.

"We must keep along this," she said. "I know of a place further on where there is water, and where we can lie hidden. But we must hasten. By this time Hassan Ali will have discovered your escape, and will search for you."

For half a mile or so she led the way, and then the old man, Abs'laam, plucked Jim by the sleeve.

"I hear camels," he said anxiously.

Jim listened, and, although he strained his ears, could hear nothing at first; but after a moment or two he became conscious of a regular pad-pad behind him.

He turned to Morsec.

"They're after us," he said shortly, and then ran forward, and told Amine.

The girl listened.

"Yes," she said, "Hassan Ali has lost no time. But there are not many of them—not more than two or three by the sound—but hasten."

She led the way, almost running, and Jim going back to Morsec, passed the latter's arm round his neck, and hurried him forward. The dull pad of the camels' feet was closer now—and coming still closer every minute.

Then Amine stopped at the entrance of a narrow gully, intersecting the one down which they were traveling.

"In here," she said, "quick; they are close on us now!"

She turned and flitted up the narrow way, looking like a ghost in the dim light, and the others followed her.

But their pursuers had been closer than they had reckoned on. Hardly had they gone fifty yards up the narrow track when there was a shout behind them, which other voices took up.

Jim turned and looked behind. Crowded together outside the mouth of the gully were four men on camels, and, as the foremost saw Jim, he waved his hand and shouted again. "Allah akbar Senussi!" rang the cry, and Jim knew they were tracked down.

Morsec took his arm from Jim's shoulder and drew his pistol.

"Better stay and finish it here," he said grimly. "Well, we have had a run for our money, but I'm afraid it's *macache* for us now."

Jim looked around. There was absolutely nothing which could be used as a weapon, not even a loose stone. Then with the Englishman's instinct he closed his fist and stepped up beside his comrade.

But the girl Amine seized him by the arm. "Not yet," she said, "let us see what happens. They will not follow us in *here*," and she half pulled, half pushed, Jim with her.

He followed rather reluctantly. As far as he could see the game was up, and he did not see the use of prolonging it. Better die now while his blood was hot than be captured later on, when weak from starvation and thirst, to be brought back to the House of Stones for death or worse. Still the force of the girl's personality won its way, and he followed her obediently.

They turned a corner of the gully and Amine pointed to the mouth of a cave, about ten feet up in the rock wall, to which a slip of the cliff had made a rough pathway.

"In here," she said, and began the ascent the others following her still. She was in every sense the leader of the party. Both the prisoners had given up hope, and would have been glad to get their nightmare flight over and done with, if they could have made certain of killing a few of their enemies first. Abs'laam from first to last had followed his mistress with the unswerving devotion of a faithful dog, but the girl herself, since the beginning of that wild journey, had neither stopped nor wavered.

Now she led the way into the cave which she had pointed out. She was breathing hard from her exertions, but was otherwise cool and collected.

"We are safe for a time," she said. "They will never follow us in here, and at least we shall not be thirsty." She pointed to the back of the cave, where the sound of running water could be heard. "Now let us rest; we shall want all our strength before long."

She seated herself on the sandy floor of the cave, and the others followed her example.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT JIM LINGARD FOUND IN THE CAVE

MORSEC lay down beside Jim and caressed his injured knee.

"This is all very well," he observed, "but as I said, I don't see that we are very much better off than we were before. We have whole skins, and that is about all there is to be said. In a few minutes—or a few hours—along will come those Arabs, *et puis, macache.*"

"She says," Jim returned, "that they won't come in here. But even if they don't I can't see what difference it is going to make. We can't stay here forever."

"Well, she seems to be very much the leader," said Morsec. "Suppose you ask her what she thinks of doing. I don't like to. Somehow the lady doesn't seem to have taken a fancy to me. She hasn't addressed a solitary word to me since I had the pleasure of meeting her. Perhaps it's because she hasn't been properly introduced, but anyhow I don't feel inclined to break the ice."

Jim rose and went over to the girl.

"We are safe so far, thanks to you," he said, "but can you tell me what is likely to happen, or if Hassan Ali and his men are likely to attack us? Because, if they do, I am afraid we are in a very poor shape to meet them!"

Amine put her hand on his arm.

"Jeem," she said, "I do not know what is going to happen. But they will not attack us here. If Hassan Ali wants to do so, he will have to come by himself. None of my father's men will enter the Wady-er-Roumi."

"Why not?" asked Jim.

"Because," replied the girl, "they fear El Roumi. Once, hundreds of years ago, there was war between the sultan Saladin and the Franks. There was a company of Franks who became separated from their *barka* and wandered into the Ahagger, where they were beset by the men of the desert. All of them fell under the arrows and lances of the Faithful except one, their leader. He was a giant in stature, and he hewed his way through his foes, until he came to the place where we are now. Five of the bravest of the sons of the desert followed him, the others dared not, for they said that he was possessed of a devil. The five men followed the *Roumi* but no man ever saw them or him again. But men say that the great *Roumi* still

walks the gully, and that sometimes one can hear the clash of steel and the cries of dying men. No Arab will enter the place."

"But," said Jim, "even if they do not enter, they have only to wait outside until we die of hunger, and I think the longer we stay here the worse plight we shall be in. Hassan Ali may send for more men!"

"I do not think so," returned the girl; "he dare not let my father know that you have escaped. But let me think—if we stay here it means death for all of us."

She placed her chin on her hands, and Jim rose. He was thirsty, and went to the back of the cave, where there was the sound of running water. Out of the rock a little spring of clear water rose, and ran merrily for a few yards over the rock before it lost itself in the sand. Jim bent over and drank deeply, then straightened himself and wiped his mouth. As he did so, in the semi-darkness of the cave he thought he noticed a darker shadow on the back of the wall. He approached it with no very definite idea, and found that it was the opening to another cave, a narrow passage which after some paces widened out, forming another chamber. With some idea that there might be a series of caves, which perhaps might lead to some way of escape, Jim went back to the others quietly, and taking the lamp that Amine had carried, with some difficulty relit it with the flint and steel which so many French soldiers carry, as being cheaper and almost as efficient as the matches supplied by a paternal government. Then he went back to the entrance of the second cave and entered it.

He had hardly taken two steps, however, when he stumbled over something, and almost fell full length. He lowered the lamp and looked. To his astonishment it was two human figures, or rather what had been two human figures, lying on the top of each other. They were both covered with white robes, which fell to dust as Jim touched them, on their heads they wore round steel caps, which were still clean and bright, and in the skeleton hands were vicious, curved blades. One of the bodies had the skull neatly split in two, while that of the other lay some paces away, grinning

sardonically at the body to which it had once belonged.

Jim gave an oath of astonishment, and continued his way. A few paces further on lay another body, and as the passage widened he saw three more. Two of them were the same as the figures in the passage, but the third was that of a great man clad in chain-mail, with a square-topped helmet on his head. One of the bodies was lying in a corner of a cave as if flung there, but the figure in chain-mail and the remaining one were close together.

Jim examined them carefully. Through the skeleton ribs of the white clad figure was driven a great sword, so far that the cross hilt almost touched the breast-bone. In the hand of the transfixing figure was a curved sword, which had bitten deep through the neck armor of the other, and was firmly wedged in the collar bone.

Jim reconstructed the tragedy mentally.

The solitary Crusader, after having cut his way through his enemies, had taken refuge in the inner cave, and thither the five men who had been brave enough to pursue had followed him. Three of them he had cut down in the passageway, but two of them had forced their way into the inner chamber. One of them had evidently, as could be seen by closer examination, met a sweep of the great sword which had almost divided his body, and the other had taken the point. Then, before it could be withdrawn, the last man had evidently forced himself up against the blade to deliver a blow with his last strength, which had slain the slayer, and there in the darkness the six men had lain for seven hundred years.

Jim went back to the mouth of the passage leading to the outer cave and called softly to Morsec. The latter rose and limped across the cave. Jim beckoned to him to enter, and raised the lamp. Morsec looked, and then whistled thoughtfully.

"We are not the first to have been here then," he said. "Gad, though, he fought well! Five he got before they got him! Well, may we go as well when our turn comes." That was the epitaph of the unknown Crusader, and, if he heard it, he may have thought it no bad one.

Suddenly Morsec seemed struck by a thought.

"Behold!" he said. "I have it. See, my friend, just exactly what we wanted," and as he spoke he stooped and loosed one of the swords from the skeleton hand that grasped it.

"Whatever happens now," he went on, "we can make a fight of it. You had better help yourself as well; these gentlemen won't require them any more!"

Jim went over to where the remains of the Crusader and his enemy lay, and with some difficulty released the great sword from the grip of its owner. It was a murderous weapon, double-edged, and nearly a hand's breadth wide under the hilts, and almost four feet long in the blade. Notwithstanding its size it was so perfectly balanced that it seemed almost light in the hand, and the edges were as sharp as they had been when its owner drew it for his last fight.

Jim tried the balance of it, and, when he swung it hissing, through the air, it seemed as if the sword sang for joy at the prospect of action. "I think I'll keep this," he said. "That thing you've got there seems a bit too fragile to do very much with, but I pity any one who gets in the way of this!"

Morsec set the point of the weapon he had taken in the ground, and pressed strongly on the hilt. The blade bent into a complete circle, and as he removed the pressure sprung back again into position.

"Damascus steel," he observed calmly, "thesort they used to make. Feel the edge, that will go through anything, bone or flesh."

Jim felt the edge with his thumb and almost drew blood. It was as sharp as a razor.

"Sharp enough for anything," he said. "Still I prefer this. And now—what are we going to do? The longer we stay here the worse off we are. I think we had better make a sortie and try our luck!"

The other assented.

"I think so too," he said; "but we had better wait a little. Dusk would be the best time. If we get through we shall have to get on before the others find out what has happened. Always supposing we do have luck, we shall have to take the *Arbis'* camels, and personally I'm not anxious for a ride over the desert under the sun. Better wait until evening."

The advice was sound from all points of view. If the forlorn hope succeeded, the first and most obvious thing for the fugitives to do was to place as long a distance as possible between themselves and the Senussi, and a journey over the desert was likely to be very much more endurable by night than by day. Of course there was always the chance that Hassan Ali had sent back to the House of Stones for reinforcements, but all things considered Jim thought that this was unlikely. If as Amine said, her father was certain to punish any dereliction of duty with a heavy hand, Hassan Ali would hardly call attention to the escape of the prisoners, especially as he had them under his hand, but would be much more likely to sit down and wait. No, a sortie was the only course, and dusk was the best time to try it.

The two men returned to the outer cave, and Jim told Amine in a few words what they had seen and what they had made up their minds to do. She seemed satisfied.

"You are safe from steel and lead," she said, "and as to him," indicating Morsec, "it does not matter. Yes, what you say is best."

The hours dragged slowly on, and both Jim and Morsec dozed. Amine sat quite still without uttering a word, and old Abs'laam sat huddled up in his *baik*, with no sign of life about him except the occasional flash of his eyes under his hood.

As Jim dozed he had a strange dream, or what he thought was a dream. It seemed to him that he heard footsteps at the back of the cave, and as he turned he saw a tall figure emerging from the narrow passage which led to the inner chamber—the figure of the dead man whose sword he had taken. The mail-clad figure came close to him and spoke. "I, Ralph de Barham, give you my sword," he thought it said. "When the time comes use it! In return lay my bones fair and straight, that I may sleep like a gentleman among these dogs of Saracens."

Then Jim woke from a thrust of Morsec's elbow.

"Time to start," he said, "are you ready?"

"In a moment," returned Jim.

He slipped into the inner cave and laid

the mail-clad figure of the Crusader on its back with the hands crossed on the breast, and then turned to go, leaving him to his last sleep among his dead enemies.

When he returned Morsec looked at him. "Anything special doing?" he inquired.

Jim laughed a little shamefacedly.

"No," he answered, "only I thought that as our friend inside had given me his sword, the least I could do was to lay him out decently. I'm ready now."

Both men stepped to the mouth of the cave, and then Amine stopped Jim.

"I do not know," she said, "but I think that something is going to happen. If you escape, you will not forget me?"

Jim passed his arm around her. "If I escape you are coming with me," he replied; "and if not——"

The girl smiled a little.

"I hope so," she said, "but I have had thoughts, and perhaps—but promise you will not forget me?"

Jim felt intensely uncomfortable. This was very unlike the self-reliant Amine that he had known so far.

"I will never forget you," he said, "but you and—your—er—servant had better stay here; there is no need for you to come with us. If we win through, we can come back for you, and if not you will be much safer here."

The girl looked at him. "No," she said, "where you go, I go," and with a parting pressure on his arm she placed herself behind him.

Jim placed himself on Morsec's left hand. His heart was beating like a trip-hammer, but otherwise he felt perfectly cool—exceptionally cool, he thought—as he found himself noticing a red outcrop in the rock with interest.

Jim Lingard had come through some trying times, and had had some narrow escapes since he had left Douargala with his company, but now he felt that he really was, as he put it to himself, "up against it." What earthly chance had two men, one crippled, and both weak from lack of food, against four Arabs? He wondered if the Arabs had guns. There was just a chance that they might not have, that is, if what Amine had said as to Hassan Ali not wishing to arrest attention was right. A

gun-shot in the gullies of the Ahagger would echo and re-echo, and would inevitably alarm the garrison. In any case their chance against four men was slender enough, but if the four had fire-arms it was hopeless. Just then Morsec spoke.

"Look here," he said, "can you go forward and reconnoitre? I would do it myself but—" and he pointed to his injured knee. "It is fairly dark now, and if you could get to the mouth of this place and see what the *Arbis* are doing—eh?"

Jim nodded silently and went forward. As Morsec said, it was getting very dark in the gullies and correspondingly difficult to pick out objects. He flung off the white *baik*, which he found an impediment to his movements, and keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the rocks moved forward until he reached the mouth of the gully. Here he dropped full length on the sand, in the shadow of the rock, and looked cautiously out. At first he could make out no distinct forms in the jumble of rock shapes, but presently, standing close to the mouth of the gully, he made out a figure. It was that of an Arab armed with a spear. A little further away were other forms which looked like fantastically-shaped rocks but which closer scrutiny enabled him to see were camels, each with a man sitting beside it. So, the siege had not been raised, Jim looked long and carefully. The sentry at the mouth of the gully certainly had no rifle, and therefore it was possible that Hassan Ali had forbidden his men to bring fire-arms. So far, so good.

Jim took one more long look at the Arabs so as to fix their positions in his memory—he knew that an accurate knowledge of where each of their enemies was would be an enormous help to himself and his comrade in a quick rush—and then crawling back as quietly as he had come, made his report to Morsec, who listened attentively.

"Four of them," he said, "well it might be worse—a lot worse. Well, what do you propose?"

"Rush them," replied Jim, "it's the only chance we have. First get the sentry out of the way, and then go for the others as hard as we can."

"Yes," said Morsec, "and the sentry—

how are you going to deal with him? Rush him as well?"

Jim considered. "Look here," he said at last, "I have a plan. I remember once a comrade of mine who had served in India told me that, in one of our little wars there, night after night they had the sentry on one particular spot cut up. At last they took a man from the native regiment who came from that part of the country and understood his friends' little ways. In the morning they found that he had bagged the man who had killed the other sentries. The soldier explained how it was done. The tribesmen would creep out and toss a stone or handful of pebbles over the sentry's head so as to fall and make a noise behind him, and when the sentry turned his head he would rush him. I'm going to try the trick. It seems a rotten thing to do—to kill a man like that—but it's no time for studying that sort of thing: it's us or them. No," as Morsec interrupted. "I'm going to do it. You can't move quickly enough with your bad leg. Then after I have cut down the sentry, what you have to do is to back me up as hard as ever you can in a rush on the others before they can collect themselves. We ought to get at least one of them and that leaves us man to man. It's the only thing to do. You can't make sure of hitting them with that pop-gun of yours, and even if you could the report would probably bring the whole lot down on us. I'm going back to tell the other two to stay where they are, and then I'm going to try it."

He went back a few paces to where Amine and Abs'laam stood in the shadow of the cliff, and put his hands on the girl's shoulders.

"I'm going to take my chance," he said, "and I want to tell you before I go how grateful, how very grateful I am for all," and he emphasized the word, "you have done for me. If I get through I will do my best to make up for all you have lost through me!"

The girl looked into his eyes, and her lip was trembling.

"Jeem—beloved," she said, and that was all.

Jim pressed her to him and returned to Morsec. The two men exchanged a few

curt words, and a hearty hand-grip, then Jim crept forward on his hands and knees, trailing the great sword beside him, Morsec following close behind.

Neither of them noticed that Amine had left her companion and was following them closely.

CHAPTER XIX

NAKED STEEL

As JIM approached the mouth of the gully, he turned his head and made a sign to Morsec to be ready. Then he grasped the hilt of the sword, and with his left hand scooped up a handful of loose sand. The sentry, who was not more than four or five paces away, was standing leaning on his lance, and, beyond occasionally peering up the gully, was apparently paying no very great attention to it.

Just enough light remained for Jim to see him and the figures beyond him, still seated by their camels. Then he took a deep breath, and tossed the handful of coarse sand and small pebbles which he had picked up high into the air with his left hand, so that they fell behind the watching Arab with a slight clatter. The man seemed to be nervous, for he faced about with a start for a moment, and in that moment Jim was on him. Before the sentry had time to utter a sound, before he had time to make an attempt to guard, the great sword swung with the full weight of Jim's body behind it, came down, almost severing one arm and shoulder from the trunk. Then with a wrench Jim tore the weapon free, and leaving the dying man, charged down on the other three men at the top of his speed followed by Morsec.

As he charged on them, the Arabs leaped to their feet. The foremost who, even in the dim light, Jim could see was Hassan Ali, lifted his spear, and with a swift motion sent it flying straight at Jim's throat. Jim could almost have sworn that it was coming straight for him, but that in some way, just before the moment of impact, it turned ever so little aside and sped past. He heard a half-choked cry from behind him, and set his teeth. They had got Morsec, had they? Well, if they were going to get him he would take one or two with him, and with his sword raised he made

straight for Hassan Ali. As he did so he heard the clash of steel beside him, and wondered vaguely what it was. Perhaps Morsec was not badly hurt after all. Then his attention became strictly centred on himself.

When the flung spear missed, Hassan Ali had drawn his heavy, straight, Touareg sword, almost a counterpart of that carried by Jim, and had leaped forward to meet his enemy. The two met in mid-career, hacked savagely at each other without effect, and then simultaneously drew back a pace.

Jim was breathing hard, and was glad of a moment's respite. He kept his eyes on his foe and held his sword almost upright in front of him, ready for either a cut or guard.

Hassan Ali was trying to smile, but only succeeded in looking like a devil. The man seemed to be looking past Jim, and to see something there which filled him with rage and horror, but Jim did not dare to turn his head to see what it was.

He could hear from the clash of steel and the deep breathing of the combatants that Morsec was fighting hard, then he heard a fall and a wet groan, and immediately the clash of steel began again. So Morsec had killed his man? Well, he was having more than his share of fighting, considering his disabled knee, and it behoved Jim to get his own affair finished as quickly as might be to go to his comrade's aid. He had not long to wait. Hassan Ali leaped in and slashed at his neck; Jim parried the blow and returned it with interest. The heavy blades circled and crossed each other, sometimes throwing out showers of blue sparks into the semi-darkness, but so far neither of the combatants was wounded.

Both men were equally matched. Hassan Ali was the quicker, but Jim was the stronger and had the longer reach, and, in the fence of the two-handed sword, strength and reach go far. It seemed to Jim that the sword which he had taken from the dead man almost fought of itself, as if it were sentient, and wished to avenge its old master on one of the race of his slayers. Time and again it seemed that it moved of itself to intercept a cunning cut from Hassan Ali, or to make an opening for itself.

The whole gully was full of the sound and flicker of wheeling steel. Morsec and the other Arab were still fighting hard, but Jim only knew by the sound of steel that his comrade was still alive. Every other sense he had was concentrated on his opponent, and he knew that, if he took his eyes off Hassan Ali's for one second, that second would send the Arab's steel into his head or body.

Clash—clash—clash went the great blades, then at last the old sword seemed to find a tiny opening in Hassan Ali's guard and slipped through it; and the Arab gave ground with the blood pouring from a gash in his shoulder. But his retreat was only momentary. He gathered himself together and sprang at Jim like a cat, lashing out savagely with his sword. Twice—three times he foiled Jim's guard, and three times, automatically, as it seemed, the Crusader's sword intercepted a blow which would have put *finis* to the book of Jim Lingard's life.

The foam was white on Hassan Ali's dark mustache and beard, and he was breathing hard, but he never for one moment ceased to press Jim or to send in one cut after another at head or body. Then the loss of blood from the wound on his shoulder began to tell, and very gradually he began to give ground, still fighting every inch of the way, but now on the defensive.

Jim was feeling the strain as well. He was not wounded, but he was weak from lack of food and from what he had gone through, and it takes a strong man and a well-fed one to use a heavy sword with effect for any length of time.

Then as Jim jumped backward to avoid a cut, his foot slipped, and Hassan Ali rushed in with his sword whirling.

Jim never knew how he met that rush, but meet it he did. In some way the weapon he carried seemed to twist itself round Hassan Ali's; the Arab wheeled back with the blood pouring from his forehead, and as he did so the old sword seemed to swing again of its own volition. Jim felt a slight resistance and a jar as the blade shore through the bone, then Hassan Ali's head seemed to leap from the shoulders, and went rolling over the floor of the gully, until it was brought to a stop by the rock

wall. The body stood upright for a moment, with the blood spurting from the severed neck, before it collapsed in a heap.

Jim leaned gasping against the rock for a moment. At that moment he felt that if his life depended on it he could do nothing else. There seemed to be a mist before his eyes, and he had a queer, sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Then as his breath came back to him he remembered his companion and turned to help him.

Morsec was fighting bravely at great disadvantage. Besides the injury to his knee he had received two sword cuts, one on the forehead and the other in the shoulder, and was losing blood rapidly. He had killed the first man he had attacked and was now, with his back to a rock, standing bravely up to the attack of the fourth Arab.

Jim swung up his sword again, and moved over to take a hand in the game, but the Arab had had enough of one white man, and had no stomach to face two. He spat furiously at Morsec, and leaping backward ran to the kneeling camels, on the back of one of which he scrambled. Getting it to its feet, he put the beast to its ungainly gallop, and disappeared, rocking and swaying in his saddle, up the pass, leaving the two white men in possession of the field.

Morsec passed his hand over his forehead and wiped the blood away.

"Thanks, old fellow," he said. "You arrived just in time. I was about done. You finished your gentleman neatly. Cut his head off, didn't you?"

"That Crusader's sword did," corrected Jim. "To tell you the truth, it seemed to take charge from the beginning; but, look, here, you are wounded, is it bad?"

Morsec laughed weakly.

"A couple of scratches only," he said, "nothing to talk about," but even as he spoke he staggered, and then pulled himself together.

"We must get out of this," he said. "That man who got away will have his friends down on us in no time. Get the girl——" but he broke off with a gasp of horror, which a second later Jim echoed.

Lying just outside the mouth of the Wady-er-Roumi was the body of the girl

Amine, with a spear driven right through her body under the left breast. She had followed her companions to the mouth of the gully, and the spear which Hassan Ali had flung at Jim had struck the girl, passing through her heart.

She was lying on her back, and the old man Abs'laam was crouched over her body.

Death seemed to have been instantaneous. There was no look of pain on the lovely face, but rather one of slight surprise. Amine of the Senussi had faced her death, when it came to her, unafraid, as she had lived.

Jim and Morsec bent over the dead girl and searched for any sign of life. They had both been in the Legion long enough, however, to know violent death when they saw it, and even as they searched they knew that it was hopeless.

Then Jim closed the dead girl's eyes and rose to his feet.

"That was meant for me," he said hoarsely, "and she took it. If she had never seen me she would be alive and happy now." He was silent for a moment and then resumed. "We must get on," he said, "She would have wished it; but first I am going to put her in a safe place."

As he spoke, he took the dead girl in his arms and carried her back toward the cave.

He entered it, and then the inner one, with his burden, and placed it beside the figure of the Crusader. He straightened the limbs and crossed the hands on the breast. Then he stooped down and kissed the dead girl's lips.

"Good-bye, dear, I'm sorry," he said, and turned to the passage.

As he entered it he gave one last look. Amine was lying as he had left her, and save for the red stain on her robe might have been asleep. Beautiful as she had been in life she was even more so in death, for the haughty look had faded from her face, leaving only one of infinite calm and peace.

The last memory Jim Lingard was to carry away of the girl whose life had touched and mingled with his own, for such a short time and so tragically, was of her lying there in her beauty with the remains of the unknown warrior of a former age.

Having seen to the dead, Jim's duty was now to the living. His comrade was

wounded, how badly he did not know, and if they were ever to escape from the gullies of the Ahagger there was not a minute to be lost. At any moment the man who had escaped might return with an overpowering force, and in that case Jim knew only too well what the fate of his companion and himself would be. Whatever his feelings had been before, El Senussi was hardly likely to err in the direction of gentleness in his treatment of the men who had slain his principal lieutenant, and through whom his daughter had met her death.

He rejoined the other two. Abs'laam was seated on the ground staring straight in front of him, with his lips working but uttering no sound. Morsec was also seated, and was evidently very weak, but roused himself as he saw his comrade.

Jim went up to him and helped him to his feet.

"Can you ride?" he asked.

"I think so," returned the other, "I'll be all right in a little time. It's only loss of blood; anyhow we can't stop here. Let's get to the camels."

Jim bent over the old man.

"Are you coming with us or do you want to stop here?" he asked in Arabic.

Somewhat to his surprise, Abs'laam rose to his feet and accompanied the two to the camels, one of which he mounted. Jim also mounted, assisting his comrade to do the same, and the party set off at a trot, the old Arab leading the way.

By this time it was quite dark, and if they had not had a guide the journey would have been very slow; but the old man seemed to know every inch of the road, and they proceeded at a good pace.

Jim's attention was fully occupied by his comrade. Morsec made light of his wounds, which he persisted in describing as "scratches," but the fact remained that he had lost a great deal of blood, and the resultant weakness, combined with lack of food, rendered him utterly unfit for further fighting.

He uttered no word of complaint, and did his best to distract his comrade's thoughts by jesting, but it was plain that he was suffering severe pain.

At last they arrived at the open space where they had halted on their arrival in the

Ahagger, and this was where the value of having a guide was proved. The gullies, which led away in all directions like the spokes of a wheel from its nave, looked exactly alike in what light there was, and, had the fugitives been forced to depend on their own judgment, precious time would have been wasted in searching for the one with Morsec's landmark of the rock. Had they taken a wrong passage there would have been nothing to look forward to except a miserable death from thirst and hunger in the heart of the Ahagger.

As it was, their guide never hesitated. He crossed the open space at a smart trot as if he was in haste to be clear of it, and his companions followed close behind him.

Once Jim had the same sensation as he had had the first time of the place being full of dim forms skulking about in the shadows, but he could not be sure, and had no desire, even if he had time, to stop and investigate. He had had enough of the Ahagger, and if death was to come to him he preferred it in the clean spaces of the open desert, where at least he could see the blue sky, instead of in the haunted gorges of the Ahagger, where the very air seemed stagnant and unclean.

They turned into another gully, and presently Jim recognized it as the one they had traversed on their first journey. Their guide had never uttered a syllable since they had left the House of the Stones, and now the other two fell silent—Morsec from pure weakness, and Jim because his thoughts did not render him talkative. The only sound was the regular pad-pad of the camels' feet, and occasionally a far off rumble, as a rock detached itself from its parent mass and fell somewhere in the recesses of the mountains.

They had been riding for some hours now, and already there was a smell of dawn in the air. Abs'laam evidently sensed it, for he urged his camel forward still faster.

Jim suggested that it would not be daylight for some time still. Although he could feel the dawn, it was more a far off breath of it than anything else, and he was glad. It was fairly cool in the gorges during the day, but, once clear of them and in the open desert, he knew what the sun would be like, and what effect it would have on his companion's wounded head.

Still, it was imperative that they should not halt. At any moment if the Senussi pursued them they might make their appearance, and while in the open desert there was a chance of baffling them. There was none whatever of doing so in the place where they were, and perhaps for some hours after daybreak the heat outside might be endurable.

The rocks at each side of the gorge were lower now, and from in front came occasional puffs of wind. As Jim felt the clean air of the desert, his heart leaped within him; at least outside there was clean space and clean sand, the same sand which had covered the bodies of so many of the Legion, and not those accursed rocks all around. Then the rocks grew lower and lower, and at last fell away altogether; they were out of the Ahagger and on to the desert again.

Here their guide halted. As his camel knelt, he slipped off its back and turned to Jim.

"I have brought you so far," he said, in perfectly good French, "because she would have wished it. Now I can do no more. Your way is clear before you," and he pointed to the North. "Go—and remember Amine of the Senussi!"

"But yourself?" said Jim, "what about you? Better come with us. If the Senussi lay hands on you, your death will not be an easy one!"

The old man made a gesture of refusal. "I go to my own place and my own people," he said. "Farewell."

He stepped back into the shadow of a rock and a shadow seemed to pass before Jim's eyes for a second. When it cleared the old man was gone, as if he had never been there. All that was left, to indicate his presence a moment ago, was his camel kneeling on the sand in front of the two white men.

CHAPTER XX

NORTHWARD ACROSS THE TANEZRAFET

JIM stared, then rubbed his eyes. One moment before he had seen the old man there in front of him—had spoken to him—now he was gone as if he never existed, and unless he had vanished into the solid rock

or sunk into the sand there did not seem to be any place where he could have concealed himself. However, Jim's recent experiences had left small room for astonishment at whatever might happen, and dismissing the occurrence from his mind he bent his energies to escaping.

First of all he weighed the probabilities or otherwise of winning through. Against them was the fact that they had not eaten for some time, and were consequently weak, also that his companion was wounded and practically disabled. Besides, beyond a vague idea that the way led North, where Abs'laam had pointed, he had no knowledge of the route to be taken. Landmarks there were none—at least to a European eye—in the desert, and El Rasa was the nearest oasis of which he had any knowledge.

On the other hand, he and his companion were armed and well mounted. The camels which they had captured were *Mebaris*, or racing camels, such as are used by the Touaregs on their lightning raids, and were as different from the ordinary baggage camel as a racer is from a cart horse. Also they were well provided with water—which is the essential in the desert—for on each of the saddles of the camels was hung a skin bottle full of water, quite enough to last two men three or four days.

All things considered, always supposing that they were not pursued and overtaken, or that they did not lose their way, there was at least a level chance of their winning through, but to avoid the former contingency there was no time to be wasted before starting. Morsec was evidently of the same opinion.

"So the old man has gone," he said, "I move we follow his example. I don't know about you, but I have had just about enough of this place generally. It gives me the creeps!"

"So it does me," said Jim, "but before we start let's have a look at those 'scratches' of yours."

He examined Morsec's wounds rapidly.

Neither of them was serious, but the lieutenant had lost a good deal of blood—which, however, had now ceased to flow—and he presented a ghastly spectacle with his face and *haik* covered with dried blood.

Jim tore a strip off his own *haik*, and

having used some of the precious water to soak it thoroughly, bound it round his companion's head and wounded shoulder, so as to keep the wounds as cool as possible. Then he transferred the water bottle from the camel which had been ridden by Abs'laam to his own saddle and mounted.

The sun was not yet high, and it was necessary to make what speed they could before it became really hot. So, taking their direction from the sun, they headed as nearly northward as they could judge.

The camels were comparatively fresh and well fed, and kept up their swinging trot without flagging. Jim would have liked to set a faster pace, but, as it was, the motion was almost more than Morsec in his wounded state could bear. He clung to his saddle bravely, but underneath the mask of dried blood his face was ghastly white and his lips were twisted with pain—although for all he was suffering he gave no outward sign. On the contrary, when he spoke at all, it was to utter a jest about the rough pace of his camel, or to compliment Jim on the result of his fight with Hassan Ali.

Four years previously Jim Lingard had held the usual British opinion of "foreigners," and particularly Frenchmen. They were all very well in their way, but an inscrutable Providence had made them in some way different from Englishmen, and when endurance, or bravery was needed—well, the Almighty had created Englishmen for that special reason, so why trouble to expect them from any one else? Now for more than three years he had mixed on terms of extreme intimacy with the despised "foreigner"—many of them the outcasts of their own nations—and his ideas had undergone a radical change.

In this special case he had to own to himself that, in a like position, he probably would not have behaved as well as his companion, and certainly would not have carried two painful wounds with the same debonair lightness. Never once since they had been captured had Morsec been despondent or out of temper, even when things looked blackest. Well, whatever happened, Jim was going to fetch him through if it were humanly possible. Probably life meant something to the lieutenant, and he was of some importance to

somebody. Anyhow he was something better than a damned *sous-off*. Then Morsec's cool voice cut in on his thoughts.

"It looks as if we were going to have another fantasia," he remarked. "There's a man coming up behind us."

Jim swung round in his saddle. Not more than half a mile behind a man was approaching, riding at the full pace of his camel. There was no doubt as to what his intentions were, for Jim could see the flicker of naked steel above the rider's head, and even at that distance hear the shouted: "Allah Akbar—Senussi!"

As far as Jim could see there was only a single pursuer, and he could not understand it until Morsec spoke.

"That's the gentleman that I was arguing with while you were conducting your *affaire*," he said calmly. "You remember he bolted when you finished your man. I suppose he was afraid to go back to his chief and report what happened, so he has followed us. If he takes our heads back with him I expect he thinks that his chief will overlook his—er—lack of zeal!"

Jim set his teeth and urged his camel on. He was furiously angry. He had done enough fighting for one night, and had almost persuaded himself that all danger of pursuit was past. Now here was this wretched, inconsiderate brute of an *Arbi* bent on making trouble.

He turned in his saddle again and looked behind. Their pursuer was much closer and coming on at a reckless pace, evidently bent on vengeance. Jim slackened pace. If the *Arbi* was so deadly set on a fight, by the Lord he should have it, and let him see how he liked it.

Jim turned to his companion.

"Look here," he said rapidly, "I'm going to argue with this gentleman, and impress on him that we don't want his company. Do you go on, and if anything happens keep on North until you strike an oasis." He held out his hand, but Morsec laughed in his face.

"I'm going on *peaudezèbie*," he answered calmly. "I didn't think you were so selfish, Lingard. You want all the fun to yourself."

There was no time for argument, the pad of the pursuing camel's hoofs was coming closer and closer. Jim swung his mount

round and drew his great weapon. The Arab was armed with a *flissa*, and by the black veil which covered his face and chest was a Touareg. He held straight on for Jim, with his weapon held high over his head in readiness for a slash, and his eyes blazing above the black veil.

Jim maneuvered his camel so as to bring his pursuer on his right or sword-arm side. He knew that if he could get in one blow with his heavy weapon, it would settle matters, but what he feared was that, a cut once delivered, the lighter and more handy weapon which the Arab carried would get inside his guard before he could recover himself.

As the on-coming camel tore past, its rider leaned far over in the saddle and slashed at the white man's neck with a vicious cut delivered from the wrist. It seemed to slide past Jim's blade, but was stopped with a jar—which the Arab must have felt to his shoulder blade—by the cross hilt of the old sword. Jim cut hard in return, but the pace of the other's camel was too fast, and the well-meant effort fell short.

Jim wrenched his mount round. The Arab's rush had carried him some fifty yards on before he could halt, but as soon as he could he do so he also turned.

The two men sat looking at each other for a moment. Then the Arab raised his *flissa*, shook up his camel and charged again with a shout.

This time he came more slowly, and had time to deliver two lightning cuts, both of which Jim managed to stop, but had no time to return.

As his enemy wheeled for the third attack Jim realized that the game was all to his disadvantage. In this quick exchange of cut and parry his heavy weapon had no chance against the lighter one, whereas, if he could bring the Arab to a halt, its mere weight would probably break down the guard opposed to it.

As the Arab came at him again, Jim deliberately maneuvered his mount so as to meet the other's camel head on, and bring it to a halt. He was completely successful. The two animals met with a jar, and next moment the riders were looking into each other's eyes.

Jim was too close to the other to use the full sweep of his blade, but leaning over he seized the Arab by the throat with his left hand, shortening the sword in his right, and feeling with its point for his opponent's armpit.

The Arab choked and gurgled and tried to wrench himself free, but could not. Then he raised his *flissa* and brought down the heavy knob at the end of the hilt with a downward sweep of his arm on Jim's forehead.

Jim's grasp relaxed and he rolled backward in the saddle. If it had not been for the high cantle he would have fallen off altogether.

He had a vision of a black veil with a pair of blazing eyes above it, and of an up-flung blade, but it all seemed to be in a dream. Then through the dream came a sharp crack like that of a whip, the threatening blade made an aimless circle and fell to the ground, and the veiled face disappeared.

A moment after he was upright again in the saddle, feeling sick and giddy, but with the exception of a bruise on his forehead, unhurt.

Morsec was seated on his camel close beside the fallen Arab, with a smile on his blood-grimed face, and his smoking pistol in his hand.

"I must apologize for thrusting myself into your affairs, old man," he remarked, "but really it seemed the only thing to do. That Arab devil would have got his *flissa* into your head in another second!"

Jim laughed rather weakly.

"Oh, don't apologize," he said. "If it hadn't been for you I should have been there"—and he pointed to the prostrate Arab—"by this time."

Morsec replaced his pistol carefully in the breast of his tunic.

"Good job I happened to think of this little tool before we left Aïn Sefra," he said thoughtfully. "If your friend had got you I should have had a lonely ride for the rest of the way, and I'd have hated that!"

Jim wheeled his camel. He hoped with all his heart that the rest of the journey was going to be uneventful. He felt that he had had enough excitement during the last week or ten days to last him for the rest of his life, or at any rate for a very considerable

period, and what he wanted now was rest, and plenty of it.

All that day, with the exception of one short halt, the flight continued. The heat was the worst part of it, but even that was considerably mitigated by the fact that the fugitives possessed an ample supply of water at least for their immediate needs. As the sun grew hotter, however, Morsec grew light-headed from his wounds. He talked continuously of Paris and iced drinks, and twice Jim had to restrain him by force from dismounting and going to make the acquaintance of the fascinating damsels with whom he averred the desert was peopled.

Jim had no very definite idea in which direction they were traveling, or whether they were heading for El Rasa at all. He kept a rough northerly course by the sun, and for the rest trusted to the camel's instinct which will lead it across miles of desert to the nearest waters. Twice he turned out of his way at the sight of distant palm-trees, and twice as they approached them the trees wavered and dissolved into the desert.

The problem of food was also becoming serious. For more than thirty-six hours neither he nor his comrade had eaten a morsel, and in that time they had both fought hard and ridden far.

Even if they got to El Rasa, it was doubtful if they would be able to proceed any further without something to eat, and Jim knew that the only chance of getting it was from wandering Arabs, who were far more likely to be hostile than friendly.

By this time the camels had slowed down to a walk, and it was apparent that they would not be able to go much further without a rest. Morsec had ceased speaking and was in a semi-comatose state, half lying over the high pommel of his saddle, occasionally rising upright with a jerk, only to subside again.

Jim was considering halting for the night, or at least for some hours, where they were, when suddenly his camel raised its head, and of its own accord again broke into a trot, Morsec's following its example.

Jim looked up. Straight ahead there were objects which broke the level line of the desert, and as they drew closer he

could see that they were palm-trees. They were exactly like the mirages which he had already followed fruitlessly, but Jim knew that while a human being, and especially a European, could easily be deceived by the mirage, the instinct of the camel was a different thing, and that what he saw ahead was real and no mocking illusion.

The only thing that he was doubtful about was whether the oasis in front of him was that of El Rasa or not. In the march across the desert, with no other guide than the sun and practically no idea of the direction of El Rasa, it was quite conceivable that he had missed his object altogether. If so—well, here at least was shelter for the night, but he had still to find his way back to Douragala or some other of the Legion's posts on the fringe of the desert. However, they were close to the clump of palms by this time, and his doubts were set at rest by a grim landmark. On the edge of the oasis was what looked like a post with a white frame hung on it—the remains of the man who had been empaled by the orders of the Emir Abd-ul-mâlek before he left the oasis. The scavengers of the desert had done their work well, for nothing remained of the body except bare bones, which still hung on the tree that had served as stake, and looked out over the desert like a grim sentinel.

As they entered the oasis, the weary camels knelt of their own accord and Jim, sliding to the ground, helped his comrade off and assisted him to the well. Here he undid his bandages and washed his wounds, afterward rebandaging them and washing the dried blood from his face and shoulder.

Under this treatment Morsec revived considerably and was soon able to speak rationally.

Jim left him seated with his back to a tree and, after watering and securing the camels, left them to graze on the coarse herbage, while he started to explore the oasis.

As he passed over the site of the encampment of his late captors, something lying on the ground caught his eye. He picked it up half idly and then opened it. It was a small goatskin bag, three quarters full of dried dates, and had evidently been dropped and left by one of the Senussi. Jim gave

a sigh of relief. At any rate, here was food of a kind, sufficient at least to keep the life in them for some days if properly husbanded.

He returned to Morsec with his find, and in a few minutes both men were making a meal, necessarily simple, but still satisfying.

It was by this time full night and, as he wiped his lips after his meal, Jim asked his comrade whether he would push on, or take the risk of stopping in the oasis.

Morsec was emphatic on the subject.

"Not another yard do I go to-night," he declared firmly, "not if the whole Senussi sect was within a mile. I've had enough for one day."

Jim looked at him sympathetically.

"Very well then, we will take our chance for to-night and get away with dawn. Now you must have some sleep. I will keep guard."

Morsec remonstrated: he was quite fit to stand his watch, and Jim wanted sleep as badly as he did.

Jim cut him short.

"When we get back," he said, "I'll have to take orders from you. In the meantime I command here, and my orders are for you to get your rest!"

Morsec grinned and obeyed; and Jim Lingard spent the night seated with his back to a tree, the naked sword of Ralph de Barham across his knees, watching over his sleeping comrade.

CHAPTER XXI

BACK TO THE FOLD

THE chill of the dawn was in the air when Jim rose stiffly and went toward the camels. He was deadly sleepy and his eyes felt as if the lids had been gummed together, but otherwise he was the better for the rest he had managed to get. The camels were kneeling and still grazing, and, after having examined them, Jim went over to the spring and washed his head and neck, a proceeding which freshened him up considerably. Then he returned to Morsec who by this time was awake and sitting up. The latter seemed very much better. He was still weak, but the fever had left him, and he was as cheerful as ever. As

Jim approached he saluted him with a wave of his hand.

"I have slept like a log, old man," he announced, "thanks to you. Well, it will be my turn to-night," and he tried to stand up, but staggered and sat down again.

"I'm afraid I'm a bit giddy still," he said apologetically, "but that will pass. I'll be all right presently. Now, what is the program for to-day?"

"Get on our way," returned Jim. "We have stayed here quite long enough. It is just luck that they haven't followed us—yet—" he threw an anxious glance to the South, but the desert was bare of all signs of life, and he continued, "The best thing we can do is to get on and make for Douargala, or anyhow keep North and trust to striking one of our posts. But you—are you fit to ride?"

Morsec moved his legs.

"Still devilish stiff—and sore," he remarked; "but I can ride. I've seen all I want of those Senussi devils!"

He rose stiffly and accompanied Jim to the camels, which they mounted.

As Jim got on his camel's back he looked northward in the direction they had to go, and then looked again. Yes, out there in the desert was a moving dot. Jim turned to his companion.

"We're not out of the wood yet," he said, between his teeth, "there's some one out there in front of us," and he pointed.

Morsec looked also.

"Looks like a man on horseback," he said doubtfully, "and there's only one."

Jim strained his eyes. Beyond the moving dot, which was rapidly approaching and growing in size he could see others—many others, riding together. If they were Arabs, he and his comrade were done for; but perhaps—he looked again. The moving figure was close enough now for him to make out that it was a man riding a white horse, and Jim could catch the gleam of a flying scarlet cloak in the morning sunlight.

He turned to Morsec and saluted formally.

"Spahis, lieutenant," he said, "we are safe now."

In a way Jim did not feel so glad as he

ought to have. Since they had been taken prisoners Morsec and himself had utterly dropped, indeed forgotten, the difference in rank which existed between them, and Jim felt that with its necessary resumption a barrier had risen between himself and his comrade.

Morsec looked at him keenly under his bandage, and then patted him on the shoulder.

"Don't think that, *mon vieux*," he said, "whatever happens, and whatever difference in rank there may be between us, you are always my comrade—the comrade who brought me through! And I don't fancy that there will be a difference of rank between us long," he added, half to himself.

By this time the Spahi had come within a hundred yards or so of the oasis, and was advancing cautiously with his carbine at the "ready."

Jim saluted again.

"Will you hail him, lieutenant?" he asked.

But a sudden and alarming change had passed over Morsec, who was leaning forward in his saddle like a man in the last stage of weakness. Jim stared at him, and to his astonishment the lieutenant favored him with a wink.

"No," he said, "you had better do it, adjutant. I am much too weak—so weak that I could never have taken the journey from the Ahagger or lived through the night afterward but for your gallantry and care, as I shall report to the colonel." He winked at Jim again, pressed his shoulder affectionately and subsided still lower in his saddle, looking the very picture of woe.

Jim rode forward and hailed the Spahi in Arabic, only to find himself promptly covered by the carbine, and it was not until he had repeated his hail in French that the weapon was lowered.

The Spahi approached with his weapon still at the "ready," and evidently far from easy in his mind.

"*Qui vive?*" he challenged as he halted.

"The Lieutenant de Morsec and the Adjutant Lingard, both of the Legion," returned Jim. "Where is your officer? I wish to report to him."

The Spahi looked surprised.

"God is great," he remarked piously.

"We thought that you had fattened the vultures these seven days!"

He wheeled his horse and galloped back to the column. A few minutes afterward two officers arrived, to whom Jim made his report, Morsec taking no part in the proceedings except to groan at intervals.

However, after a hearty meal provided by their rescuers, he recovered. The tale of their adventures, and Jim's share in them, lost nothing in the telling, and Jim was very conscious that the two Spahi officers were regarding him with admiring eyes. They both showed keen interest in the tale of the journey which the two fugitives had taken, and especially in the details of the strength of the Senussi, and the rock fortress in the Ahagger.

After he had heard all that was to be told, the squadron commander struck his fist into his open palm.

"*Dieu de Dieu,*" he growled, "and those *sacripants* are there—within two days' march of our frontier—and the Government will do nothing, as usual. No! The country is pacified, the population is 'peaceful, industrious and well affected'"—he was quoting from a recent speech delivered by a famous politician—"and so no steps must be taken. If they were it might be called 'war,' and that would be bad for the Government—and bad for the fifteen thousand francs a year of their supporters." Then addressing Morsec, "Well, lieutenant," he said, "we were sent to find out if the Senussi were still on the oasis. You and your adjutant are supposed to have been killed in the little affair you had here last week. I expect they will be surprised to see you at Douargala. Your company will be pleased too, I fancy. The Legion don't care to leave their dead!"

"And the company?" inquired Morsec anxiously, "did they suffer heavily?"

"Not very heavily," returned the Spahi, "ten men killed or wounded, perhaps. Your sergeant put up a very good fight. After they had beaten off the *Arbis*, they put in the best part of a day looking for your remains, and then it was too late to follow. Well, we may as well get back now! I expect your colonel will be glad to get your report."

Some hours later they rode into Douar-

gala, and there was a wild rush of men to see their two comrades, who had been given up for dead. Jim had never known that he was so popular. He had his hands almost shaken off and was forced to tell and retell the tale of his adventures, until he could hardly speak. One part of them he kept to himself. He made no mention of Amine or the part which she had taken in their escape. The girl had been his—if only for a moment—and dead or alive, his alone he intended that she should remain. As he stretched himself in his narrow cot that night he thought with a shudder of that grated cell in the House of the Stones and of its occupant. If it had not been for the dead girl he himself in all probability would have been there instead of where he was—with the Lost Sheep of the Legion.

The next morning came an interview with Captain Faës, who took copious notes of their narrative for transmission to headquarters, and then life at Douargala settled down into its accustomed groove. One morning, however, about three weeks after their return, an official message came ordering Lieutenant de Morsec to proceed to Sidi-bel-Abbés without delay, and two days after a similar one arrived for Jim.

He was rather glad. Douargala was too close to the desert, and every time he looked at the yellow-gray expanse of sand it reminded him of his journey, and also of Amine. Sidi-bel-Abbés was civilization of a kind, and might make him forget, and that was what he wished to do if it were possible. So it was with a lighter heart than he carried at any time since his return that he set off for Aïn Sefra *en route* for Sidi-bel-Abbés.

He arrived at headquarters late one afternoon and reported himself to the officer of the week, who was distinctly amiable.

"The Adjutant Lingard?" he said, "good. Well, adjutant, the colonel has left orders that you are to see him as soon as you arrive."

Jim followed the officer to the colonel's bureau.

Colonel Giradot of the 1st *étrangère* was seated at his table, a soldierly, white-haired figure; and to Jim's surprise Morsec was also in the room.

As Jim entered the colonel looked at him.

"The Adjutant Lingard?" he queried.
Jim saluted.

"Yes, colonel," he answered.

Colonel Giradot turned over some papers on the table.

"You were an officer in the British cavalry before you came to us?" he said.

And again Jim answered, "Yes."

"I have here," pursued the colonel, "a communication from M. the Minister of War, appointing you"—here he paused, and then continued—"that is, should you care accept it, to a lieutenancy in the *légion étrangère*. I may add, on behalf of myself and my officers, that we shall be more than pleased to welcome you among us, and also to congratulate you on the bravery and resource you have shown; and in particular, on the gallant way in which you behaved when attacked while making your escape. Well?" and he looked at Jim inquiringly.

Jim could hardly speak. The news had taken him utterly by surprise.

"Colonel," he began—but the colonel cut him short.

"I take it that is settled then," he said, with a smile; "my congratulations, lieutenant, and now you must be tired after your journey. Lieutenant de Morsec will put you up for the night. Good-night and good luck!"

As Jim walked across the parade ground, his head was in a whirl. At last—at last his chance had come again, and this time it would not be his fault if he did not use it!

At the door of Morsec's quarters he turned for a moment. The sun was sinking red over the desert, and to Jim Lingard it seemed that it was setting on his old life, to rise again next morning on a new one.

Next Month's Novel

"The Man From Joliet"

BY

ALICE M. WILLIAMSON

*Author of "A Soldier of The Legion," "The Golden Silence,"
"The Shop Girl," and a dozen other popular novels*

THIS IS A MYSTERY STORY
THAT WILL HOLD YOU

AUGUST SHORT STORIES:

OUT JULY 12TH

WHEN IDEAS ARE TRUMPS

By HENRY M. SNEVILY

Author of "None But the Brave," etc.

JIMMIE TYSON, COACH OF THE CRAWFORD CREW, PREFERRED MEN WITH TEN-THOUSAND-DOLLAR BACKS AND TEN-CENT IDEAS TO MEN MADE JUST THE OTHER WAY AROUND. ALONG CAME SIMPSON WITH A TEN-CENT BACK BUT A BIG IDEA AND TYSON WAS GLAD TO GET IT.

ARE you boys rowing, or are you just friendly-like scratchin' the river? Say, Numbers 6 and 4, if you don't get your blades in the water quicker they'll get sunburned. Number 2, I'm goin' to get a baby-jumper for you. You swing like a merry-go-round. What's the matter? Got a corkscrew for a spine?"

Jimmie Tyson, Crawford's crew coach, was barking at his 'varsity eight, and he had cause to. They had just dragged over the four-mile course in a time trial about four seconds slower than they should have, and Tyson was not one who would have condoned even the most trivial faults in his pupils.

"On the level, boys," he finished, "I'll have to smash five of the six cylinders in this coaching launch, and then drag a kedge anchor to slow her down enough to keep pace with you. Get back to the boat house, you hurt the river."

The spindle shell pulled round and headed for quarters while Tyson, silent, studied the work of the men from the launch. Johnny Durant, the 'varsity manager, sat in the stern puffing a cigar and contemplating the expressive back of Tyson's neck. When they were half a mile from quarters Durant suddenly rose, squared his shoulders, and threw his half smoked cigar into the water with a violent gesture.

"Look here, Jim," he said determinedly. Tyson turned round. "Let's face this thing squarely. I know you're dead against talking to any living soul, but I've made up my mind what's the matter with that boat. I'm no expert, but I want to help you."

Tyson did not speak.

"It's Fenwick, the stroke. Isn't it?" Johnny demanded.

The coach nodded.

"He's gone stale," he admitted, "and it's just three days before the race. For heaven's sake, Durant, don't breathe this to a living soul. The men in the boat don't know it yet. If they did they'd all go to pieces. That's my one hope, to keep it away from them. It would smash their morals. - You know as well as I do there's no one to take his place. He's got to stroke the race but barrin' miracles he'll lose it. It kills the whole boat."

"You know me, Jim," said Durant, as the launch slid alongside the float. "I won't talk. Perhaps I can help. I think I may get an idea."

Tyson shook his head. "Ideas ain't of much account in a four-mile grind," he said. "I'd rather have a man with ten-cent ideas and a ten-thousand-dollar back than vice versa, when it comes to crew racing. But thanks, Johnny, just the same."

The coach was right. Fenwick was stale and there was no man to stroke the boat in his place. In a tale of fiction, a substitute, previously considered of inferior calibre, would have come forward and led the Crawford sweep swingers to victory, but Tyson was up against real facts—and six other fast, four-mile crews. Fenwick had stroked the crew two years. He was a wonder at it. He became a nicely timed machine as soon as ever he slipped his heels into the brass cups and felt the leathers across his toes.

But now something had gone wrong. Fenwick sensed it and it frightened him because he could not fight it off. He knew he was not himself and wondered that Tyson left him in the boat. Sometimes he felt guilty for being there, but he had supreme confidence in the coach. That was all.

If Tyson thought he was the best man for the place, he was. There was no conceit about that. Tyson was paid three-thousand dollars a year to pick the best men to sit in the boat and he ought to know.

So Fenwick struggled on, fighting his battle out alone. Nights he ate his heart out, tossing on the bed, and it was not often he went to sleep before the coach slipped silently into the room and let him sip half a glass of heady ale.

The other men knew the boat was not traveling right but they put it down to a slump. Slumps occur in every crew, but it is bad when they come on the eve of a race. To the layman watching practice, the Crawford shell and the men in it seemed to be a finely timed piece of human mechanism. The craft never left an even keel. The blades clutched and left the water without throwing a drop. The time was the height of precision, but the coach in the launch did not hear the rip that should have been there as the legs jammed down, and there was no "champagne" at the prow.

The night before the regatta the little town under the slender steel bridge was a maelstrom of color. Bunting streamed from every window and the shops were decked with colors. In the lobbies of the hotels undergraduates from seven different universities met. Some talked, others bet, and some imbibed. Crawford was selling high in the pools and there were those who even offered two to one on the blue against the field and did not always find takers.

About eight o'clock all the Crawford men disengaged themselves from the various arguing groups and went to Odd Fellows' Hall. On a platform at one end of the big meeting room sat Johnny Durant the 'varsity manager, a young graduate in clerical garb, the dean of the college, and one or two others. By half past eight the hall was crammed with Crawford men, old and young, for the word had gone out that there was to be an important mass meeting. The dean spoke first, cautioning all present to keep absolutely secret everything which was to be said during the meeting. Johnny Durant was the last of the speakers. Those before him had said nothing out of the

ordinary, and the Crawford supporters began to wonder why the dean had been so mysterious.

There was a feeling as Durant got to his feet that something of importance, something startling, was in the air.

"Now, fellows," he said, "this race is up to you. Those men across the river there have given ten months of this year to you in the work they've done on the machines and on the river.

"They've given up all the good things you fellows have had. They've plugged and plugged and plugged. They have been driven and coaxed until they've become as fine a set of oarsmen as ever sat in a boat. But there is one thing that the men themselves can't fight off. That is staleness. It's a hard thing to train a man up to a point and have him there at just the right minute. An hour is enough to start him down hill, and when you have eight men, all different, and all to be trained to a point at the same instant, the problem is just about sixty-four times as hard.

"Now there is one man in that boat who has gone beyond the point. It is Fenwick. We've talked it all over and Tyson has decided he's the only man to stroke the crew, and he's got to go those four miles.

"You fellows don't know what that means, when you have to sit down on a sliding seat and pull your life out for four miles. Fenwick has got to do it. Do you fellows understand? He's down and out and yet he has to go there in the broiling sun and fight with an oar for twenty minutes. And he's got to win the race!

"His strength is gone—I mean his physical strength—but he's going on his nerve. Nerve has got to win the race and that nerve has got to come from you fellows. Fenwick will put all that's in him into that race but he's gone stale—stale I tell you—and you boys have got to *make him go!* You know what that means. Yell your windpipes raw. Don't just shout, but organize, and don't let up from the time that crew pulls around Krum Elbow until they cross the line at the finish and you fellows see the blue flag flying at the top of the string from the bridge. That's all.

"The men over there have done their part and you must do the rest."

There was a burst of cheering that shook the walls. Johnny Durant's words had gone home. Every man in the place felt that next day when the slender, spider-legged shells lined up at the stake boats he would have his part to play as well as the men in the boat.

As Durant was leaving the hall an undersized, studious looking young man with large shell-rimmed spectacles stepped up to him. Johnny had seen him on the campus but he did not know him by name. In fact the studious looking fellow had never figured prominently in college life and Durant was a little surprised that he had showed interest enough to attend the meeting.

"My name's Simpson," began the stranger, and Johnny expressed himself as glad to meet him. There was no need to mention his own name. Every one knew the 'varsity crew manager.

"I have an idea I want to explain to you. It's about Fenwick," continued the studious looking one in a voice not over robust. Durant thought of Tyson's remarks concerning ideas.

"I'd be glad to hear it," said Johnny, "though I'm afraid it's too late to do anything better than make him feel you're all behind him to-morrow."

"My idea is better than that," announced Simpson very mildly. The manager looked at him askance, but the idea was already undergoing illumination. Durant found himself listening intently. As the milky voice of his new acquaintance trailed on he even listened excitedly and when the plan was at last unfolded in all its completeness he hit Simpson a smashing slap on the back which all but staved in that young gentleman's ribs in conveying to him the managerial approval of his personality in general and his idea in particular.

"Simp, you're a wonder," he declared. "If this thing works out, you will have won the race for Crawford. We'll see now what Tyson has to say about ten-thousand-dollar ideas. This one is bigger than that."

They parted and Durant sped back to quarters in the launch. Tyson had not

gone to bed but was sitting on the float throwing chips into the water studying the tide. Across five feet of water Durant jumped to his side before the launch scraped the float.

"That race is won," he said, "and it's won by an idea—a big idea out of a little shrimp."

"You make me sick," said Tyson.

"All right listen to this." And the coach did listen, just as Johnny had listened, because the idea gripped, and held and was a big idea.

"Wait," said Tyson, when Durant had finished. "I'll sneak up and see if he's asleep now."

He tip-toed to Fenwick's room and heard him tossing on the bed. To make sure, he spoke to him, asking if it was cool enough. Fenwick replied in wide-awake tones. For days the coach had watched Fenwick's sleeplessness with sinking heart, but to-night he thanked providence that the stroke was awake.

"It's all right," he said as he rejoined Durant.

The two men tip-toed to Tyson's room which was next to Fenwick's. For a few moments they spoke in soft whispers gradually raising their voices until they were certain Fenwick could hear them.

"So you got the money up?" Fenwick heard Tyson ask.

"Yes," replied Johnny Durant, "but great gods, Jim, I wish I hadn't now."

"Oh, come, don't show the yellow streak," Tyson answered with the hint of a snarl. The men were playing their parts well.

"If the boat was only going better," said Durant. "Think, Jim, if we should lose. We couldn't replace the money. Even if my father would help me to stave off the disgrace, he couldn't make good on that amount. I wonder, Jim—I wonder if it would mean prison if they found us out?"

Fenwick was in a cold sweat. Jimmie Tyson he regarded as a friend, but Durant he loved as a chum. The thought of what they had evidently done staggered him. When the chill left him the hot blood pounded through his veins as it had not done for days past.

Tyson was speaking again.

"Now look here, Johnny, I got you into this. I'm a man, full grown, responsible. If anything goes wrong, I'm not going to see you suffer. I may be crooked, but I'm not yellow. You're only a kid and I tempted you and led you into it. If things—well, you know—if what we fear happens, I'm going to take the blame and clear you. If only poor Fenwick hadn't gone stale."

"Hush, Jim, you're talking too loud," said Durant, and Fenwick heard him arguing in whispers with the coach, but he could not make out the words.

Staring straight ahead of him, he sat bolt upright in his bed. It was all perfectly plain to him. Durant as manager, must have wagered some of the crew money on the race. From what Tyson said, the coach had suggested the idea, but that didn't matter to Fenwick.

Johnny was in trouble. Trouble of his own brewing, to be sure, but trouble from the shadow of which he would never be able to escape—if Crawford lost the race. He believed in Johnny and in Tyson too, even though they had gone wrong this once. He knew that if he could save them they would never fall again.

He pictured Johnny, his chum, in prison stripes, making shoes in a dingy shop in the shadow of gray stone walls. And all the time the blood was pounding through his veins, pounding the way it used to, before something had gone wrong inside. He alone could save Tyson and Johnny. And with the thought came its logical staggering sequence—he alone might write their doom. When he sat in the boat on the morrow he would grip the end of a fourteen-foot sweep on whose nicely balanced swing depended the life and honor of his best friend, his chum.

The blue blades of the Crawford oars flashed in the sun as the shell shot out from the shore and rounded Krum Elbow to take the inshore position at the starting line. On the long, snake-like observation train colors rioted. One after another Crawford yells boomed out from different cars and floated across the water to the brown-limbed men in the boat. While the rooters in one car recovered their breath those in another car voiced their slogan. The

leaders had organized and they meant to pull on every stroke the 'varsity men took.

The men in the shell did not look around. They had their orders and they had their duty there in the boat. No one was nervous but all were keyed up to a snapping point. Fenwick alone did not feel the hair-trigger sensation in his legs. The muscles of his stomach did not automatically tighten and long for the strain. His oar feathered to a nicety. His back heaved at just the proper second, his legs drove down on the finish but Something was lacking.

And all the time he was thinking of Johnny and of Tyson. To Fenwick's worried mind both men had seemed nervous that morning. They must be thinking of what they had done. Fenwick was determined to save them, but he was afraid—not of the ordeal ahead of him, but of the feeling of inelasticity, of deadness, which he could not shake off. If only he could feel the blood pounding down into his arms and legs once more, pounding the way it had for a few moments last night when he heard the coach and manager talking.

The seven shells maneuvered into position, the men in the stake boats caught the rudder posts and held them there tugging and wrenching in the tide, while the crews sat ready at the oars. Three miles in the distance the slender bridge yoked the hills on either side the river. The heat of the sun, dancing over the water, seemed to make the arches waver and twist. People on the observation train yelled themselves hoarse. Johnny Durant's cohorts were living up to their instructions.

Fenwick heard it dully, but it didn't make much impression on him. He was thinking of Johnny and of Tyson. They were in trouble and if Crawford lost the race—he could not bear to think of it.

The starting gun boomed and the shells shot forward. Crawford started well and took the lead with Severn close beside her. For a quarter of a mile the two shells kept pulling ahead of the others at a tremendous pace. The thousands on the train made an ear splitting din. At the quarter-mile post Crawford dropped back a few feet. Severn picked the stroke up and, rowing at thirty-eight, tried hard to shake her rivals. The Crawford oarsmen breathing hard, before

they had gained their second wind, threw all their power into thirty-seven strokes to the minute and pulled alongside Severn, then just nosed ahead of her.

Severn rowed the higher stroke but Crawford got more power into it. That was the tremendous drive with the legs at the finish. It had taken the coach eight months to develop that leg drive, but it was counting now. So it was for a mile. Then Crawford slowly dropped back. The strain was telling on Fenwick. His head lagged. His back did not swing so evenly over the keel. Cayuga was catching up to the blue. Slowly, one by one, two shells slid past them and Fenwick was still weakening.

Way over under the east bank the coach's launch churned the waters of the river. Tyson and Durant were in it and they kept staring at Fenwick. Tyson was muttering to himself something about ideas being no good anyway—psychology be blowed.

The Crawford boat dragged. The keel was a bit uneven. "Potomac's beginning to pass us," whispered the coxswain to Fenwick. "Come on Ted, we've got to go, we've got to go." Fenwick wondered what on earth was the matter with his muscles. Out of the corner of his eye he took just one glance at the Potomac shell, the gray oars thrashing just to starboard of him.

Eight shining, sweating bodies were swinging back and forth, hurling a slim shell forward, over the water it almost seemed. Fenwick began to feel resentment against them. He thought of Johnny Durant and of Tyson. Those heaving men in that shell were sending them to prison. Every time a Potomac oar gripped the water, Fenwick heard the bolts rattle in a cell door.

And there were three other crews ahead of him. Crawford had to pass them all, if Johnny and Tyson were to be saved. A gleam came into Fenwick's eyes. The coxswain noticed it and hoped, though he did not understand. The stroke's oar began to snap through the water with more life—like a whip. The boat felt alive. Tyson, way over by the shore could see it.

Red anger filled Fenwick's soul. He

could save Johnny. He was the only one who could save him. He felt his muscles gaining elasticity. Crawford began to pull up a little bit. The leaders were at the two-mile mark and the blue oars flashed in fourth place. Severn was in the lead, distancing Crawford by about three lengths of open water.

In the train they could scarcely believe it at first, but Tyson's men were certainly gaining. They were shaking Potomac, and pulling a long even stroke forged ahead of Seneca. A dozen strokes more and the nose of the Crawford shell jutted in front of Cayuga's bow. Severn was the only shell ahead of them, but there was open water. Inch by inch Crawford overhauled her last rival. Both crews were smashing the oars through with every ounce of beef.

They were nearing the bridge. Sheds and dock houses hid the crews from sight. Severn had quarter of a length lead when the two shells disappeared behind the first building. The positions were practically unchanged when they emerged from behind the last obstruction but Crawford began visibly to cut down the distance. Old men danced in a frenzy of excitement, girls laughed and shrieked, joining in the chorus of the stirring cheering songs the undergraduates were singing.

Out on the river the men, sweating, aching, blinded, swung back and forth with never a quaver. Every ounce of nerve and strength went into every stroke. They heard the song, but only vaguely. They were there to pull. That was the one idea which possessed them. They were machines, but machines with feeling.

Fenwick was thinking of Johnny Durant. He felt the momentary phantom cool of the shadow of the bridge as they swept under it, but to-day it struck terror to his heart, it was like the shadow of the prison walls which threatened Johnny and Tyson.

"Only a mile to go," yelled the coxswain.

"Only a mile, only a mile," thought Fenwick. Sometimes it had seemed a mile without end, but now he thought of it as all too short in which to retrieve the race—to retrieve Johnny Durant's honor—his very life.

The thin gauze bandage about the

stroke's head to keep the perspiration from running into his eyes seemed to be a band of steel pressing into his temples. It was saturated and the water streamed over it, smarting his eyes and running into his wide-open mouth. It added to the terrible, parched condition of his throat, it was so salt.

From the corners of his eyes he could glimpse the hills on either shore. Cool and green they always had looked but now they seemed to be burning, and they were crushing in on him, smothering him, pressing on his head.

How could they expect him to row with the hills tumbling in on him that way. Suddenly they took on the gray aspect of walls—prison walls—prison walls yawning for Johnny Durant and Tyson. Fenwick must row through them.

He knew he had been stale. Vaguely he wondered how he was sticking it out. When a man is stale he is not good for four miles at so terrific a pace. If only some one would keep those great, brazen hills off of him. They were crushing his breath out. Now they were reeling in a weird dance with the prison walls.

"Only a quarter of a mile more," shrilled the coxswain.

The stroke went up to forty. Close to starboard Fenwick could hear the crashing drive of the Severn sweeps. The shell was still a trifle ahead of his own. The sound maddened him. Behind it all he heard the grinding of hinges—hinges of prison doors—prison doors that those men were shutting on Johnny Durant and Tyson.

The coxswain leaned forward. "You're passing Severn," he yelled. "You're ahead of them." Fenwick thought he was lying. He was stale, so how could they pass Severn? Each stroke drove knives into his stomach. But he was rowing strong.

On the train men saw that he was carrying the whole crew. His men were struggling to keep pace with him. They were catching just a trifle behind him, throwing a back-breaking strain onto his tired body, but he kept up the terrific stroke.

The siren of a gunboat split the air. It seemed to Fenwick that his head would burst with the noise, but he knew it meant no more than fifty strokes more. He could not see. He knew that he was rowing, but he could not feel anything. Then bedlam broke loose. Fenwick dropped forward over his oar, but Crawford had won the race.

On the observation train callow youths were telling each other that it was the cheering that had won it, but Johnny Durant was thinking of a quiet little chap with big bone-rimmed spectacles, a boy with a worthless back, but a big idea. "We need him in Phi Psi Chi," the manager was saying to himself.

At the boathouse Durant helped Fenwick from the shell and drew him apart from the others.

"Old man," he said, with a quaver in his voice, "I've got a confession to make to you. Tyson and I——"

Fenwick stopped him with a gesture. "Johnny," he said huskily. "It's all right. You and Jim forget it now. We won the race so it's all right. You won't have to go away. I heard all that you said last night, but I——"

It was Durant's turn to interrupt.

"That's just it, Ted," he said. "Tyson and I meant you to hear it. That's the confession. We didn't put a penny that was not our own on the race, but you were stale—and we had to make you go."

A light of understanding danced in Fenwick's tired eyes.

THE PILFERED PENNANT

By Frank Condon

Another story of a Great Idea, but this time in Baseball.
Read how it won a game but lost a devotee to port and poker

ALL NEWS-STANDS

JULY 12TH

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE BIG

By DONALD FRANCIS MCGREW

Author of "The Blood That Binds," "A Matter of Personality," etc.

THIS MAN DIDN'T WANT TO BE KING; HIS AIM WAS TO BE BIG—BIG ENOUGH FOR A GREAT THING. CAME THE TIME WHEN TO SACRIFICE HIS HATRED OF AN ENEMY AT THIS ALTAR SEEMED TO SPELL HIS OWN DOOM. AND THEN WAS HIS BIGNESS TESTED. THIS IS ONE OF MR. MCGREW'S BEST PHILIPPINE STORIES

IN THE general order of things as they are, few men knock at the door of philosophy until they give thought to their missing ribs. So it is not likely that Private Bill Wayne gave any serious consideration to questions of littleness and bigness, or matters of soul proportions, until he came in contact with Ruth MacClaren.

It was in the spring of the year that this happened, and the spring of the year is a dangerous period for upstanding young orderlies whose hearts are young. With Nature all soft and wondrous in a mood of abandoned giving, the hearts of the young respond, and throb warm with the robins, while their ears catch strange messages that seem to come in on the breeze from the Land-Out-Beyond-The-Rim; and Bill, who in other springs had attributed this to the unrest of the wanderlust, now came into full harmony with and understanding of its meaning.

Not that Bill showed it. Bill saw—at nineteen—the awesome gulf between the daughter of a major and a private of the line. Having been detailed—while acting as the commanding officer's orderly—to act as escort for Miss Ruth for no other reason than that Ruth, at sixteen, was not to be fully trusted with a mount as vicious as Jupiter, Bill realized that he must speak only when spoken to, ride behind as a matter of course, and come alongside only at her request or in moments of evident need. He also understood that if her black hair seemed a glory, her dark eyes brighter than the stars, and her slow, liquid tones sweeter than any music, he must speak of it only to his pillow, or to the warm, comforting neck of his horse.

"And so," he whispered to Laddie, after their third ride, "I guess I don't buck for orderly any more." Her hand had touched his accidentally that afternoon, and Bill thrilled—then winced—at thought of it. "There's things a fellow can't stand," he murmured.

Miss MacClaren, however, had no intention of letting matters rest in that way. She was a laughing, pink-cheeked, healthy girl with some influence in her home, and she had decided that no one could handle Jupiter quite as successfully as Bill. A quiet and a soft-spoken youth, though a boy with eloquent blue eyes, Bill had a way of smiling without parting his lips; and a boy whose rather sad and altogether gentle smile disappears in dimples is usually very kind to horses. Thereupon Ruth prevailed upon her father to offer Private Wayne the "position" of permanent "striker."

Now this, in the eyes of most the enlisted men, is not a "position" worth coveting. The man who accepts is oftentimes required to perform menial services, and is looked upon in the barracks as a "dog robber." And Bill—though he did not know his parents—was conscious of some unmistakably American instincts that drew the line between obedience and servility.

"I'd rather not, sir," he told the major. "I like to soldier for you, but——"

"Very well, Wayne," said the major. He knew men. "I understand the usual disinclination toward this—er—sort of duty. However, think it over. All you have to do is to take care of that horse."

Bill "fell away" with a salute, and slowly walked down to the corral. His blonde head hung low, for his mind was troubled.

"Think it over," the Major had said. Well, he didn't know that there could be very much to think over—and yet—

"How is it when—when you're *strong* for people?" he whispered to his horse, Laddie. "Does it make you just want them, or does it make you want to *do* for them? Eh?"

The horse rubbed its silken nostril against the brown cheek.

"That's what *you* say," expostulated Bill. "But I ain't no dog-robber. I ain't no handshakin', mitglommin' flunkie. I'm a *man*, and a soldier!"

Bill thrust his hands deep into his pockets—a most unmilitary attitude—and stalked moodily about the corral. In fancy he could hear the laughs of his comrades—no, he would not do it. No law of the service could make him, either.

"She don't know what she's askin'," he murmured. "Still . . . When you're strong for people, has it got to be that you beat things inside you so that they——"

A great sigh escaped him. Then he stood erect, tall, and slender in the sunlight, while his eyes focused on a point far out across the horizon.

"Why," he said aloud, "that's funny, now. It's really nothin' to be ashamed of. I guess I'll be able to do it. Furthermore," slapping his horse on the shoulder, "I'll do something else. If I can be big enough to beat *that* because I—I *care*—I guess some day I'll be big enough to——"

He could not put the last into words. But while he walked toward the major's to tell him that he would accept, new ambition stirred within him. "For," he reasoned, "why is it I don't dare to speak? We're both *humans*. 'Course I'm not fit to speak to her yet nohow, but aside from that we're both humans. She breathes, I breathe—same general kind of hands and feet. But I've got on a private's uniform, and *she's* an officer's daughter. If I was free, now, and had *money*, maybe I could come to her some day. That's it. I've gotta have money, and education to get it with, and *that's* what I'm goin' to have!"

Under fortuitous circumstances, the bridging of the chasm between determina-

tion and realization does not require more than a normal amount of effort. In Bill's case even the rudiments of education had been denied him, so he had much to overcome. At first Ruth loaned him books; the chaplain's wife also helped; but at twenty-four Bill was still "plugging away." And, because his duties had become almost mechanical, and because no "outside" work could give him the same amount of freedom for study, Bill still remained in the service.

Thus Bill at twenty-four—now Sergeant, not Private, Bill Wayne. He was a little taller, a great deal heavier, a bit more bronzed. In other ways those who had soldiered with him constantly saw little change in quiet Bill. They knew him as a man "with a mule-kick in both fists," though a man hard to rouse; he was, in a word, "just Bill—a sort of a quiet chap who's allus got his nose in books—and can talk more with his eyes than he does with his mouth." It cannot be said that everyone loved him, but it can be said that no man hated him; and when a sergeant has to live in close contact from day to day with men who are more than prone to become peevish and disgruntled under the Philippine sun, and has oftentimes to reprimand these men or report them absent from "calls," this does not speak badly for Bill.

Especially may this speak well for Bill's serenity when it is considered that M Troop was now living under a régime particularly obnoxious to every man in the troop. Their captain, a remarkably even-tempered and just man, had been sent to Ft. Riley on special duty, and a certain Lieutenant Hayes appointed to fill his place. Hayes had managed to upset all the unwritten rules of daily procedure laid down by the old captain. Dapper, suave, and courteous on the line, he was correspondingly brusque, nasty, and vulgar in his dealings with enlisted men. A stickler for uniformity, he was careless about the troop mess; a severe man with drunkards, he appeared at drill time after time while bitter and savage from the nerve-racking effects of a night's debauch. From a satisfied troop of orderly, self-respecting men, M Troop was beginning to slip into the ways of a badgered, disgruntled mob; and even the First

Sergeant, a man of twenty-five years' service, voiced the opinion that he was glad he would soon be retired.

"I'll soon be free of the ways of young pups like him," he confided to Bill. "Then maybe he'll make you top. I wish you luck of him."

"Not me," smiled Bill. "I want the time to study. He can make Brashares top."

"He *will* not," grinned that inimitable character. "He can *bust* him, that's what he can do. I'm going to town right now and call on the ladies. Come along, Bill?"

"Get out," grinned the First Sergeant. "Don't badger Bill. You know he don't play around none with the dames."

"Naw," said Brashares. "That's cause he's a fogley. He ain't *human*."

Bill only smiled, and threw a book at Brashares. Bill was human, and knew it well. Possessed of all a healthy youth's natural craving for occasional excitement amid the company of his rollicking friends, five years of almost constant denial had taught him to know himself better than most. And, had Brashares retained any further doubts on the subject, he should have read his friend's heart on the day Ruth MacClaren arrived in the Islands!

When this event occurred, the "outfit" had been stationed for six months in Mindanao, P. I. As Ruth had been off at school for a period of a year and a half before the regiment's departure for the Islands, Bill had not seen her for two years.

He stood, then, some distance away from Lieutenant Hayes and Major MacClaren's party as the *Seward* slid alongside the dock; and as his eyes fell upon her, Bill's heart threatened to burst bonds within his breast.

In his brightest dreams he had never seen her so beautiful. Laughing, jubilant, her dark hair lying in gleaming ringlets against the pink of her cheeks, she stood out, clean cut, as some vibrant, colorful masterpiece carved from the rock of health. Bill thought her superb. He looked at her, and looked—much as a straggler looks upon water in the desert.

She came running down the gangway, then, straight into the arms of her mother. From her she whirled to her father, while

the young officers crowded round them, all talking at once.

All this Bill saw, and was glad. It pleased him to see her happy—he was glad to know that she was popular. But as Hayes bowed before her, Bill winced. There was something different in his attitude toward her—something directly personal which Bill could not mistake. And suddenly he wished he had not come.

"By James, maybe there'll come a day when I don't have to stand away holdin'—holding—my thumbs," he soliloquized. "Maybe *I* can be well-groomed, and talk with people who don't say 'ain't,' and—oh, get *savoir faire*." Bill thought of the last lovingly; he had "looked it up" in the dictionary.

Then, just as the party started off down the dock, Ruth looked back and saw him.

"Oh, wait, papa!" she cried. "Why, there's Bill!"

The Sergeant's heart leaped. She remembered him! She was actually coming back to speak to him! In the presence of the officers!

He heard her mother's low protest, and Ruth's "Oh, pshaw, it's just Bill!"—and then she stood before him.

"A really, truly, sure-enough sergeant?" she laughed. "Let me see your sleeve. It is true, isn't it? H'm! You wouldn't want to take care of Jupiter now, would you?"

"I should be glad to," said Bill, fumbling with his hat, and looking down at her. Try as he would, he could not keep the color from his face. "It was very nice of you to send me those books last Christmas," he went on.

"Oh, *listen* to the inflection! Bill, you're actually getting polish."

"Maybe that's because of the books you send," he grinned.

"That's good. I'm glad I helped you. And you're still studying?"

"Every day."

"Isn't that splendid! Well, I must run—they're waiting. But I'm glad you're promoted—glad, glad. Though it makes me afraid I cannot treat you as a boy any longer. You've grown so *big*, too."

The words struck close to the trend of Bill's thoughts. Before he could check

them, the words came out; "You won't ever have to be afraid of the kind of bigness I want. I want to be big, but it's bigness of another kind."

She paused, stock still, looking into his face. His words, far less than that which looked from his eyes, held her. A man cannot always keep his soul from its windows. A shadow crossed her own; she was startled. So she held him a moment, searching, questioning—and then turned abruptly, almost into the arms of Lieutenant Hayes.

He had strolled back along the dock, and neither had noticed him.

"Oh, pardon me," she murmured, regaining herself. But uncalled-for color flamed in her cheeks. "Well, good-by, Bill; I'm really glad you're promoted."

Bill murmured something, he knew not what. He was looking into the eyes of Lieutenant Hayes. Nor was the look impersonal. Their uniforms had ceased to cover more than the shape of arms and legs, and between the two flashed the old, old challenge of the man-beast seeing his rival across the glade.

This lasted but a second, and one standing near would not have noticed it. But as they turned away and Bill in time followed them down the dock, he found himself studying an officer for the first time in his life from a strictly personal standpoint. Hayes was damnably handsome; he must admit that. It did not follow, of course, that Ruth should think him so as well. But it appeared as though she did, for she looked up at him repeatedly, and appeared most vivacious, laughing at all he said; it went against the grain, for Bill, and he flung himself on his bunk not long afterward, strangely depressed and sullen.

"Never thought she'd see anything in a souse like that fellow," he muttered. "Why he's——" Then in a spirit of revulsion, he jumped erect. "You're a fool, Bill—picking trouble before it's ripe. Why, he ain't—hasn't any more than walked down the dock with her."

However, as the days went by, and from time to time Bill saw her riding, walking, or chatting along the line with Lieutenant Hayes, it began to appear as

though he had real cause to worry. Never in his knowledge had she given this much encouragement to any one particular officer. And she no longer greeted Bill with the old, frank air of gracious camaraderie, but in rather an aloof and even chilly manner; while Hayes, though he acknowledged no personal breach between them, seemed to take especial delight these days in reprimanding Bill for every slip he made.

"He's yellow!" Bill declared, airing his troubles before the wise old palms on the beach. "A man can't bully an outfit simply because he's got the straps and measure up with a real man. Some day it'll show in him. But she—why I suppose when he's dancing, or talking, or making eyes at her, he looks pretty good. She ought to know him as we do, the———." Then, raising his hands, Bill swore, "By God, before I let him take her from me before I've had a chance, I'll kill the——, I sure will!"

He meant what he said; meant it with all the seriousness of a single-minded and serious man. And how long the affair might have gone on before an encounter occurred only Chance may tell; as it was, Chance alone had something to do with bringing a meeting about.

While acting as Sergeant of the Guard one day in the following week, Bill arrested a Moro dato who insisted on going through to the barrio of Iligan without leaving his bolo. This occurred late in the afternoon. Upon reporting it to the Officer of the Day during the supper hour, that worthy told him to stop at the Commanding Officer's home on his way to supper, and ask him whether he would interrogate the Moro at the guardhouse or have him brought to his home. Dato Pedro was influential, and the C. O. might see fit to release him in person, thus salving the old fellow's ruffled dignity, and avoiding needless trouble.

Belted and armed, Bill walked up the cement pathway to the Major's veranda. The orderly had been dismissed for the night; none of the family were on the veranda. Thinking that they might be at supper, Bill mounted the steps, and knocked loudly against the casing of the open door.

No one answering, Bill knocked again, and sought to pierce the gloom of the hallway. He could hear no one. Then, thinking that perhaps the major had settled into one of his comfortable arm chairs for a nap, Bill stepped to the open window of the library.

A faint light burning on one of the tables showed the room to be empty. But even as he ascertained this, Bill's eye fell upon a photo of Ruth. It stood in an ivory frame, close to the light.

Bill eyed it longingly. He had never possessed a view of Ruth; had never dared to ask for one. He certainly would give a great deal to have this. He would give—"By James," he muttered, "why not?" He looked up and down the sidewalk, and could see no one. The house appeared to be empty. The family was probably off somewhere at dinner.

"They'll think they've mislaid it somewhere," he reasoned, opening the door stealthily.

He advanced carefully, lest by any chance the house prove to be tenanted after all. A board cracked under his foot. He stopped, scarce breathing. No sound coming from the interior, he then stepped quietly into the library, walked straight to the picture, and picked it up.

Standing so for that one brief second, he was silhouetted by the light; and Lieutenant Hayes, coming unheard across the lawn, glanced in over the edge of the veranda and saw him.

A swift rush, and Hayes was confronting Bill in the hallway.

"What are you doing in here, Sergeant?" he demanded.

Sullen, murderous, sick at heart, Bill choked, unable to speak. One hand fumbled longingly at his pistol butt, the other held something against his breast.

"Come!" ordered Hayes. "Give me that you have there under your hand."

"I'll give you—" began Bill, advancing a step; "I'll give you—"

He stopped, and wheeled. At the other end of the hall the curtains parted, revealing Ruth MacClaren. She came forward, her eyes wide and troubled.

"What is the matter, Lieutenant? . . . Good evening, Sergeant."

"You had better ask the Sergeant the trouble," said Hayes, pointing at Bill's left hand.

"Why—"

Hayes tersely explained.

"I—can't—believe it," Ruth murmured, looking at Bill. "He has never been a thief. Please deny this at once, Bill."

The Sergeant raised his head, looked at her, then dropped his eyes in misery. "I'm afraid—" he began. Without further words he handed her the picture.

Ruth took it—bowed her head over it. A rich wave of color flooded her neck, her cheeks, her temples. She was suffused.

"Why—Bill!" she whispered. "Bill!" She raised her head, searching his averted profile.

"He's in poor position to say anything," Hayes cut in. "It's a plain case of attempted theft."

"Just a minute!" cried Ruth, turning on Hayes. "Please leave me attend to this. It is my picture, and my affair."

"Oh, if you insist! I say, though, that it is a case of a court-martial. Very likely he intended to sell the frame. It is—"

"You lie!" Bill cried. "Damn you, don't you—"

"Bill!" The cry was a command, yet the undertone was imploring. She clutched his arm. "Don't forget yourself—he's your superior officer."

"And he shall answer to me as such," said Hayes, backing out of the door. "You will report to me in the orderly room in the morning, Sergeant Wayne."

Bill saluted, but watched him go with hate contorting every feature. Then slowly he turned to meet Ruth's eyes—and his own dropped. Twisting his hat in his hands, he stood shifting his weight from one foot to the other, his eyes on his shoes, the floor, the spot under the table—anywhere but on her face.

"Bill—" she spoke at last, and he hardly knew her voice, so low and gentle had it become—"why did you do this?"

"Please," he whispered huskily, "don't ask me."

She moved closer, placing her hand on his arm. "But I *am* asking you, Bill. I have the right to know."

"Well, it wasn't to—to steal the frame."

"But if it wasn't that——"

In a sudden rush of feeling, Bill reverted to the vernacular. "Aw, have a heart! You *know* what it was. Can't you *see* when—when people are *strong* for you?"

Ruth drew back. "Oh!" she murmured. "Oh! Then *that* was what made you—on the dock. . . . But I did not understand——"

"I couldn't expect you to," said Bill. Head down, hat twisting about in his hands, his breast so suffused with emotion that his vocal chords seemed thickened, coarsened, Bill went on, stumbling over his words—"I couldn't have expected you to. I didn't look at you that way on the dock because I wanted to—to take advantage. I never expected you to understand, anyhow, until I could be somebody worth your attention. It wasn't to be this way in the dreams I've had about it. But you see I've never had a picture of you through the years I've thought—what I couldn't *help* but think—and, somehow, it didn't seem like *stealing*. Why, a man *can't* steal what he'd—what he'd—God! It didn't seem like it *could* be stealing, taking a picture of a person a fellow's *worked* for, and only wanted to have happiness, and gentle things—and peace of mind. I—you see——"

There is a great deal of the mother in a good woman, and a great deal of God in a mother. Ruth's full bosom trembled with the intake of her breath.

"Don't!" she said now. "Please! I understand now, Bill, and I'm—I'm sorry. Please go at once, before father returns."

"Then you're not—not——"

"Insulted, or shocked, or—or going to—but there, you *know* I am not going to say anything. You have—have paid me a sincere compliment, after all. Now, please go."

"All right. You're mighty—mighty kind. Only there's one thing—that is why I spoke of bigness there on the dock. I wanted to be big because of that."

"Big? How big?"

"Big enough to make money—to compete with other men out in the world. Big enough to get money so that those you care for wouldn't have to have moments

craving for things they want. That's what I've been working for."

"I see," she nodded. And she looked at him with a strange softness he could not understand. "I'm beginning to think there are other sorts of bigness, when you understand them. Now go, Bill, before father comes."

When he had gone, she ran to the 'phone . . . and soon afterward Hayes stood before her.

"Well?" she said.

"You let him go?"

"I did."

"Does that mean that he has had the audacity to speak to you, to——"

"Well, suppose that he did?"

"But he's an *enlisted* man!"

"True. But somehow, when you come in contact with people who are 'just Bill,' it makes you stop and think over this eternal distinction between man and man."

"Why, I believe that you *care* for him," he cried in hot jealousy. "By George, I'll——"

"Ye-e-es?"

So she placed it in his hands. She neither denied nor affirmed his statement. But she implied by her silence that she *might* care—that it was not *impossible*. Hence the man sensed fully that she was "putting the matter up to him," or, in other words, weighing him in the balance.

"I'm not—unfair," he said at last. "If there is any possibility of your caring for Sergeant Wayne—though it stuns me, I confess—he shall come to no harm through me. In fact, I have something in my mind which will more than convince you of this." And he turned abruptly and left the house.

There was commotion in three hearts that night. Long after he left, Ruth sat at the window, chin in hand, gazing pensively out across the bay. Hayes sat alone at the officers' club, brooding over many brandies and sodas. As for Bill, he spent the night in fear and foreboding. Though Ruth's kindly exoneration might dispell any intention on the part of Hayes to report him or call him to account for his threatening attitude, Bill feared the man's treacherous nature, and had no doubt that, chance affording, Hayes would

take revenge under the guise of military necessity.

His emotions may be judged, then, when, on the following morning, Hayes called him aside.

"Miss MacClaren chose to let the incident pass, Sergeant, so there'll be no more said of it."

"Very well, sir."

"Miss MacClaren has, however, chosen to put this on a somewhat—er—personal basis. That is, she seems to think that I may look upon what occurred last night as cause for personal animosity. Forget it."

Bill had no words for this.

"Or, if you can't, think of this—when Sergeant Dorgan retires, I'm going to make you First Sergeant."

For the moment Bill was completely taken in. He almost thanked the man.

"Just the same, sir," he said, "I'd rather not, if——"

"Why?"

"I'd rather do straight duty, sir."

A fleeting light of triumph passed over the officer's face. "Because you'd rather study, eh? Well, you didn't come into the service to prepare yourself for civilian life, Sergeant. You came in to give the best you have to the service. I think you're the best man for the place, and I'm going to promote you—understand?"

Bill did. He saw the whole of the officer's mind in a flash. By promoting him he could remove any doubt of his littleness from Ruth's mind; at the same time—and this Ruth could not know—he was placing extra work upon Bill's shoulders, taking away his study hours, and forcing him into a position where he could be held personally accountable for the slips of every man in the troop. And as he saw it all, Bill longed to reach out and take the man by the throat.

It transpired as he foresaw. Dorgan retiring, Bill was immediately promoted to fill the gap. Then began a life of daily hell—petty naggings for this, reprimands for that, file after file of unnecessary paper work thrust upon his hands. If a man turned out for drill without full equipment, Bill heard of it, if the Quartermaster Sergeant failed to turn in his oat list on time,

Bill was asked why. In addition to this, he saw Ruth still riding or walking with Hayes in the cool of the evenings, and, as he could not go to her direct, he supposed, quite naturally, that everything had been adjusted between them. And so his former serenity of countenance gave way to a worried, hunted look, while his thoughts of Hayes grew rancid in his mind.

When a man soldiers in Mindanao, he sleeps over a volcano which erupts occasionally without warning or reason. Peaceful to-day, to-morrow some priest may produce a Koran, show his warriors a passage which seems to indicate that Christians are more vulnerable in the dark of the moon, and incite them to pull out their bolos and dance about the camp fires. In the majority of cases the constabulary attend to the needs of these children; on special occasions, the regulars are called upon to administer the necessary.

In this case Datro Pedro had refused to be mollified by the commanding officer, and, when he reached home, began to make great preparations for war. . . . And so it came about M Troop rode down a certain cañon, heading toward Data Pedro's in the south.

At the far end of the cañon they expected to find a broad highland plain, with Dato Pedro's barrio at the end of it. As this was his first encounter with the Americans, they fully expected to find the black-haired warriors massed in the open before their village, armed only with bolos and spears. So they had met the Spanish.

A troop commander is supposed to ride at the head of his troop when they are in column of twos, but as they moved up the cañon, Lieutenant Hayes began to manifest a great deal of concern for the state of the men's equipment. To inspect them, he reined to the side of the trail, speaking to this man and to that as they passed; then he turned somewhat uncertainly toward the rear guard, as though waiting to give them orders.

"If he's going to command this outfit," thought Bill, looking back, "he'd better stay up here, I'm thinking."

Then from the head of the cañon came the sound of scattering shots.

"The point's into it!" he thought. "We can't wait for him. . . . Gallop—ho!"

The troop lunged forward, the thunder of the iron-shod hoofs echoing from hill to hill. Bill reined out to the side of the first set of twos, and again looked back over his shoulder.

"If he's coming—ah!"

The troop commander was coming, and at the gallop. But as Bill looked back, Hayes's animal pitched forward in a heap. And Bill could have sworn that Hayes had deliberately thrown his mount!

"I *knew* he was yellow!" he gasped. Aloud he yelled into a sergeant's ear, "Bart, take the troop on and hold 'em at the head of the cañon till I get there!" Then he turned and galloped for the rear.

"You don't welch if I can help it!" he muttered, flinging himself from his horse before the prostrate man. "Hurt?" he he yelled, shaking him savagely by the shoulder. "Not much? Come on, then, up with me."

The rear guard thundered up at the gallop; Bill had the dazed officer in his arms. "No, I don't need help," he yelled. "Go on, I'll be with you." To the officer, "Up front, there, now—so!" He literally heaved and pushed the other into the saddle, shoved the reins into his hands, slapped the horse on the rump, and vaulted up behind. Clapping his hands to Hayes's shoulders, he roweled the horse viciously, till the animal stretched low, belly to earth, and cleared the rocks in bounds.

"Yipp-I!" yelled Bill, peering sideways into Hayes's white face. "Hold up that head, Lieutenant—you don't want any more falls to-day."

Cursing him, Hayes lurched sideways; but Bill quickly thrust his arms under the other's, seized the reins, and clamped him in a grip of steel. "Pull out your pistol," he yelled. "I'll do the riding." And in this manner they swept out on to the plain.

Far ahead of them, the troop had spread into line, and were now charging toward the Moro village, their sabers on high. Either Bart had misunderstood, or deliberately disobeyed. Through the gaps in the line Bill could see a horde of Moros gathered in plain sight before the village;

seeing this, he judged it to be the latter. Bart had evidently thought the chance too good to lose; the opportunity for a charge does not come often in the Philippines.

"Go to it!" grinned Bill, driving the spurs deeper. "Come on, we want to be in at the finish!"

Up to this time, no shots had come from the Moros. But suddenly, as the men rose on high to yell, the Moro horde fled to right and left, and from a long line of unsuspected rifle pits there burst a sheet of flame.

"Well, what the——" gasped Bill.

He saw the troop slow down, halt, and begin to mill; then his mount had cleared the gap, and he heard himself shouting into Hayes's ear, "Well, why don't you *do* something—say something?"

He did not get Hayes's answer; everything blurred before his eyes. His breath left him—there came a hellish twist of pain—when he lifted his head, he found himself on the ground. The horse lay dead at his right hand; in the foreground was the huddled form of Lieutenant Hayes; looking back, Bill saw that the troop was now galloping to the rear, no doubt with the intention of dismounting to advance by rushes on foot. With the exception of two dead men and four prone horses, he and Hayes were the only members of the troop left exposed to the enemy's fire.

"At three hundred yards they ain't doing so bad, either," grunted Bill, as a ricochet showered him with dirt. "I guess——"

A spasm of pain robbed him of breath. In moving, his left leg bent sharply, much after the manner of the letter K. It was broken below the knee.

"Phew!" he whistled, wiping the sweat of agony from his forehead. "Some sweet fix, I don't think!"

Another bullet whistled close to his head, singing the song of a soul long gone. He lost no time in turning, face up, then sat up, reached forward, and placed the broken leg over the right. Settling back, he then used the palms of his hands to squirm backward to a position behind the dead horse.

There for a moment he rested, faint with pain.

But only for a moment. A slug of lead ripped through the upper part of the horse's neck and chugged into the ground with a nasty "ps-t-spat!" Bill raised his head and peered over the romp.

"How do you like it out there?" he mouthed at the unconscious man. "Oh you're alive, are you?" as Hayes's hand moved. "Well, I hope you come to about the time they get you, you—— ——! I want you to feel it!"

Whistling, whining, two ricochets tore up the ground within three feet of Hayes. Bill laughed and waved his hat.

"A little windage, you gu gu on the left there!" he yelled. "And a little more elevation!" To Hayes, "Damn you, I thought'd have to be me to get you, but you're in for——"

The wind blew his hat from his head, and he broke off; but he watched on, hopefully. A slug struck within two feet of Hayes's left leg, and Bill grinned. Sill another showered him with dirt, and Bill exulted. But as a third and a fourth and a fifth bullet landed in Hayes's vicinity and still left him untouched, the Sergeant grew impatient.

"You've got to die," he muttered, pulling his pistol from the holster. "If I have to do it myself."

He leveled the pistol over the horse's romp. "Get a line on him, you gu gus, there, or——"

He cocked the pistol, and almost pulled the trigger. Then, as the defenceless man's back came into full line with the sights, Bill's face flooded with shame. He wavered—cursed himself for a weak-minded fool, a soft heart and a baby—but wavered, nevertheless. He looked now with reproach upon the pistol, "you never shot a man in the back yet, Bill," he whispered. Why do you want to start now?" He shoved the gun into its holster, dropping back to the ground in a swift revulsion of feeling. "You never shot any one in the back," he repeated.

He began to drag himself backward, this time around the hind legs of the horse. "I guess I didn't think," he groaned, from between set teeth. "He—I hate him, God knows, but he ain't—isn't himself any more. He's *bers*. So I guess——"

He covered the distance between him-

self and Hayes by twisting and shoving, while the sweat poured from him, and his face aged with pain. Bullets struck near him, around him; they whistled close overhead, but he reached Hayes without being hit. There he turned with great labor, stretching himself alongside the unconscious man; and, reaching forward, he seized the khaki collar in his teeth.

The return journey proved slower, and more arduous. By much awkward shoving and pulling, he managed to get Hayes's limp body across his own broken leg; with this leg as a skid, he was able to move backward, a foot or two at a move. At times he nearly gave up; but in the end he was able to drag his burden behind the horse. There he gave way to an overpowering feeling of nausea and faintness.

When he cleared his eyes, Hayes had recovered consciousness. With blood streaming down his face from an ugly wound in the forehead, he leaned forward, leering at Bill.

"You came close to getting what you wanted, didn't you?"

"H'm!" thought Bill. "He doesn't know I pulled him here." Aloud he said, "Well?"

"Just this, my man. If I have to cash in, it won't do you any good. She cares for me—*me*, do you understand?"

A bullet tore its way through the body of the horse, nipping a patch of cloth and skin from Bill's thigh. The Lieutenant seemed not to notice. In the face of death he had thrown all pretence and distinction of rank aside; hate mastered him wholly.

"She loves *me*, d' you hear? Me, damn you, me——"

Bill's Colt came out, its black muzzle covering a spot between Hayes's eyes.

"I *know* she does," said Bill. "'N by God because she does, I'll make a hero out of you. It'll be ten minutes before they're here——" nodding at the troop— "'n you may be got before then—this horse is leakin'. Your legs are good—pick me up on your back and beat it out of the line of fire. Move, I say—move, or——"

During that last move, Bill's right leg received additional compliments from the Moros in the rifle pits—compliments which

might have reached Hayes had Bill's leg not intervened. And so it came about that, after M Troop had attended to the Moro's wants in a business-like and proper manner, they picked up a rather delapidated "top soldier" and carted him down the mountain trails to spend two long weary months in the hospital.

They saved both legs, but the left—they said—would always be a bit lame; hence the major doctor had recommended that he be given a "disability discharge" and a pension. This was not so bad, thought Bill, for though the pension was hardly large enough to live on, he could, by being very economical, stretch it, with his clothing allowance, to meet the needs of four months' study. By that time he expected to complete his electrical course. Too, the major had recommended him—and Hayes as well—for a medal of honor; and this is something that many a man soldiers to retirement for and never gets.

But all this had less of real meaning to Bill than to those who envied him. While introspection gave him a certain amount of pleasure, Bill's thoughts of the future were not the sort that usually wing our hopes at twenty-four. Hayes had not called on him, and neither had Ruth, though she sent him flowers. But so did the Chaplain's wife, and several others. And once Bill saw her walking with Hayes, away down on the beach. He spent a great deal of time alone in his wheel-chair, looking away over the glassy bay.

Then there came a time when he could walk about on crutches—and one night he slipped away from his friends and hobbled out on the long dock. It is quiet out there at the end of that dock; the water laps gently at the wooden spiles; the moon, rising over the black mountains in the east, bathes the bay with a sheen of purest silver; now and then a white-sailed banca comes gliding down from Iligan; and a man can drop his legs over the edge of the planking, and look at nothing, and *think*.

Bill sat there for five minutes—perhaps ten—then turned at the sound of footsteps. He was annoyed until he recognized her. Then he rather wished—at first—that he

could drop into the bay and swim across to the barges.

She came forward with hesitation—stopped and looked behind her—then came to him quickly, even with a little rush. Bill could have sworn that she floated—she was all things graceful and pure to Bill.

"Bill," she said then, "you'll—you'll forgive me for not coming up to see you?"

"I never could have anything to forgive you," said Bill, turning his face in pain from all this glory that was denied him.

"And you'll overlook *his* actions, too—won't you? You see, he couldn't quite bring himself to do it—apologize to you—he is so—so steeped with the officer and man idea. But he didn't know—until later—that you carried him back out of that spot, Bill—truly he didn't. He's not all bad, Bill—please believe me—he told me all about it."

"That's pretty big of him," said Bill, forcing the words with reluctance.

"Big?" Her eyes rested upon his averted face, and filled with the light that comes neither from moon nor sun, but is only known to woman. "You were not thinking well of him at the time you—you *did* it, Bill. Tell me—what made you do it?"

"I couldn't want to take away from you what was yours—could I?"

She trembled—and was on her knees beside him, catching his dazed face in her soft palms. "You thought I cared, Bill, and you did *that*? Boy, boy, I wasn't sure till I heard that—and then I knew—knew why I have been thinking—thinking ever since you looked at me that way the day I came. And I should have come to you then, but it was like—like—well, one time I heard a story about a Jew girl who decided that her racial aversion to pork was nonsensical; but when she tried to eat it, she choked. It wasn't as easy for me to be big, as you who—who——"

"Ruth!—"

Humbled by the very glory of this which came upon him when furthest from hope, Bill breathed her name as men do a sacrament.— And then Bill knew for the first time not only the satisfaction but the joy of being big. For a man is biggest when, clothed in humility, he is throned on high within the heart kingdom of his mate.

BILL HADLEY'S BURRO

By ARTHUR PRESTON HANKINS

A NEW SERIES OF SIDESPLITTING YARNS BY AN AUTHOR WHO HAS DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF WRITING OF THE NEW WEST. HERE IS A STORY OF THE NORTHWESTERN MOUNTAINS IN WHICH "SWEET-HEART" THE AFFECTIONATE DONKEY PLAYS A LEADING PART

JIM HICKS, the Saddle Tramp, and I sat on boxes with our backs against the sunny side of the little cabin in the San Bernardino Mountains. Jim was whittling with an immense jack-knife. At a little distance, sheltered from the wind by tall pines, his pinto consumed a flake of alfalfa hay, worth, up there, forty-five dollars a ton. It was rather late in the fall, and a chilly breeze blew over Stirrup Lake, which the cabin overlooked.

I had met Jim the Saddle Tramp a hundred times in a hundred parts of California. And Jim had told me a hundred yarns typical of his rugged Western life. In the present instance I had been duck hunting on Stirrup Lake, had found my pockets empty of matches, and, seeing smoke issuing from a distant cabin, had gone to beg. And I found my Saddle Tramp propped comfortably against the sunny side of the shack, "just restin' a few days because the cabin was empty, and a storm looked to be comin' on." When the storm had passed he would be astride his pinto and away to—well, he couldn't just say. Death Valley, maybe, or up toward Old Woman Springs, or perhaps make a try at Doble for a month's work in the mines at Gold Mountain.

"Well," said Jim, "Thanksgiving's comin'; ain't she? And the poverty-strickenest gazabo in the old state'll have cranberries and punkin pies, and turkey stuffed with oysters and baker's bread. Thanksgiving's a day for eatin'. Turkey's good, but there's many a thing that'll take its place in a pinch. Ever make Thanksgiving dinner on salmon, for instance? There's one thing I've had a hankerin' to set my teeth into for many a year. That's baked salmon, stuffed with salted almonds—Jordan almonds. Ever tackle that?"

"I should say not," I replied. "I never heard of such a dish."

The Saddle Tramp slowly shook his head and looked reminiscent. "It must be a rare concoction," he cogitated. "Had it almost set before me once, but it never reached the goal."

I waited.

"It was up in Northern Californy," he went on presently, "'way up in the big-timber country. Miles and miles o' forest as primeval and untouched by the hand o' wasteful man as in the days of the archaeopteryx. How's that for a word?"

"Well, we were buildin' a railroad up there. One Harriman was puttin' the thing over, with my assistance. I was second helper to the electrician at forty-five per. Electrician's name was Hadley—Bill. Other way round, o' course. First helper's name was Peck—George Peck. And me second assistant, as before stated.

"Contractor's name was Moore. Big outfit. Had to cut through almost solid rock near eighty-five feet. Had over a hundred Austrians and Hungarians workin' with the shovels—Hooligans we called 'em. Funny people, those Hooligans. Scared to death o' powder. But I'll tell you about that later. We worked night and day. Hence the electrical department, with one Jim Hicks as second assistant at forty-five. We three worked nights, o' course—me and Bill till midnight, George Peck from midnight on—runnin' the dynamo to light the night shift, workin' maybe a quarter of a mile away.

"They were puttin' in some pretty big shots in that heavy rock, and pebbles as big as a washtub were in the habit o' goin' up toward the sky a mile or so; and the old sayin' that 'All goes up must come down' was workin' in those days. So our two cabins—one for the engine and dynamo, the

other our livin' quarters—were comfortably away from these frequent volcanoes.

"I remember that sleepin' cabin yet. It was built out of native lumber, right from the sawmill. There was hair on that lumber half an inch long, and before you got out of bed you had to reach for a comb and smooth down the floor so's to keep splinters out of your feet while dressin'. And cold! You could throw a cat sideways through fifty cracks in that cabin. And the big, cold, solemn woods all around, with the panthers screamin' at night and the diamond-heads rattlin' by day, and just us three there alone.

"And half the time we were out of wood and water. Down at the main camp there were two men who drew pay for doin' nothin' but keepin' the outfit supplied with wood and water. But they concentrated their gigantic efforts on tendin' to the wants o' the cook tent, and forgot us about every other time we run shy.

"Wood didn't bother so much, for a fellow *could* run out in the timber and collect an armful in no time; but it wasn't a comfortable proceedin' of a frosty mornin'. But water we had to have for both the metal engine and the human engine; and our blamed bar'l was empty three fourths o' the time. Bill kicked and kicked, but it seemed to do no good. That mule-skinner didn't like to make his team pull the tank-wagon up the mountain—that was all.

"One day when we couldn't sleep, and were loafin' in front o' the cabin along comes an old prospector walkin' slowly behind a train o' six burros, and castin' disgusted looks down at the work below. One burro, a little desert-colored rascal, was lame as the dickens, and the old fellow had took the pack off of him and distributed the load among the others. He carried only a pack-saddle, but still he limped and seemed about all in.

"'What's wrong with the canary?' asks Bill.

"'Got a sprain,' says the prospector. 'And I don't know what to do with him. I've got to get on to my claim and do my assessment work mighty quick, or some one'll be jumpin' it. And this fellow's keepin' me back. He'd be all right in a day or two, if I could afford to give him a rest.'

"'Wanta sell him?' asks Bill.

"'Yes, I'll sell him,' says the miner. 'But you'll have to buy the saddle and outfit, too—I can't pack another pound.'

"'How much?'

"'Fifteen for the donk; fifteen for the saddle and outfit.'

"'Thirty,' says Bill, and digs for his purse. 'Just anchor him anywhere here, in not over five fathoms.' Bill had been an electrician in the navy, and was always droppin' things 'on the deck' and 'goin' below' and doin' somethin' 'four bells in a jingle.'

"'Well, you unconverted idiot!' I says, when the old fellow had gone on with Bill's gold in his pocket.

"'Oh, I don't know,' says Bill. Then he yells after the prospector: 'Hey, you! Schooner ahoy! What's the name o' this packet?'

"'Novio is the title of that burro,' the old man shouts back.

"'What does that mean?' Bill fires at 'im.

"'It's Spanish for Sweetheart,' comes from the miner.

"'But he's a he!' yells Bill.

"'He's a he sweetheart, too,' returned the other, and on he goes.

"'Aye, aye, sir!' shouts Bill. 'Sweetheart it is, sir!'

"'To continue,' I says to Bill, havin' in the meantime thought up a lot o' good adjectives to go before 'idiot,' 'you—'

"'Oh, stow it, shipmate!' says Bill. 'A burro o' that build and lines is just what this aggregation needs.'

"'True, O Bill,' I says. 'And how we ever managed to struggle along with—'

"'He'll keep us in water,' Bill breaks in. 'We'll take four five-gallon gasoline cans, rig some kind of a gadget to make 'em fit on the gilligan, and you c'n take Sweetheart in tow and bring us twenty gallons o' water at a crack. Sweetheart is a good buy—hey, Sweetheart?'

"'Sweetheart, who was 'moored,' as Bill put it, to a little fir tree, slanted his long left ear forward, and the right one backward; then shifted the right forward and the left backward; then did it twenty times as fast as you c'n twiddle your fingers.

Then he begun suckin' in his breath in a pitiful sort o' way, and looked at his owner with sorrowful meltin' eyes.

"Some mule!" says Bill Hadley. "Intelligent, all right. Looks like——"

"His master," I puts in.

"You pipe down," says Bill. "And say, what's his name now?"

"Well, sir, we all thought and thought, and we'd all three lost it. I couldn't throw a word o' Spiggoty in those days.

"Well, anyway," says Bill, "whatever it is, it means Sweetheart. And that'll have to do. That burro'll just naturally have to learn the English tongue. But I wonder why he labeled him a fool name like that?"

"And it wasn't long before we knew. That long-haired, mouse-colored imitation of a mule just naturally had Romeo, Bertha M. Clay, and Ella Wheeler Wilcox shoved off the boards backward, with their heads tied in a sack. That animal was Love, with a big capital, from the tips of his impossible ears to the tips of his outlandish little hoofs. He loved everybody. Love just oozed from him. He'd whimper and put his head against your breast, and then burst into sobs. He didn't care much about hay or grain or water, or sleepin' soft on a bed o' straw. All he wanted was love, love, love. And when you didn't happen to feel the tender passion uppermost in your breast, he'd drag his feet about the place and just naturally sob himself sick. And say, when he sobbed he sobbed! When an uncontrollable fit o' sobbin' struck him, along about three o'clock in the mornin', for instance, you somehow didn't care to sleep any more that night.

"As for haulin' the water, Sweetheart was all right so long as you could find him when water was needed. We'd turned him loose, and for days at a time he'd go wanderin' off in the woods to eat queer roots and berries till his breath smelled like a chemical lab'ratory. And when you'd hunted and hunted for him, and called and called, then give up ever seein' him again, and were about resigned to death from thirst, he'd slip up behind you and sob a whiff o' medicinal restorative in your face that would drive away all thoughts o' the life to come. Then sometimes he'd take a

drink and hold about half a pint o' water in his mouth for fifteen minutes. And when you weren't lookin' he'd come and kiss you on the back o' the neck, and the half-pint would ooze down your back to your shoes.

"Sweetheart seemed to care little for common horse food. Bill Hadley said the roots and things he ate in the woods were for a love potion. He liked the covers off tomato cans, and he always bit first right into the big red tomato in the picture. Didn't seem to care particularly for the *San Francisco Examiner*, but he liked the backs o' the *Literary Digest* and those of certain Sunday magazine supplements if the colors were warm and appetizin'. Plain writin' paper he refused to touch. Whisk-brooms pleased him, and sixteen-ounce canvas wasn't so distasteful. And once he took a lift out of Bill's sandy hair that left Bill kinda baldlike up the back of his neck for weeks.

"But his specialty in the epicurean line was the corners o' the cabin. He preferred these as a sort of an *al fresco* proposition somewhere between midnight and dawn. And say, when he'd purloin a mouthful o' that hairy lumber, just when you'd got nicely to sleep and dreamin' about what you were goin' to do with your stake in Frisco, you'd think the earth had been split asunder. *R-r-r-ripl!* she'd go. And Bill would jump out of bed and yell: 'All hands on deck to abandon ship! She'll sink with that hole in her bottom.'

"Then when I'd quieted Bill down, and we'd be dozin' again, Sweetheart would slip up to the window and Fletcherize that cargo o' lumber he'd derived from the cabin till you thought you were tryin' to sleep in a sawmill. *Chonk! Chonk! Chonk!* he'd go; and Bill would get up and tear his hair.

"'Kill him!' I'd yell.

"Then would come that soft, suckin' sob, pleadin' for just one word o' love, just one smile. And Bill Hadley would lean out the window and kiss him on the brow.

"But I didn't have fifteen dollars wrapped up in that side-kicker of Baalam, and when it was me that raved out of bed after him something usually happened.

"The first time I heaved something through the window at him it was kind

laughable. There was a brick on the table, which I'd seen George Peck bring in to crack hazel nuts on while I was takin' a bath in a washtub that afternoon. When I went to bed I located the position o' this brick, and I says: 'If Mr. Sweetheart comes Romeoin' about my balcony this night, he'll get that bouquet.' Along about one o'clock he began sobbin' for love ministrations. I stood it ten minutes. Then it ceased, and a little later I saw Sweetheart's shaggy old sheep-nose come pokin' in at the window against the background o' the moon. And he let a roar permeate that cabin that would have made delirium tremens a happy state.

"And before Bill could move I reached for the brick and let her fly. Felt kind of light, but it landed right between Sweetheart's eyes. Yet there's no dull thud, no sickenin' crack, no total collapse o' the ass. Just a kind of soft, splattery, squashy sound. And when I got out of bed, there was the brick still on the table. I'd hit the burro with my wet rubber bath-sponge, which I'd left beside the brick.

"A little later Sweetheart finished the last of it at the window; and the sigh o' content he heaved when it had gone down took all the bitterness out of my heart. Told Bill he'd have to buy me another sponge, but he never did. If I *had* heaved the brick, I reckon it would have gone the same route as the rubber article; for when, a few days later, I made a muzzle for Sweetheart out of wire poultry nettin', to keep him from eatin' up the shack, it was missin' the first mornin' after he'd worn it.

"He's just naturally et it up,' says George Peck.

"And Bill Hadley couldn't dispute it, though he hunted for it unsuccessfully for days to vindicate Sweetheart's honor.

"And that ain't all. I've thrown hatchets at that burro, and monkey wrenches and once a whole pound o' six-penny nails in a sack. And none of 'em were ever found. That awful Fletcherizin' noise would always be heard in the distance after such things were thrown at Sweetheart. But you can't prove anything by me. All I know is, as I said, the tools and nails were never found.

"He could eat queer things, as I've in-

dicated, but when he first met salted Jordan almonds face to face he was an almond addict for the remainder of his days.

"It was along about Thanksgivin', and the first big winter rains had come. The creeks were swelled to three times their size, and up from the sea came the salmon to spawn. They'd been kept out almost a month after their time by the shallow water and they were more anxious to become parents than any fish I ever saw. Ever see 'em? Some sight! The old bucks lash about with their tails, and rare up on their hind legs, and wrassle with one another till the water's churned to white foam.

"Bill Hadley had got tired of his job—too much money in his jeans—and he'd gone to Fort Bragg to blow in a hundred or so. George Peck was left in charge o' the plant, and me in charge o' Sweetheart. 'Be kind to him, Jim,' Bill had said on leavin'. 'And don't throw things at him. It's unmanly, and besides you never get 'em back.'

"'Oh, I'll be kind to him,' I says, and winks at Peck.

"Well, when the salmon come up to spawn me and George rigged up a spear and went out after 'em. We got some dandies, and had 'em fried and stewed and boiled, and every way, till we pretty near got tired of 'em.

"'What we want to do,' says George, 'is to knock off on this fish diet for a few days. Thanksgivin's comin', 'he says, 'and, so far as I c'n see, our turkey's likely to be a big fish o' the salmon family. We'll get a big one and bake it,' he says, kind of wistful, 'and just have a whoppin' old feed.'

"And we carried out this schedule so that the day before Thanksgivin' we were almost keen again for fish. In the mornin' I went out and forked a big fellow, and he was cleaned and ready for the oven by ten o'clock.

"And a little later, in came Bill.

"Bill had been drinking. I was nearly sure of the deplorable state of affairs right away, but was too shocked to make remarks. The first suspicion I got o' the Bacchus business was when Bill tripped on the doorstep and slid for first on his stomach about ten feet into the room scattering packages all over the floor.

"'You're out!' I says.

"'Blut-gr-vassa-whimk,' says Bill, which he afterward translates as 'All hands to muster.' He set up smilin' in the middle o' the floor, and begun collectin' his parcels one by one like a two-year-old kid pickin' up his blocks. Believe me, he was an intelligent lookin' specimen o' the Family Hominidae!

"'Hello!' he says.

"'Go to hell!' says I. Then I thought I hadn't better be too severe with him, and asks soothin'ly: 'Did you break the bottle, Bill?'

"Bill paid no attention, but sat there blinkin' at a package. He mumbled somethin', shook his head doubtfully, then stuck a finger through the sack to see what's in it.

"'Crambies!' he yells in glee. 'Haw-haw!'—that low, roughneck laugh o' his! And he heaved the package at the ceiling; and it rained cranberries for a minute.

"I called George in from the dynamo shack. 'Come look what Santy Claus brought us,' I says; and George squashed through the cranberries to bear witness to the disgustin' sight.

"Bill kept sittin' on the floor, pokin' his fingers into sacks to find out what he'd bought.

"'Celery!' he yells, and throws a big long parcel out the window. Celery wasn't on the table for Thanksgivin' dinner.

"Bill worked carefully into another bundle, yelled, 'Turk!' and heaved her toward the clouds.

"But it was an eight-day clock, which Bill afterward remembered he'd won at a raffle. And the thing never run a lick after it hit the floor.

"George picked it up in disgust. 'Here's your turk,' he says witheringly, and shoved the face o' the clock up to Bill's.

"'Clock,' says Bill solemnly, like a two-year-old respondin' to 'What's this, dearie? Tell mama, now.' 'Clock,' says Bill again. 'Tick-tuck. Tick-tock! Remember now—lost turk out of car window. Haw! Tick-tock!'

"He forgot it and begun pokin' into another package.

"'Nuts,' he says with a grin. 'Almon's. Salted almon's. Jordan almon's. Im-

ported. At all confectioners sixty cents the pound, except in th' Far West. Eaten ten pounds of 'em. Like somethin' nutty when I'm drinkin'.'

"'You don't need it,' says George, but it was lost on Bill.

"'Whoop!' Bill suddenly sung out; and George grabbed at his arm as he starts to throw the almonds. But just then a mouse-colored head reached in at the window, and the Jordans vanished.

"'Sweetheart's got almon's,' drived Bill. 'Haw-haw!' And he struggled to his feet. 'Wanna see Sweetheart,' he says, and staggered out the door.

"George hurried after him and managed to get the nuts away from the donk. And he come back in, leavin' Bill with his arms about Sweetheart's neck, and them two sobbin' on each other's shoulder.

"'He's got no bottle on his hip,' I says to George, 'so we'll leave him slobber over the burro to his heart's content. I'll sweep up the cranberries and wash 'em, and we'll have somethin' of a feed after all.'

"Well, just about the time I was ready to bake the fish, in came the inebriate.

"'Haw! Fish!' he says, 'I show you how to cook fish.'

"'I'm gettin' this dinner,' I says. 'You sit on the floor and play with your clock, Willie.'

"'I'll cook fish,' he says. 'Stuff him with salted Jordan almon's—sixty cents the pound at all con—'

"'You'll not,' I says.

"'M a cook,' he informed me solemnly 'watch me stuff fish with Jordan— Now you chop almon's Jimmie. Watch me stuff fish.'

"George come in again. 'He *can* cook,' he says. 'I've heard him tell about it lots o' times. Give him a chance, but keep your eye on him. Salmon stuffed with almonds ought to be good.'

"'Why?' I asks.

"'I dunno,' says George. 'Seems to me I've heard o' somethin' like that. Stuffin' birds with nuts, you know. In France—'

"'George,' says I, 'le'me give you a piece of advice: If you're goin to be a humorist, be a humorous humorist. A salmon ain't a bird.'

"'Gi'me fish,' broke in Bill. 'Chop nuts,

Jimmie. Watch me stuff him four bells in jingle.'

"Aw, bust yourself, you idiot!" I says, and got up and left the cabin.

"A little later I peeked back in. George was maulin' the stuffin' out of the almonds. And the chef, preparatory to handlin' the fish, was washin' his hands with the brown doorknob that had come off while he was away, thinkin' he had a cake o' tar soap.

"All right," I says. 'Go to it! I'll have nothin' to do with the deal.' And I went into the dynamo shack.

"I was in there 'way over an hour. I was wonderin', kind of sneakin' like, if they'd forgot to call me to dinner, when Bang! goes somethin' over toward the cabin.

"Out I ran. There stood Bill, wobblin' about on his legs, with my six-shooter in his hand. And a little distance away was George hidin' behind a tree. And thirty feet in front o' Bill was Sweetheart, with his long ears up, and his mild, lovin' eyes lookin' wonderin'ly at his master. Up goes the six-gun in Bill's hand. *Whang!* she goes. The top joint o' the stovepipe that answered for a chimney to the cabin come clatterin' down.

"Don't, Bill! Please don't!" moans George Peck, crouchin' lower behind his tree. 'You can't hit him, Bill. You'll likely hit somebody for whom you have high regard.'

"I never knew a man to use such careful grammar as George when he was scared.

"Can hit him!" yelled Bill; and up comes the gun again, and *Whango!* she goes!

"The bullet clips the leaves off o' George's tree, and, with a yell, away ducks George for the forest.

"Ungrateful beast!" says Bill, and brings the gun in action again.

"Say," I yells, 'tell me what you're shootin' at and I'll show it to you!'

"I'm goin' to kill that unnatural burro," says Bill, sightin' carefully. 'Ungrateful brute! After all I've done for him, the darned beachcomber! After all I've suffered, the infernal ingrate! After the nights o' misery I've put up with, without a word o' complaint—the doggoned stew-bum! What does he do, the darned,

heinous—er—parvenu! Sticks his ungrateful head in the window, when I ain't lookin', and eats all the Jordan almon's, sixty cents the pound except in the far West, out of my fish!' *Bang! Bang!*

"A window went out in the dynamo shack. I changed my position to behind a big tree, where I could see better. Still Sweetheart stood and gazed in wonderment, and carefully masticated the last of those imported almonds. Bill begun to cry. Again he pulled the trigger. The gun was empty. Then, with a yell o' despair, Bill threw the gun away, grabbed up a rock, and went for the donk primeval like.

"Sweetheart savvies this kinda warfare, all right, and away he ran. Bill after him. Every time Bill fell down he picked up a rock, and when he got on his feet again he let her fly at Sweetheart. But he never hit anything but the landscape.

"The burro ran straight for the works. Just as he reached the edge o' the cut he swerved off to the right. And just at this instant Bill fired a big stone.

"Then come a big boom from away down the cut. The earth vomited dirt and stones. A big shot had been fired. The rock Bill had thrown didn't curve with the burro, but went off over the edge o' the cut; and she clattered down among a bunch o' Hooligans who were hidin' there till the shot's over.

"Now, as I said before, these Hooligans are deathly afraid of a shot. They'll get as far away from it as the boss'll let 'em. Not long before, a practical joker had conceived the idea o' hidin' above where they were crouchin' when a shot was fired, and rollin' stones down to scare 'em. They'd caught him at it, and the whole bunch had gone after him. The kid got excited, pulled a gun, and bored one of 'em straight through the liver. They'd run from the gun at first, givin' him time to make his getaway; but later they all quit work and went huntin' him. They'd 'a' lynched him if they'd got their hands on him, but he was gone ahorseback for Canada before they got unlimbered.

"And now Bill's rock went bouncin' down among a bunch of 'em just as the big shot went off. And up the rocks they come like pirates up the side of a ship—six-

footers, every one of 'em. And they were after Bill.

"Well, Bill saw 'em comin', and he was just sober enough to remember the fracas with the kid. And he was sober enough, too, to say to himself: 'Guess I'll just move off into the woods till this thing blows over.' And he moved for the woods in a kind of a long amblin' gallop, like a coyote that's stayed out till the sun begins to peep over the hill. After him went rocks and Hooligans and Hooligan imprecations, but Bill got on some mighty praiseworthy momentum, and he was several lengths in the lead when he vanished among the trees.

"Well, I run out and grabbed the Austrian giant who did the interpretatin' for the bunch. I pulled him down so's my voice would reach his ears, and by certain signs, words, gestures, and facial convolutions made him savvy that Bill was pifflicated and the whole thing was a mistake. So he called off the gang; and when they'd quieted down me and George Peck went huntin' Bill.

"We spent the whole afternoon, till time for one or the other of us to go on shift, searchin' for that depraved person. But no sight nor sound of him could we get. We hurried through the big woods and yelled and whooped, and turned over logs and looked under ledges o' rock. The forest had just naturally swallowed our Bill.

"He'll go to sleep somewhere and sober up," says George. "Then he'll know we've squared the thing with the shovel-stiffs, and'll come sneakin' in. Let's go eat that excavated salmon."

"Where's Sweetheart?" I says, as we reached the cabin.

"Search me," says George Peck. "I ain't seen him since he run into the trees, just before the Austrian army crossed the Styx."

"Better take that shirt o' yours off the line," I says. "He'll likely be moseyin' in in the middle o' the night."

"But Sweetheart didn't mosey in that night, and neither did Bill Hadley. Noon come next day, and dusk, and still neither of them had appeared. O' course George and me didn't give a whoop about the donk, for he was in the habit o' pulling off scientific expeditions after herbs, and

might be gone several days. But we worried about Bill Hadley. It was a mighty easy matter to get lost in that big forest, and the nights were mighty crimpy.

"So we went down to the main camp and organized a search party. All one Sunday some fifty odd white men hunted the woods for Bill. We didn't find hide nor hair of him. But two fellows said they'd seen Sweetheart eatin' huckleberries and things, though they couldn't get near him.

"When I tell you that exactly seven days passed and no Bill, you won't wonder that George and me begun thinkin' of all the mean things we'd said to him; and how pathetic and irresistible was that twisted smile o' his when he asked to 'borrow' a chew o' tobacco; and how he'd told us in a low voice about his mother and little sister back in Oskaloosa, or Oshkosh, or Osawatomie; and George would sit and look out the window, and his Adam's apple would kind of hop up and down his neck like it couldn't just decide on a comfortable place to settle. The eighth day come—no Bill, no Sweetheart. And George said he just couldn't bear the sight o' the new three-dollar-and-a-half flannel shirt Bill had bought and left hangin' on a nail, so he hung his old one up instead and put Bill's on.

"And the followin', as I afterward learned, is what was happenin' in the meantime:

"After entering the woods Bill had run and run and run, till he fell over a log, lay there to get his breath, and went to sleep. It was plumb night before he woke up, almost froze stiff. He was sure he'd freeze if he stayed there till mornin', even though he built a fire, so he got up and started hikin' back toward the cabin. At least that's what he thought he was doin', but it appears he was goin' in just the opposite direction.

"Well, he went and went and went, and he got nowhere. All night he hiked, and in the mornin' he was in a place that looked like the one he'd started from. So he struck out again and walked all day, and by nightfall he begun to suspect he might be lost.

"From then on it must've been just plain hell. Trampin', starvin', despairin', al-

most crazy with the big solemn, mockin' forest all about. There was nothin' to eat but huckleberries, and he et them till he imagined his skin was turnin' blue. He tried to run down a half-grown rabbit, but I gathered that the proceedin' was endowed with scant success. He threw rocks at birds; but, judging from his marksmanship in the case o' the burro, there must've been no great consternation among the denizens o' the woods. He climbed a tall pine after a squirrel. He was about to grab its tail, when the thing jumped to another tree. On account o' his weakened condition Bill didn't feel quite up to this. So he slid down and cussed the squirrel when it barked at him. And on and on he went, and lost all track o' the days and everything.

"The creeks were going down, and most o' the salmon had hiked back to salt water. And I reckon the young salmon had gone along with their folks. Anyway, Bill couldn't find a single one, young or old. He made a hook out of the clasp of his sock-supporter, cut a pole, and, with twisted grass for a line, tried to catch trout with huckleberries for bait. But the trout would rise to the surface, bat the huckleberry off the hook with their tails, make a face at Bill, and go on about their household duties. Bill was starvin'!

"Then one day as he was lookin' into a pool o' water for trout a great big salmon, weighin' twenty-five pounds or more, dashed out from under an overhangin' tree and sprinkled Bill all over with a flap of his tail. He was the last survivor o' the homeseekers' excursion that had come up durin' high water. He was land-locked in that pool, with a shallow riffle above it and another below. And Bill decided that, if he could out-manuever that fish, he'd finish his interrupted Thanksgivin' dinner.

"The pool was about four feet deep, and maybe forty feet across each way. There was little chance to get that fish but to lay violent hands on him. Bill crept along the overhangin' tree, then tossed pebbles to drive the fish his way. And pretty soon here he come, slippin' along like a submarine, in the shadow o' the log.

"Bill reached down, tremblin' and miserable for fear he'd lose him, and made a grab.

"He got the fish round the middle. But he might as well tried to hold greased lightnin'. With a slippery, slappery flop away went the salmon, almost drowndin' Bill with the spray he kicked up behind him.

"Bill maneuvered again and again. Three times he laid hands on that fish, and tried to sink his fingers into its flesh. But always it slipped away from him, and left him weaker and almost sobbin' with despair.

"Then Bill Hadley got mad. The water was cold as ice, but he stripped off his clothes and in he waded after that land-locked salmon. He had a club, and he was never in his life so mad at a fish as then.

"Around and around that pool they churned, Bill in the icy water up to his elbows. It was a battle royal. Each of 'em was fightin' for his life. Every time Bill wielded the club the fish would be too far under water, and the blow would lose its kick. Bill was gettin' weaker and weaker and madder and madder, and was consequently losin' force. But he wouldn't give up till he dropped. He'd run that fish to death if nothin' else. And the fish seemed to be workin' on the 'Sir-I've-just-begun-to-fight,' idea himself.

"Now and then Bill would lose him. Then he'd sneak about till, all of a sudden, the fish would dart from somewhere and hand Bill a wallop with his tail. Bill's legs and arms were gettin' numb; he was chillin' to the bone. And still he seemed no nearer to capturin' his dinner than at the start.

"Then Bill cornered the son of a gun under a submerged ledge o' rock. Out dived the salmon, scared to death, right between Bill's outspread legs. Bill tried to dive between his legs after it, and he lit on his head on the rock bottom o' the pool.

"When he come up he was dazed a bit, and hardly knew where he was. Then he heard a terrific splashin' down below. He looked.

"That salmon had just naturally seen the fix Bill was in when he was standin' on his head, and he'd said to himself, 'Me for gettin' out of this pool while his head's under water.' And he was in the shallow riffle below, floppin' his way over the stones to a bigger pool adjoinin', where he'd be absolutely safe in water twelve feet deep.

"But Bill took all this in at a glance. If the fish managed to cross that riffle and get to the pool below all was lost. 'Curfew shall not ring to-night!' yells Bill. 'All hands up anchor!' And he grabs his club and churns after his prey.

"He couldn't run fast in the deep water, and the fish, floppin' along over the stones, was gainin' on him. The salmon was within three feet o' the deep pool when Bill raced clear o' the little pool and into the riffle. Now Bill gained, but the fish had only his length to go. He struck a big rock!—the fish did—and begun floppin' up and down to get over it. And over he goes, just as Bill reached out to lam him with the club.

"Bill misses—lost his club. He fell flat. The fish wriggled half his body into the water. Then, with a yell, up come Bill, dived through the air, and fell on top o' the salmon.

"He threw both arms about it, and the fight begun, with the fish ten inches from life and liberty.

"Bill was naked, you remember, and that was the slipperest fish he ever wrassled with. It was half as big as Bill was, and strong as an ox. Pretty soon Bill's body was as slippery as the fish's. They wrassled about, Bill tryin' to get a half-Nelson, the salmon tryin' to slip into the big pool, and slappin' Bill with his big broad tail.

"Three times Bill threw that fish away from the water's edge; three times, in spite of him, that fish wriggled and flooped himself back. Bill rolled on him and tried to squash him, but he was tough as leather. Then Bill's head hit a rock, and it kinda stuns him again. And light come back to him just as the salmon's twistin' the last half of his body into the pool. Bill dived on him and threw him back. His hand accidentally clutched a rock under water, about the size of a great big spud. And when Bill come back at that fish the rock was in his hand. And he laughed long and loud and wild; and he soaked that leviathan right between his two goggle eyes and soaked him again, and soaked him again, and laughed and yelled, and fell over in a faint.

"From this on Bill was kind of nutty, it seems. He didn't remember comin' to, nor puttin' on his clothes. Seems that the

first thing he recalls is the cracklin' o' the fire he'd built and the smell o' the broilin' fish. But he remembered stickin' his face into that pink flesh, and keepin' it there till his stomach yelled, 'Hold! Enough!'

"And then, all of a sudden, a soft, mouse-colored nose came pokin' over Bill's shoulder. There come a familiar sob in his ears, and a pink-tongue handed him a larrup alongside the cheek. And Bill got fumes in his nose like invoice day in the storehouse o' the Owl Drug Company. And—now, Bill told me this himself, layin' on the bed in the cabin, kind of nutty, I guess—Bill said that burro spoke to him just like the ass did to Baalam. And he says: 'Hello, there, Bill! I was prospectin' for herbs about two miles away, when I smelled that salmon cookin'. Say, Bill, got any Jordan-almond stuffin' in it?'

"You can't prove anything by me—I'm just tellin' you what Bill said.

"And Bill Hadley he begun to weep. And he threw his arms about Sweetheart's neck and scrambled aboard. And he didn't know nothin' but to hold on tight till me and George dragged him off at the cabin door."

The Saddle Tramp ceased whittling and looked up at the gathering clouds. "She's sure comin'," he remarked. "Better stick here with me to-night."

"And what became of Sweetheart?" I asked irrelevantly.

As irrelevantly the Saddle Tramp replied: "That there Bill Hadley just went clean to the bad. Got to be quite a figger in the world, got married, had kids, and amassed a lot o' high ideals. A big American electrical company sent him to Spain about five years ago, in sole charge o' their outfit there. He shipped that blamed burro over there! Let on like his kids were so attached to him he couldn't bear to separate 'em. But I notice he had his choice o' goin' to Honolulu, South America, or Spain, an' he chose Spain. D'ye know why? Well Jordan almonds don't come from the Jordan River, as I'd always supposed. They come from a place called Malaga, in Spain. Over here, as Bill informed us they're sixty cents the pound at all confectioners, except in the far West. But I'd like to try 'em stuffed in a salmon just once."

WAX TO RETAIN

By G. COURT

Author of "An Alibi For Love," "Five Frozen Notes of Interrogation," etc.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE CAREER OF G. HARRINGTON GALE, THE BARRISTER-DETECTIVE FINDS HIMSELF AT THE SCENE OF A CRIME AT THE VERY MOMENT OF ITS PERPETRATION. A THUNDER STORM IN THE NIGHT AND THE ILLNESS OF A SERVANT IN THE MORNING FURNISH THE BASIS FOR HIS DEDUCTIONS AND HIS KNOWLEDGE OF COURT RECORDS DOES THE REST

A BEDROOM door closed softly; a faint smell of clover remained and two men, pyjama-clad, faced each other in the silence of the moonlit passage. A hall clock struck three. Instinctively they both moved without a sound to the head of the big staircase. Through the open window opposite came the lullaby of the Atlantic breathing its summer message of sleep. Away in the distance "Trevoze Lighthouse," the tireless sentinel of Cornwall's granite cliffs, winked its ceaseless scrutiny.

"There are some things, Durnford," whispered the taller of the two men, "that it is impossible to remember." Reverence and conviction were in his tone—he merely voiced his faith, chivalrous and unquestioning as a cavalier of old who, hand on hilt, repeated his father's creed. He looked straight at his somewhat circular host wondering idly whether the mere enunciation of so patent a truth might not evoke a caustic reply. It was as bad as saying to an adversary at cards, "I suppose you don't cheat."

To Macdonald's infinite surprise there came no immediate answer. His host, an unheroic figure, the reputed master of incalculable wealth, stood motionless, gripping the balustrade that circled the well of the hall, his brow furrowed with the crisis of infinite decision. Then he turned, his arms folded across his chest. An obsequious debtor had once told him of his likeness to Napoleon. He had sold the man up but the glory of it became a permanent asset.

"There are some things, Macdonald," the words seemed like a faint ironic echo, not unfringed with danger, "which it is

impossible to forget. Will you get a dressing gown and come down to my study?"

"Now?" The cry of amazed incredulity was dangerously loud. "Why it's three o'clock in the morning and we start for that Falmouth picnic at ten."

"Now," came the deliberate reply. "Is an hour's sleep more important than a girl's good name? Hush!" he said warningly as the sound of an electric switch turned on in a room near by showed that some one was awake, "wait till we get downstairs. Follow me as soon as you can," and Durnford turned away admitting no further argument.

Frank Macdonald walked slowly to his room—almost too amazed to think, wondering whether the laws of hospitality should outweigh his chivalrous instinct to kill his host at three in the morning. Anyhow it would not be fair. He had kept in hard training ever since he had played Rugby football for England six years ago. His host was the wrong side of forty and had taken to knickerbockers late in life.

He flung on a dressing gown and crept like a burglar along the creaking passage—pausing for a moment outside Charlie Burlington's door, whence the click of the electric switch had come. All was still there—then he stole down the broad stairs, graced with the antlered heads of splendid beasts his host could never name—through the hall and along the passage that led up to Durnford's study above the garage. Whiskey, brandy and siphons were on the table and a few sandwiches. It was only three or four hours since all the party had gathered there for a happy good night. Harrington Gale, the celebrated

barrister, had been in tremendous form—the eternal question had been raised as to whether Counsel is justified in defending a man he believes to be guilty—the ladies had all argued in favor of the voice of conscience, the men all wanted the criminal to have a run for his money. Gale who frequently got the money and enabled the criminal to run pointed out that if the prosecution used black paint and he used white, the jury could be left to decide the actual tint of gray that distinguished the halo the prisoner should wear.

It was a change to find Durnford sitting there alone—at his big table—an overcoat over his shoulders, a rug round his feet; and Macdonald's wholesome soul despised the oval outline of this ill-bred little man who lived apparently to barter his wealth for the vicarious glory of social advertisement, heralding him as the host of others less obscure than himself. Any serious reason for this conclave he entirely failed to grasp. To his mind the incident upstairs was over—shrouded forever behind the golden veil of reticence. He could only imagine that his host craved for himself one dramatic moment in a social life of inherent insignificance.

He dropped into an easy chair—mixed a whiskey and soda—annexed a couple of sandwiches from which the suppleness of youth had departed and prepared to play any part allotted to him as rapidly as politeness would permit.

"An awkward contretemps," said Durnford with a sneer. The words were slow and measured.

"Rot," was the laconic answer.

"You do not seem to appreciate the situation. Miss Carr is staying in my house as my sister's guest. I find her at three in the morning knocking at your bedroom door—you open the door to her."

Macdonald felt as if he were part of a play. He knew if he were on the stage he ought to get furious at the mention of Marion's name and hiss something through clenched teeth, but it was all too unreal and theatrical to take seriously. He was almost amazed to see the change in Durnford. Up to now he had been nothing but a smiling and obsequious host—to-night he had the stern face of a relentless tyrant—

the iron line of his mouth in repose looked quite grim.

"If I thought you were serious," Macdonald answered lazily, "I should kill you."

Durnford just checked a smile. His fortune had been built up on the motto, "Silence is golden." His victims found the gold and he had kept silence. He had listened to more than one threat of murder wholly unmoved, cynically confident that the weakness that pays and the strength that kills are strangers the one to the other—but, even so, he seldom went unarmed, though no one guessed it. He was conscious that more than one man in England would welcome his death as a relief from intolerable persecution. Macdonald paused a minute before he continued:

"You know as well as I do, she was walking in her sleep. She never spoke or moved her eyes all the time we were taking her back. It's a common thing for girls to do. My sister is never allowed to have the bottom part of her bedroom window open at night for fear of accidents. I'll bet you any money you like Miss Carr appears at breakfast in the morning without a shade of self-consciousness or embarrassment. Come let's chuck this absurd melodrama and go back to bed!"

He rose and stood with his back against the mantelpiece. He thought his host had never looked so unattractive. His large coarse features cried for the saving grace of a white collar. He was clean shaven by day—but not in the early hours of the morning in summer time.

"One moment, please," the voice was cool and almost peremptory, and Macdonald's anger began to rise. Durnford deliberately mixed a brandy and soda, drank off half the contents of the tumbler, and then began in an almost caressing tone.

"By the way, forgive me for asking what might seem to be a personal question. Are you engaged to be married to Miss Carr?"

At any other time, Macdonald would have realized the impertinence of the remark. Now his only thought was to defend her name.

"No, I'm not, though I don't know what the devil it has to do with you. But it won't be my fault if I'm not before this time to—

morrow, and then there will be trouble for some one."

A quick sound—it might have been a sigh of unspeakable relief—escaped Durnford's lips. He finished the tumbler by his side—and braced himself as though for a final effort. "You're a rich man—Macdonald—a very rich man—you have never known the struggles and loneliness of the poor. Such an education to have missed!"

This sudden turn to sanctimonious moralizing puzzled Macdonald completely.

"What in the name of all that's vulgar has that got to do with it?" he cried.

"And I," went on Durnford very slowly and very deliberately, "who saw Miss Carr outside your bedroom door am a poor man, a very poor man."

Macdonald flung himself across the room in about four strides only to see the barrel of a revolver pointing straight at him.

Durnford laughed softly. The situation was piquant in its novelty. He was not playing for gold this time. He had enough and to spare. He was playing for happiness—and if he won he would play no more.

"No personal violence among friends, I implore you," he purred. "It would be so awkward for me to have to shoot you by mistake for a burglar."

Macdonald stopped short—two feet from the table that separated them. He became conscious of real danger—but it was the danger of a fog at sea.

He crushed down the anger that was threatening almost to choke him and forced himself to be calm. "I congratulate you on your hospitality," he said his voice vibrating with scorn. "You are apparently trying for some reason unknown to me to fight a man by attacking a woman. I hope you are proud of it."

Durnford's eyes never dropped—and his voice was gentle—almost pleading—as he answered.

"I'm sorry you use such harsh words—so unsympathetic. It shows such a gap between the rich and the poor. But you know how easy it is for the breath of scandal to get about. It's so untraceable. It just begins to get whispered "Miss Carr! Oh! Yes! Just a lift of the eyebrows—that's all—a hasty interrogation— 'Of

course it couldn't be true?' A cosy chat late at night in utmost secrecy between two women to whom any breach of confidence is better than a breech in the conversation. 'What! found at his door? And such a nice girl, too!'

"'And what does Mr. Macdonald say?' 'Oh! sleep walking.' 'Then he *did* find her!' 'Well. Well, well, of course it's the only thing he could say!' My dear Macdonald—I assure you that if that story once starts, within two months Miss Carr will be having doors shut in her face whether she is in London or the country, and she won't know why, until some kind friend tells her. Kindness under such circumstances is an epidemic."

It was perfectly done—Durnford was a born actor—and ere he had finished he had created a deep and horrible impression. Macdonald felt as if a net were closing round him—as if the fight was not fair—but he never flinched—he flung out his answer without hesitation.

"What rot! I shall ask her to marry me to-morrow and that will stop the mouth of all scandal."

The elder man shook his head—almost in pity it seemed for a difficulty over which he had no control. "Chivalrous! Oh! very chivalrous! But will it stop it? The scandal will begin just the same—the doors will be closed to her but not to you—the kind friends will tell her why—and then—why then Macdonald—she's a proud girl and she'll think you've asked her out of pity. Her pride will be hurt and when she finds social ostracism strangling her joy in life—she will break off the engagement. Her name will be tarnished, your heart will be broken! There will be no place or pleasure in life for either of you again."

Macdonald recognized the devilish ingenuity of the argument. Of course if it came to a choice between his word and Durnford's he might be believed—in any ordinary case. But a girl's name was different. Her birthright was not vindication but a sound-proof shelter. To defend is to decry. But the mystery of Durnford's motive or object baffled him.

"But why the devil should you want to ruin the life of a perfectly innocent girl?"

What have you asked me down here for to-night?"

Durnford gave a little sigh of contentment as he heard these words heralding a bargain. The hard lines left his face and for a moment Macdonald thought he saw tears in his small narrow eyes.

"Don't think too hardly of me, Macdonald; when I said to you that you were rich and I was poor, I was not referring to money. You knew that. I was referring to friends, position, honor."

Macdonald felt that the marvels of this strange interview would never cease. All the offensive note of the man's previous utterances had vanished. It was a genuine plea for understanding by a perpetual under-dog.

"I'm not a gentleman," continued Durnford, "I know it. I had no time to learn manners in the early days. I was too hungry. I've had some success. But money is not everything. I want other successes—social success, lots of people do—but very few are honest enough to own it. I want a big position in England—a London house where I can entertain. I want to meet all the swells—to entertain titled people and to have my dinners reported in the *Morning Post*."

Macdonald shivered at the pathos of this misplaced dream but made no sign and Durnford went on with his strange confession. "I know my only chance of success is marriage. Early this summer I met Miss Carr in London. She is the real thing. Her people are the real thing and have been for hundreds of years. I'm only like an English grass lawn in the making—the very early making. I schemed for weeks to get to know her better—away from all her London surroundings, where I knew I had no chance—I found out that she was coming to Cornwall for the summer to sketch. I arranged for my sister to meet her. I took this house for three months as part of the plot. To my delight Miss Carr and her aunt, Miss Hamilton, accepted my sister's invitation."

The unhealthy looking little man paused and mopped his brow. Macdonald thought of the delicate fastidiousness of the girl he loved, and shivered. Tall and fair—the whispered reincarnation of Greece in the

storied days of Art and eternal youth when beauty was a religion and nature a mystic friend she had come across his path as the answer to all the riddles of existence, the soothing caress to all the loneliness of life. What part or lot could this pathetic freak of a man who spoke to him, expect to have in such love as she might give some day?

"I wish you'd come to the point," he said abruptly. Durnford did not notice the interruption—he mixed another brandy and soda and went on.

"They'd been here a fortnight before you came. If I had known you had met her, I should never have invited you. But Charlie Burlington asked if you might come for a few days—told me you were thinking of taking an interest in one of the China Clay Mines near here. The moment you arrived I saw you were her sort—knew you had stolen in here to be with her—and recognized that I was out of the running. But to-night——" Suddenly the tone changed from the pathetic self-abnegation of a mendicant to the terse command of a man who had been told he looked like Napoleon, "to-night my chance has come and you have got to pay for it—not in money—but in the things in which you are rich and I am poor. You can call me what you like in the secrecy of your own heart, but in public I can close your lips and I will not spare you. No—stand back!" His grip on the revolver had never loosened.

"You've got to listen—and obey."

Macdonald felt that before long he must wake up from a hideous dream—he walked to the window and pulled aside the blind. The grass lawn was green in front of him. The dawn was reddening in the east. He knew that he never dreamed in colors—and braced himself to meet realities.

"You have your car here," continued Durnford sternly, "you will have an early breakfast and leave before the ladies come down. You will be out of England in forty-eight hours and swear to me on your honor that you will neither see nor write nor communicate with Miss Carr in any way for twelve months. If by that time Miss Carr is my wife—we are quits—you and I. If she is not my wife—you are free to do what you will. My power over you will be gone—even so piquant a story as the one we

have been discussing would be powerless to hurt her when it was a year old."

Macdonald walked over to the big study table at which Durnford was sitting.

"And if I refuse?" he asked quite quietly.

"Then the untraced voice of scandal will follow her and poison her life and yours. Accept my terms and some day you may be happy with her. Refuse and her happiness is a dead letter for all time."

Macdonald grew pale as he listened to this hideous revelation of subtle villainy. He could not see any escape. All he desired was time to think. His soul yearned for the satisfaction of personal violence—but the barrel of the revolver still pointed at him.

"Look here," he said—"we are off on that picnic at ten o'clock to Falmouth. I want time to think. If I answer now I shall refuse—let me give you my answer tomorrow night. In the meantime you have my word of honor that I will say no word to Miss Carr that can alter the present situation."

"I accept it," came the unexpected answer, "accept it without demur and—" there was a little break in his voice as he went on. "I would sell my soul if you could take my word of—" he hesitated for a fraction of a second—"my word of honor in the same easy way. Don't think too hard of me, Macdonald. You have never known what loneliness means. Good-night."

Macdonald left him without a word and a few minutes later was standing by his open window revelling in the cool morning breeze. Below him—at the foot of the granite cliffs—the Atlantic was whispering to the dawn. He had looked on it all before with love and hope strong within him. An hour had changed his life and robbed him of his youth.

There was little rest for him in the few hours left of the night and he was dozing but fitfully, when Gale thrust his head in at the door, threw a saffron bun at him and shouted "Bathe." He slipped into his bathing kit, flung a dressing gown round him and went downstairs. Gale and his satellite Danvers—were already on the terrace talking to Charlie Burlington. A minute later came Marion Carr, clad in a

fascinating Japanese kimono—Macdonald watched her carefully. She walked toward them smiling—the very incarnation of the morning—delicately sure of herself—ignorant of challenge—her whole being unconsciously eloquent of the conviction that chivalry lived to protect her. A cliff path led them down to the beach—they walked a few yards on the soft white sand untouched by any tide and then reached the firm hard sand down which they ran to find a merry party from the neighboring houses waiting them at the water's edge. Half a dozen children raised a shout of delight when they saw Gale coming. Many a man who had suffered the tortures of the lost at the hands of the great cross-examiner would have gazed in speechless wonder at the sight of him leading a riotous rush of small boys and girls into the sea. He had been there only a week—but no bathing party was complete without him.

Macdonald felt refreshed by his dip, and walked up with Marion. Burlington followed alone at a discreet distance. Gale and Danvers stayed in longer and brought up the rear-guard.

"I understand," said Gale, "that we motor this morning some fourteen miles to Truro and then go on the river to Falmouth. I shall be interested to see how mine host divides the party. There will be eight of us and two cars. The apple of discord is in front of us. The rest of us don't matter."

"I bet you half a crown," answered Danvers, pausing to light the best cigarette in the day, "that Macdonald wins out in the end—but I expect Durnford will take her to-day with Auntie and his sisters, and we shall have a bachelor party with Macdonald and Charlie Burlington."

Gale nodded. "I expect you are right. If Burlington can drive as well as he can carve, he ought to be an artist."

Every one in the house party had been interested in Burlington's work. He was carving a wonderful Oriental mantelpiece for Durnford's town house. Nobody quite knew what his position was. Rumor harped back to an expensive cavalry regiment and equivalent wealth—but these seemed—both of them—to be nothing but fast fading memories. He had lived with Durnford for some time and it was under-

stood that he was not working for the love of it. He spent hours a day in the long colonnade at the north of the house, fashioning weird Indian devils and as Gale and Danvers reached the house, he called to them cheerily to come and view his latest monstrosity. He always gave Gale the impression of hidden trouble beneath an air of fostered gaiety.

The motor party started out as Danvers had prophesied and Macdonald felt a sense of relief that it was so. He had no mind to talk. The hours were pregnant with Fate and the problem he had to solve was insoluble.

It was not till late in the afternoon that he found himself alone with Marion. The party had landed for tea at one of the picturesque spots on the bank of the Fal and he and she had wandered together down a leafy pathway between high over-arching trees. She noticed that he was absent minded and far away and wondered whether he would come to her for help. They had passed long ago from the outer court of acquaintance, where conversation must be unflagging, to the inner shrine of friendship where silence speaks—but today the line of communication seemed broken—the harmony of silence jarred by some half whispered discord.

She had known him just a year and he had interested her—he was so alive—so original and yet so simple and unspoiled. She had met so many men who looked on themselves as conferring a favor on life by living it, bored by its pleasures and grumbling at its pains. She had found Frank Macdonald refreshing and enthusiastic. They had often come across one another in London and had stayed once or twice at the same houses for week ends—and she frankly liked this big clean shaven man. His mouth was so strong and his eyes were so merry. They had drifted into an easy friendship. But in London no thought of love had come to her. She had many men friends. Their interests were broader than a woman's. They were also useful and she had no brothers. But to them all she gave the frank camaraderie she craved in return and so seldom found. Every proposal came to her rather as a shock.

The distance between her and Macdonald had certainly not lessened during the week they had spent together in Durnford's house by the sea—but she had taken each summer day of sunshine as it came, refusing to waste one moment in trying to analyze her feelings—or his. She did not even admit that it was wise to avoid analysis. She just avoided it.

They came to a stile—a Cornish stile—just three stone slabs a foot apart jammed into the wall on each side like a sloping ladder. He turned to help her over and as he looked up at her, she saw the blind misery in his eyes. That moment bridged for her the chasm of a woman's eternal fear—the gift of a love unasked—and she knew what her answer would be.

He stood there trembling. Never had he desired her more. For a moment the tender chivalry of his love that bade him stoop to touch the hem of her garment was forgotten—the barbaric savage in him yearned to seize her and crush the life out of her with hot burning kisses—kisses taken by favor it might be, but taken anyhow.

And then came the chilling memory of his word of honor. Was he after all bound by his oath given under such circumstances? Could Durnford hurt her if he broke it? He doubted the first and was sure of the second.

"I want to say something to you this afternoon," he said gently—but his voice was shaking—"it is not easy."

"Shall we sit down here?"

She felt her breath come and go—she could help him—but woman-like she wanted to see him win through alone.

"Things are not always easy," he began slowly as if finding a difficulty in choosing his words; "I think we start out in life facing a big mountain up which lies a hard path. As we grow to manhood, something points out to us far up the mountain a wondrous marble pillar—we can see its shining whiteness from afar. To each man is given the hammer and the chisel of the sculptor and he is told that imprisoned in that marble pillar, stands a perfect woman, awaiting his releasing hand."

Marion had never heard him speak like this before. The intense halting utterances—like slow-swinging iron gates never un-

barred till now—filled her with a feeling of mystery and reverence.

Then he went on—his voice—torn by emotion beyond his control.

"Sometimes a man stays to rest—sometimes he wanders to the right or left of the winding path that leads him upward—but there are some who neither stay nor wander. To them the inspiration of life is the search for that mystic white spirit of the mountain side, waiting in its marble purity until they come. For them life has no other meaning."

He paused a moment. She could not speak or move—the wonder of the world was flooding her soul. "I knew one such," he almost whispered; "he climbed long and alone—the path turned and twisted as it wound its way up to the mountain—but his eyes were ever gazing upward. At last he saw the miracle of his dream growing near. Another turn in the path and he could call on the snow white marble to yield its secret. He turned the last corner, and the pillar of his dreams stood revealed. But some Greater Hand had been at work before him. The marble pillar was a Cross—and over the Cross was a scroll—on which was carved one word."

"What was it?" she cried breathlessly against her wish.

"Renunciation," came the sad sorrowful reply. His voice broke as he said it, and his face was white with pain.

There was no mistaking his meaning or the exquisite delicacy of his story. She longed to comfort him and then steal away like a wounded animal to solitude and silence. What it all meant she knew not, nor could she ask. She looked up at him for a moment and their eyes met. Then she bowed her head and he dreamed he heard a whisper "God be with you" in the silence. Not another word passed his lips or hers as they walked back to join the merry picnic party.

No one was up next day in time for a bathe before breakfast. The Falmouth expedition had been a tiring one and a violent thunderstorm in the middle of the night had baffled the soundest sleeper and every one had wakened in the morning rather jaded and weary. But in one room

of the house there was no awakening. Huddled on the floor of Durnford's study lay something dreadful and alone. Death may be peaceful and dignified, full of a great Hope and a splendid revelation. But a violent Death—uncared for and unkempt—partakes of the indecent and obscene. Durnford—the pathetic master of infinite wealth—lay there crumpled as he had fallen—three cruel wounds in his side—a dark pool beneath him. A revolver lay on the table, but no cartridges had been fired.

Away at the other side of the house, ignorant of tragedy, Danvers and Gale were breakfasting. Neither of them had slept well, but the sunlit room, the sight of fresh mackerel and Cornish cream revived them.

Danvers carefully shut the door and placed half a crown in front of Gale.

"Much obliged," said Gale, pocketing the coin, "but why?"

"I'm no longer an expert on lovers," he answered regretfully.

"I bet you yesterday half a crown Macdonald would win the apple of discord. He won't."

"How the deuce do you know?"

"Macdonald left in his car at one o'clock this morning. I was fast asleep but was awakened by the sound of a car. I peeped out and saw Macdonald driving away. Then I remembered my half crown."

Gale strolled over to the sideboard to get a second helping of mackerel.

"Was it before or after the storm?"

"Before—bad luck on Mac being out in it. I could not get to sleep and so I switched my light on to read and then in five minutes there came a thumping great clap of thunder and my light went out. I guess the wires fused."

There was the sound of hurried footsteps and the footman burst in white and trembling.

"Please come at once, sir; something awful has happened."

Both men were on their feet in a moment, and, as they were taken to the study, were told how the body had been discovered by the electrician who had been sent to get the wires right—the whole lighting apparatus of the house having been put out of order by the storm.

Gale and Danvers had never before been at the actual scene of a crime. In working out defences they had reconstructed together many a murder from the information of others—but this first-hand experience was something new. Danvers watched Gale with intense interest—in spite of the gruesomeness of the tragedy. He saw his face go hard and stern and Danvers realized that he would see him cross-examining not witnesses but facts.

Gale took in the scene with one comprehensive glance—pulled up the blinds and sent the footman to tell Burlington. He seemed to Danvers to be oblivious of the personal side of the matter. The horror of death—the tragedy of the man who had been his host—went for nothing—he was a brain on fire for truth.

“Look here, Danvers,” he said the moment the footman had gone, “the one essential is that nothing should be disturbed till the police have been here. Remember I suspect no one—I imagine nothing. I can only tell you I saw a revolver in Durnford’s hip pocket yesterday afternoon as I climbed that cliff ladder just underneath him. It is an unusual precaution in the country, unless a man has enemies, possibly, not very far off. Anyhow you or I must remain in this room—just as a precaution.”

He had barely finished the low spoken words when Burlington dashed in without coat or collar.

“Good God,” he exclaimed, “how ghastly!”

Brandy and soda were on the table and he poured out a full measure and drank it neat. He went over and looked at the dead man lying in the sunshine. The face was distorted and horrible. He shivered and turned away.

“I’ll just go and finish dressing,” he said brokenly, “the police will be here in a minute,” and with bowed head he went out.

Gale meantime was wandering round the room—his hands behind his back—his fingers locking and unlocking in ceaseless motion. Danvers had noticed the same thing in Court often enough. It implied a desperate struggle for light. Suddenly Gale’s hands became quite still and he called quietly to Danvers. Gale was standing opposite the fireplace. On the mantel-

piece were two very heavy candelabra of old Sheffield plate—each holding two candles. Only one candle had been lighted and the wick had burned down about a quarter of an inch before it had been blown out.

The sound of voices in the passage caused both men to turn quickly round before a word had been spoken and Burlington entered with a plain clothes inspector of police and a doctor.

The inspector was a tall lean man with keen piercing black eyes beneath bushy brows. Having been successful in a few matters of local crime—he believed in himself as a sleuth hound of abnormal intelligence.

This murder was the first affair of importance since his appointment, and he greatly desired a monopoly of fame and credit. He was ready to share the glory of success with no man. He recognized Gale immediately as the man who had cross-examined him once at the Bodmin Assizes, and had shown him up as having acted with a zeal that had considerably outrun discretion. The inspector’s vanity had been badly hurt at the time, and he was more than ready now if the chance came to put Gale in his place.

They all walked across to where Durnford lay. The doctor knelt beside him and gently lifted his head. The nose was broken and a slight redness showed on the back of the head. The left side of the body was soaked in blood, and three jagged tears in the left hand side of the dinner jacket showed where blows had been struck with some sharp instrument. The Doctor rose to his feet. “Death, I think, was instantaneous. Each of those blows is of extraordinary severity. They were struck by a left handed man.”

“Tell us why?” said the inspector patronizingly, as if giving an inferior intellect a kindly opportunity to shine. The Doctor moved toward the table.

“Let me show you—what must have happened,” he said, taking hold of the study chair.

“See, I sit here in this chair, with just comfortable room between me and the table. Now what is the first thing that takes place? The nose is broken. There

is a stain on the table showing where his nose struck it. You can trace the effusion of blood right away from that place on the table to where he fell. Now there must have been force to cause the nose to break. You find on examination a bruise on the back of the neck, showing plainly that a hand seized him there and pushed his head violently down. Now where are the blows on the body? Why! on the left hand side. A right-handed man would undoubtedly hold the dagger in his right hand to make sure of a strong blow—using his left hand to force his victim's head down. He would strike on the right-hand side. Only a left-handed man would strike on the left side. So your search, Inspector, is narrowed down to the quest of a left-handed man."

Gale listened with admiration to the clear cut and lucid explanation of the young doctor, and asked him, just before he left on an urgent telephone call, for his name and address. A man who can combine medical knowledge with deductive reasoning is a valuable asset.

The inspector nodded a somewhat patronizing farewell to the doctor and turned to Burlington.

"Would you kindly tell me," he said, "who were staying in the house last night?"

Burlington gave a list including Macdonald's name.

Gale refrained from looking at Danvers but pondered. Apparently Macdonald had said no farewell then to Burlington.

"And are all these people in the house now?" continued the inspector.

Gale could not be sure whether there was an infinitesimal pause before Burlington answered "yes—all of them—as far as I know."

Gale remarked quietly:

"Mr. Macdonald went away in his car about one in the morning."

He was quite conscious of the dangerous shadow his words must cast. A provincial detective in pursuit of a clue is like a morphomaniac. He won't be happy till he gets it.

Danvers chimed in and told what he had seen, and for a moment there was a tense silence. Had Gale been in the inspector's place, he would have asked whether Mac-

donald was left-handed—but he realized that all minds do not work alike when he heard the next question.

"When did you last speak with him, Mr. Danvers?"

"Oh, about eleven o'clock. Mr. Gale and I went up to bed at the same time and said good night to Mr. Macdonald on the stairs."

"And you, Mr. Burlington?" said the inspector.

Gale had no doubt of the hesitation now. Burlington looked at the floor and his brow was wrinkled with thought.

"I saw him about 11.30." The answer was given with evident reluctance.

"Where?" snapped the inspector. He only wished he was cross-examining Gale.

"In my bedroom."

"And did he bid you good-bye then?"

"No—no—he bade me good-night."

It was obvious to everyone that Burlington was not being frank. Gale was sitting well back in an arm chair with his eyes half closed. He had chosen a chair where his face would be in the shadow. Not a word or intonation escaped him.

"Where was his room?" said the inspector.

"Next to mine with a bathroom between."

"Which door did he leave by?"

Burlington tapped once or twice on the floor with his foot before he answered.

"The door into the passage."

"Did you hear him go to his room?"

"No."

"Did you hear him again in his room?"

Burlington shook his head. To the inspector the horror of the dead thing was forgotten. His power as a cross-examiner was being vindicated at last. Gale shook himself up from his reclining position and leaned forward his chin on his hand.

"What did he talk to you about?"

"Oh, general topics."

The inspector rose from his chair and stood with his back to the fireplace. Then he said rather sharply, jutting his chin a little forward:

"Was Mr. Durnford's name mentioned between you?"

Burlington went over to the side table and mixed another brandy and soda.

"Yes," he said, "it was, but it can have nothing to do with this case, and as it concerns a lady's name, I must refuse any information at all. You surely are not going to be so absurd as to connect Mr. Macdonald with this murder simply because he went away a little unexpectedly in his car?"

"Mr. Burlington," said the inspector almost bursting with authority, "it would take very little for a warrant now to issue against Mr. Macdonald. The only way to avoid it is to give some reason for his departure.

Gale had foreseen the likelihood of this step for some time—but he felt his pulse quicken as he heard the actual words. The use of the cheery phrase "Go and be hanged" to one's intimates would have to be limited if this sort of thing happened often. His eyes wandered to the candelabra and his mind was full of doubt. Of course, normally, Macdonald would be incapable of murder—but where a girl's name was involved, nothing was impossible.

"Well," said Burlington angrily, "I'll explain but only to avoid the absurdity of an arrest. It appears that Macdonald and Durnford both wanted to marry Miss Carr, a girl staying in the house. Last night Macdonald told me an extraordinary tale. The night before Durnford had found Miss Carr outside Macdonald's door. She was walking in her sleep. After they had seen her to her room they had a few heated words on the landing. I heard them talking. The only words I heard were 'A girl's good name.' I switched on my light meaning to go out and tell them to be quiet but they went away. Apparently they had an interview in Durnford's study in which Durnford told Macdonald he must clear out for a year or the breath of scandal should touch Miss Carr's name. Durnford gave him twenty-four hours in which to decide. Macdonald came to consult me. I'd known him for years. Unfortunately during the day I in utter innocence had made things more difficult. Durnford had asked me if I had heard them outside my room and I said I had. He asked me what I'd heard—I said 'A girl's good name.' He told me to keep silence; I answered that I knew nothing and should remember less.

But when Macdonald spoke to me I saw Durnford's ingenuity. If the scandal ever did start, here was I an independent witness who had admitted hearing a discussion about a girl. It's flimsy enough—but you know what scandal is! I advised Macdonald to accept Durnford's terms and go, and there you have it. And I take it that's a sufficient answer to your question."

The impression the story made on his listeners was profound. Gale, refusing to make any deductions until certain facts were ascertained, realized the adequacy of the motive and the stress of circumstances rendering murder almost justifiable. He had noticed how silent Macdonald had been the day before and had put it down to a healthy attack of love. He only wished he had been consulted. The inspector with prophetic eye, was already seeing columns about his sagacity in the *Western Morning News*. But he had one more link to forge.

"Was Macdonald left-handed?" He asked the question generally and every one denied any knowledge.

The inspector shut up his book with a snap and put it in his pocket.

"I must go and speak to my man in the car outside," he said rather pompously. "I shall return here in a moment. Perhaps one of you gentlemen would show me the way."

Gale nodded to Danvers to stay behind and walked with Burlington and the inspector toward the hall. As they entered it he saw Marion seated in a big chair, reading. In the silent watches of the sleepless night she had made up her mind to clear things up between her and Macdonald. His love for her was obvious. She knew the strength of her answer.

Nothing could be worse than the unsolved mystery. Any burden—even the horror of some boyish entanglement—complicated by marriage—would be lighter if they could share it. And then when the horror of the morning met her she craved his presence all the more. She imagined he was with the other men in the study—and she was waiting in the hall now pretending to read, conscious of an agonized hunger—never even dreamed of before—a hunger just to see him—to look into his blue eyes and hear the tones of his voice

smothering the tenderness he could not control.

She looked up and to her disappointment saw a stranger with Gale and Burlington. They stopped a moment by the outer door behind which innumerable golf bags were piled. Lying in front of the heap was a leather bag on which was printed "F. MacD."

The unknown man pointed at the bag. "Is that Mr. Macdonald's?" he asked.

Marion, glad to take part in anything that brought her in touch with him, joined the group. The stranger looked the sort of person one could talk to without an introduction. "Yes, those are his," she answered. Her nerves were strained and she was not thinking very clearly. And yet surely he could not have sent for his clubs to-day!

The inspector took a club from the bag, then another and yet a third and handled them with the loving care of an expert.

"A left-handed player, I see," he remarked quickly, replacing the clubs.

"Oh, yes," Marion answered, "of course he is."

And then the strange man seemed to lose interest and sprang in to the waiting car and was off in a moment.

Gale, in no mood for conversation leading into endless by-paths of explanation, wandered off apparently without much aim or object, leaving Marion to the tender mercies of Burlington.

A few minutes later he was back in the study.

"Hello! Where's the inspector?" said Danvers shutting the door.

"You may well ask—he ought never to have left this room unlocked—but he has dashed off on a wrong trail, I fancy—before I had a chance to make one or two inquiries or to offer one or two suggestions. I doubt if he would have listened, though. I have found out two things since he went. All the men working in and about the house are supposed to be right-handed and no fresh candles have been put in the candelabra since Durnford took over the house. The candles are dusted every day but not this morning as a domestic called Polly was ill."

And then Gale did a strange thing—he walked up to the mantelpiece and drove the

small blade of his knife very carefully into the very lowest visible part of the one candle that had been lighted, lifted it by the knife out of the candelabra and snapped round its base a candle shade holder—of the type that opens and shuts—and elevated the brass circle that generally holds the candle shade so that it extended beyond the length of the candle. Then with Danvers's help he bound some light tissue paper round the whole thing from the brass circle downward so that the candle was completely concealed from view and yet was untouched by the paper. He also went over to one of the tall glasses out of which brandy had been drunk and placed a small clean flower pot over it and then turned it upside down touching only the bottom of the glass. Of this combination he made yet another parcel—covering the flower pot and the bottom of the glass with paper so that the contents of the parcel were hidden, and the sides of the glass untouched.

These two parcels he handed to Danvers who had been assisting with obvious intelligence and understanding. "Go and get these done, will you?" said Gale, "I'll get the chauffeur to run you down. And while you are there—don't forget some printer's ink and a piece of flat tin. I think we have got everything else."

Danvers nodded and a few minutes later was off in the car, holding his precious parcels as if they were flowers for a bride.

Dinner that night was a gloomy affair. Miss Durnford had besought them all to stay until after the funeral—and they could not well refuse. Marion was the only lady down for dinner but she felt anything was better than the loneliness of her own room. After dinner they were all sitting in the smoking-room—a large room opening out of the hall. Burlington had brought in a small piece of carving to do. Gale and Danvers were talking to Marion, and the talk drifted inevitably toward crime. Presently Danvers went out and returned with a small box which he handed to Gale.

"This might interest you, Miss Carr," said Gale.

She appreciated the kindly effort of this distinguished man to entertain her and was grateful. Burlington walked over and

saw Gale take an ordinary piece of white paper which he pinned down on a drawing board. Then from the little box he took a bottle of printer's ink, a wooden roller about three and a half inches long, over which a piece of rubber tubing had been tightly stretched and a piece of flat tin. He put a little printer's ink on the roller and rolled it up and down the piece of tin until nothing but a thin film of ink remained on the tin. "I don't know, Miss Carr," he said, "whether you believe in palmistry, but it is a remarkable thing how the lines on the top joint of your fingers—that is behind the nails, differ. No two fingers of yours are like each other and no one else in the world has the same markings as you have."

She leaned forward full of interest.

"Let me see," she said. It looked messy but he had worked for her amusement and she would not disappoint him.

He made her sit in front of the inked tin plate and place her right thumb on it as if she were playing the piano, only her nail was at right angles to the plate and faced to her left. Then he made her turn her thumb slowly over the plate till her nail was again at right angles to it only facing the other way—the result being that the whole of the first joint of her thumb behind was covered with ink. Then he took her to where the clean piece of white paper was stretched on a drawing board and made her press her inky thumb on it in the same way as she had done on the plate and the result was a perfect impression of all the markings of her thumb. And thus he did to her other thumb and all her fingers and showed her how not a single one was identical with another. Burlington had watched with interest, asking one or two questions.

Gale marked on the paper Miss Carr's name and identified the different finger marks and then turned to Burlington.

"Let's carry the proof a little further, Burlington. Miss Carr is still doubtful whether her prints are unlike any body else's."

For a moment Burlington seemed to demur but when Miss Carr pressed him he could not without rudeness refuse and soon a complete impression of his fingers lay clear on the paper beneath Marion's.

Gale took a magnifying glass from his pocket and gazed long and earnestly at them. Danvers seemed to gravitate toward the door. It sounded to Marion as if he knocked a pipe once or twice against the door but as he was smoking a cigar, it seemed improbable, still she did not understand why he should knock the door from the inside.

Suddenly she became acutely conscious that something was going to happen—was happening. Gale had drawn himself up to his full height and was speaking in a voice that frightened her—it seemed so relentless and inevitable.

"Burlington," he said, "you forgot the candle."

"What on earth do you mean?" came the quick answer—but Burlington was white as death and he moved a little unsteadily toward the back of a tall arm chair and held on to it.

"You tried this morning to blacken Macdonald's character, to screen yourself. Here"—he turned quickly to Marion who was making strange little noises in her throat—"drink this." She sat down—fighting for self-control—she knew Macdonald had gone but had heard no rumor of disgrace—"but," said Gale fiercely, "you forgot that people don't use candles in a room lit by electric light, *unless the electric light is out of order.*"

"Very interesting," answered Burlington with a sneer. "I entirely agree—but I fail to see my connection with you—forgive me—somewhat amateur investigations."

"Wait," came the stern reply, while Marion listened breathless, feeling as if her heart would burst, "the candles in that room were put in new when Durnford took the house—they are dusted every morning but this morning that work was omitted. Macdonald went away before the storm fused the wires. Therefore he had no cause to use the candle. The Doctor told us this morning the murder was committed by a left-handed man. When I saw that one candle had been burned a little, it was obvious that some man had been in there at the time the wires fused and had had to light a candle to finish the work he had in hand."

Marion watched the drama trembling and fascinated. Burlington was holding the back of his chair rather tight—his face was still ghastly white but he listened to Gale with a smile of amused cynicism.

"But the left hand, my dear Gale," he said easily, "the left hand! I am right-handed. My golf clubs are outside."

Gale looked full at him for a moment—caught Danvers' eye and saw him nod and then went on—even his trained voice shaking with emotion.

"Yes—I have not forgotten it. I knew I had to find a left-handed man. I knew Macdonald was innocent and my suspicions fell on you—*because you are a wood carver.*"

The words were full of mystery to Marion. She saw Burlington stagger, but he answered bravely, "I did not know that because a man was a wood carver, therefore he was a murderer."

"No," said Gale, "perhaps not, but because he is a wood carver he is trained to use his right hand and his left equally well. That was established in the English Courts by evidence nearly fifty years ago and I happened to know it. Therefore, my suspicions fell on you."

"Brilliant! brilliant, my dear Gale," Burlington was recovering himself, "but a little thin on which to—to deal hastily with a man."

Gale scarcely noticed his interruption and went on. "I took the candle you touched when you were surprised by the fusing of the lights just after you had murdered Durnford. I had it photographed

in a special way. It showed the marks of the fingers and thumb of a left hand. At the same time I had the glass out of which you were drinking brandy this morning photographed. I saw that you held the glass in your left hand and worked the siphon with your right."

Gale stopped a moment and watched him. His self assurance was vanishing and he almost covered before the blow that was coming.

"The finger prints," said Gale slowly, "were identical. They also tally with the finger prints I have taken to-night as an extra precaution."

"Danvers," he spoke sharply and the door opened and the inspector of the morning came in.

"You had better come quietly," the inspector said, slipping a pair of handcuffs on; "there are two more men outside."

At the trial at Bodmin, which Macdonald attended with his wife, a great deal of Durnford's extraordinary career of blackmail came out. Burlington had been one of his most unhappy victims. Durnford had discovered a rather disgraceful episode in his past and had bled him systematically for years and at last Burlington could stand it no longer. The weakness that paid turned at last into the strength that killed. He deliberately planned to kill Durnford and chose his opportunity, believing that Macdonald could clear himself with ease at his trial, and that by that time suspicion would have been diverted from himself.

Burlington died at Bodmin—where the Assizes are held.

Watch for IN CAMERA

*The G. Harrington Gale
Story for August*

Within the past few months these barrister-detective stories have come to be a distinctive feature of Short Stories. They are dramatically human, vividly real, and, which perhaps is best of all, they are as detective stories DIFFERENT.

AUGUST SHORT STORIES

ALL NEWS-STANDS JULY 12TH

A PRUDENT PRODIGAL

By C. WELLS NIEMAN

Author of "Bashford's Try Out," "The Calico Bronc," etc.

AS A SPEED-EATER "TOMMY POMMY ROMMY OH" WAS A DISTINCT SUCCESS, AS ARE A GOOD MANY OTHER YOUNG COLLEGIANS, BUT IN HIS INITIAL PLUNGE INTO HIGH FINANCE TOMMY KEPT A LITTLE RED NOTE BOOK FOR HIS WILD EXTRAVAGANCES. TOMMY IS ANOTHER OF THOSE VERY REAL HUMAN BEINGS MR. NIEMAN PAINTS SO WELL.

THOMAS POMFRET ROMNEY is a dignified thing in the name line. It made a good impression at the baptismal exercises and promised to be a life-long adornment to the owner; but between font and funeral much may happen to a name. Its first glorified corruption was "Tommy Rommy," the appellative genius of college rounding out the metrical bobtail to a lung-stretching lyric, the tribal lay of his clan: "Oh Tommy Pommy Rommy! Oh, Tommy Pommy Rommy, Oh!" And the happiest feature of the name was that it fitted; one among ten thousand Tommy Rommy stood correctly labeled.

Tommy's classic career was just one triumph after another. He triumphed over his entrance exams with only two conditions; and he triumphed over subsequent mid-years and finals by the barest margin any one could get through on and live. His attainment of a degree at all was decided, according to unchallenged rumor, by the toss of a coin at a faculty meeting. Packing the sheepskin in the top of his suitcase, for quick response to the first demand, Tommy went forth. His post-college career was not a matter requiring much consideration, for he knew that his future, like his past, lay in the hollow of the hand of Uncle William. Uncle William Romney was Tommy's entire family; his parents and other kinsfolk, male and female as they were created, having at intervals dropped out of the stern course of the years, leaving him alone with Uncle William. Most men would have preferred being left alone with the ten commandments and a glass of cold water. In placing Tommy on the highway of life

Uncle William provided him with a full set of the Rules of the Road handsomely bound in cast iron.

"You have up to the present, young man," he said, "done nothing but live and consume. From now on you will work and produce. Upon whether you can produce more than you consume depends my judgment of you as a man or an incompetent. And remember that the mere earning of money does not constitute the whole of success. Wise investment of time means wages, but wise investment of wages means wealth. Fortunately I shall be on hand to advise in the investment of your savings, and there will be no opportunity for your repeating the errors which brought your father to his misfortune."

The sins of his father had been visited upon Tommy at all serious meetings with his uncle, and none of these star-chamber sessions ended without some reference to the "Golden Fleece," the name of a mine which had swallowed up all the Romney fortune except that of Uncle William. Calling to them to sell while the selling was good, he had ridden out of the storm in his carefully provisioned ark, while the others had been engulfed—so much for the sin of not following advice which was cheap, plenty and sound.

When Tommy found himself an ink-stained slave in the accounting department of the C. & T. R. R. he accepted without a murmur the chilling drop from class day to pay day and set determined teeth into the juiceless rind of the transportation business. Happily, his diet was not all bitter husks, for there was the Heliotrope Club. To this exclusive stronghold of the younger set Uncle William, believing a successful business career demanded mingling with

men, had staked Tommy to a year's dues and a size 13 charge account. Tommy was a good mingler. Although regarded at the club as a mere infant, his knack of being engaging was quickly appreciated. Whenever you met Tommy he had something to say to you; and soon saving up funny stories or hard luck stories to tell Tommy Romney became a habit with most of the members, for whether it was laughter or sympathy they expected, it came quick and sincere. Only one exception there was among these good fellows, Blackmar; and he only knocked with faint praise. Anything agreeable that Blackmar did was generally faint, and sooner or later revealed itself as a knock. Blackmar, it happened, was the reason for Tommy's being at the Heliotrope. He was Uncle William's lawyer and confidential hawk; and, in choosing a club, his presence where he could report on his nephew's doings was considered of great strategic value for the prompt nipping of evil tendencies. William Romney's own club was unsuitable, of course, for Tommy, being composed of such highly successful men that he would have felt as ill at ease among them as a short-sighted cat in a gathering of kings. Outside the club, in society, Tommy was received with guarded welcome. A young man of good family, pleasing manners and his own way to make cannot expect to have the run of the range among the spring crop of lambs. Uncle William's Spartan views and vigorous health eliminated Tommy as even a good sporting chance. But however distant the hand from the heart of society he cared not a car fare. There were men in the world, and some of the best of them belonged to the Heliotrope.

Thus were Tommy's feet set in the ruts of the Street called Life, with his social position carefully defined and his future under contract. He had every opportunity to work and save and grow like Uncle William; and easy enough this would have been for Thomas Pomfret Romney, but for Tommy Romney—it began with a summons to the office of the President of the C. & T., and it led from there right into the heart of the crazy impossible; and it ended—well, where it would end Tommy could not possibly have foreseen.

The President of the C. & T. R. R. was Mr. Benjamin Foxhall Adams. Outside his immediate sphere of discipline he was known as "B. Foxy Adams." And he had brought the C. & T. up from a midget not much longer than it was wide to a position of prominence on the stock exchange and an added thorn in the side of the Interstate Commerce Commission. The line of least resistance is rarely straight, but it is usually the shortest distance between two points; and so like the trail of a pursued fox ran President Adams' plans, and close behind followed his road. His final goal, as all the world knew, was a tide water terminal. That, and the C. & T. would be a trans-continental factor. The world waited to see how he would get it. As a former friend of Tommy's father, President Adams had never failed to notice the young man with a pleasant word when they met in the course of the day's work; and as Tommy now entered the private office in response to his summons, he was received with the cordiality of a brisk sweep of the arm that wafted him into a seat as it wafted the secretary out of the door. The President gave his chair a quarter-swivel and looked into Tommy's eyes.

"Well, Tommy Romney," he asked, "how do you like the railroad business?"

"Very much, sir," answered Tommy, dutifully like a child cross-examined as to whether it loves its mother. "I am trying—I hope there hasn't been any complaint against me?"

"About as usual," replied the President. "Your chief, Clapham, wants you fired, I believe. But that's not important," he added hastily, as the dull red surged into Tommy's face. "If I discharge everyone Clapham wanted me to there would be only two of us left working for the C. & T., and I wouldn't be any too safe. No, your work is satisfactory, and probably in two years you may be earning what we pay you. In ten years you stand a chance of being a minor executive with a salary of \$1,800 a year."

Tommy smiled wanly. The prospect of the ten years' apprenticeship did not call for much in the way of merriment.

"Rather a long ladder, you think?" queried President Adams, with eyes that

gimleted Tommy's soul. "But there is another side to railroading that you haven't seen yet, what we might call the diplomatic department, where the ladders are shorter but get you higher. Just now there is something in the diplomatic department that touches the affairs of the C. & T. very vitally. The work required is of a very unusual character, and I have considered you for the job. Like everything else diplomatic, it is confidential. There is no one from whom you could not keep a secret? No relatives——?"

They smiled at each other. Uncle William as a father confessor was not irresistible.

"Not a soul on earth, Mr. Adams."

"That is understood then. I knew your father, Tommy, and I do not hesitate to stake the future of the C. & T. on his son's integrity."

He paused a moment, and then turned froward on the young man.

"Would you be prepared, if the interests of the C. & T. demanded it, to engage in an undertaking that would place you in a false position before the world—make you appear a fool, in fact—for thirty days?"

Tommy gasped.

"What good could it do the road for me to be a fool?" he asked in amazement. "And how could I get over it in thirty days?"

"I will explain," said President Adams. "Look at this map. Right there—that section of land between those two creeks, extending from this point to here—that land the C. & T. finds it important to buy within the next month."

"For the terminal!" cried Tommy. "But it's only a piece of Jersey swamp, and so far off!"

"That you are not supposed to worry about," answered the President, drily. "I have made my arrangements. What I want you for is to buy that land in your name and turn it over to the company. If we tried to buy it directly the owner of the land would make his price absolutely prohibitive. We have advices to the effect that he needs money and would sell if he could; but nobody has wanted to buy that land for years, and the moment he received an offer from any sane business man he would suspect something and hold him up.

Someone like yourself, young and inexperienced, must throw him off his guard. You must make him take advantage of your innocence. He is capable of that. I know Blackmar."

"Blackmar!" echoed Tommy. "You mean Mr. Charles Blackmar? Why, he belongs to my club."

"You know him then, of course?"

"Yes. He is Uncle William's lawyer, and I have an idea he makes informal reports on me."

"And you have no bond of affection for him that would interfere with this arrangement?"

"None that I can think of without some effort. But please, understand, Mr. Adams, that if I undertake this work it is only because you believe Mr. Blackmar will try to take advantage of me. He will have to make the first advances, and without any hint from me. I am perfectly willing to turn tables on him, but I won't be a bunco-steerer."

"Excellent!" exclaimed President B. Foxy Adams, with enthusiasm. "The best possible way to keep him from suspecting. You do as I instruct and you won't have to worry about his approaching you."

"But," objected Tommy, "Mr. Blackmar knows perfectly well that I have no money to make foolish investments with, and he knows I couldn't get hold of any. I have no idea——"

"I will supply the ideas," cut in the President crisply. "All you need furnish is action. You will find a purchaser for your father's old interest in the Golden Fleece. I have arranged matters with Mr. Worthington, your father's executor, who holds the stock for you, as you know. The sale of this mine will give you enough sudden wealth to turn your head completely. To-morrow, Mr. Worthington will send for you, and from that moment on you are a money-mad fool. You will be provided with expense money——"

"Expense money?" inquired Tommy. "I thought I was to sell the Golden Fleece."

"Only constructively speaking," replied Mr. Adams. "You must remember that every cent you throw away comes out of the bank account of the C. & T. The

more economical you are the better business head you will show. Understand that this is no joy-ride—you've got to get a hundred cents' worth of extravagance out of every dollar you draw down. And you won't find it easy to make a notorious fool of yourself in New York—the competition's too keen. Think you'd like the job?"

Tommy strangled the arms of his chair as he considered.

"All right, Mr. Adams," he said quietly. "I'll do it. It's better to be a fool for thirty days than to be one for ten years."

President Adams sighed in relief.

"The way you take hold of this, Tommy Rommy," he said, as he held out his hand, "makes me feel that the future of the C. & T. is safe with you."

Emerging from this interview into the systematic bustle of the general office Tommy felt an almost irresistible desire to yell. He wanted to climb upon a desk and gibber like an aboriginal ape; and then go mad, play he was a Bengal tiger and scatter confusion and consternation the length and breadth of that sane, businesslike room. To consider himself now an element in such a smooth-running engine of super-efficiency seemed a wild outrage. Then he remembered the President's words. "The future of the C. & T. is safe with you." After all, he was part of the C. & T. He was simply the company's Broadway representative. And he returned to his desk with a meekness that delighted even Clapham, that veteran overseer of subdued rabbits.

In the forefront of the next morning came Tommy's call to the world of contradictions, where he was to be economically extravagant, calculatingly reckless, soberly drunk, a wise fool and a hard-working loafer. The call ought to have come by way of a clown in rainbow tights, but in fact it was Clapham, that conventional servant of the system who brought it.

"A telephone message, Romney. You may have five minutes."

"Poor Clapham! You are in for the shock of your faultless life; one of your human adding-machines is going to explode and bite you. But not yet; not until Tommy, after telephoning, has asked to be excused, "on important business,"

and has overstayed his leave by three hours. Then he will come swaggering up to you, hat on head and cigarette in mouth, and address you as "Clapham!" And you will hear in words as plain as an office floor what Tommy thinks of you, and through him what everybody else thinks of you. And as you stand gaping and gasping, this rebellious rabbit will silence your thunder and shatter your big stick to slivers by firing himself from his job! Looking from the window you will see him stroll into a taxicab that could eat you and your whole month's salary in one joyous gulp, and drive off in a white cloud of cigarette vapor. You will see this, Oh, Clapham! but you will not see Tommy as he gets out of the taxi around the corner, pays the minimum fare, without a tip, and makes an entry in a little red notebook, as neatly and decimally accurate as any you ever accomplished in your life. You will not see this, nor will anyone else. All you will know is that Tommy Rommy, once poorly paid, pen-pushing proletarian, grown drunk with sudden wealth, is headed straight for perdition.

Nor was Clapham the only one to shake a foreboding head over Tommy's case. Already the word had gone around the club, and the prophets were rushing to their gloomy jobs. And to them nothing could have been more satisfyingly perfect than Tommy's appearance. Taking a street car to within minimum-zone distance, he had entered another taxi and had himself paraded to the doors of the Heliotrope, where, dazing the chauffeur with a tip twice the fare, he alighted. A linger of whiskey on the breath, advertised by a clove, and a smooth-wrapped, torpedo-shaped cigar made his entrance melodramatically complete. And among the spectators of Tommy's flowering into wealthy insanity not the least interested was Blackmar.

It is a rule that a reputation cannot be bought with money, the only exception being a reputation for extravagance; and that cannot be acquired in any other way. The force of this truth was made painfully apparent to Tommy as he studied his red notebook one night in his room at the Club. Two weeks of wild spending had run some

huge totals into his expense-account, and still he was far short of his goal. All the Club knew he was money-mad, and laughed at him as being temporarily unbalanced; but as yet he had made no huge impression. Blackmar, he could see, expected him to come to the end of his rope any day, would not believe he was the possessor of any really large sum of money, and was not, apparently, even considering him as a possible easy customer for the Jersey swamp land. In vain, Tommy had gone into the buying of fast automobiles—the red notebook groaned under two of these costly toys—and at the risk of his neck had earned the title of “speed-eater”; and in vain he had talked about buying aeroplanes. Blackmar was interested of course, and cynically shared in Tommy’s lavish treats, but he was not tremendously impressed. He had seen no really big money spent, and big money was the only thing for which Blackmar was going to fall. He helped Tommy spend his money, and then like a loyal hawk reported his doings to Uncle William. The ways of uncle and nephew had parted almost immediately upon the young man’s accession to wealth, in an interview that was full of thunder and lightning, like a storm scene in a melodrama.

That a real spendthrift should have come into the family—a downright waster—was as much of a blow to the old man as though Tommy had been caught red-handed in a burglary. After this interview Tommy knew that he had burned his bridges finally and definitely. If he failed to secure that terminal site for the C. & T. he would be a discredited and utterly friendless beggar on the face of the earth. In his predicament he went to Mr. Worthington.

The man Tommy’s father had chosen as executor of his wrecked estate was one of those world-weathered veterans such as every man would like to have look after the interests of his wife and children. Every man of substance in New York knew Mr. Worthington, and most of them had availed themselves at some time of his moral support and advice.

“Well, Tommy,” said the old man, “I am surprised to hear that you are becoming discouraged. I had supposed from the

reports that are circulating among your friends that you were doing fairly well as a spendthrift. Let’s see, what is it they call you—a “speed king?”

“Speed-eater,” corrected Tommy, humbly. “I haven’t exactly wasted those automobiles, Mr. Worthington,” he added, with a weary smile. “But it isn’t enough. Blackmar doesn’t really think of me as any more than a flash in the pan. He’s waiting to see if I *can* spend a lot of money, and of course I can’t—and keep my expense-account down within reason.

“The only way I can see out of it,” replied Mr. Worthington, his honest, sturdy old features set in thought, “is, if you haven’t enough money of your own, to spend someone else’s.”

With starting eyes Tommy gaped at the old man in helpless bewilderment. In all the topsy-turvy delirium of the last two weeks this seemed the hardest to reconcile: this calm advice to spend money not his own. As he watched the young man’s startled face Mr. Worthington’s delicate, precise lips separated into a humorous, understanding smile. It was probably the first time he had ever aroused a suspicion of his honesty in a human soul, and the old trustee enjoyed the joke immensely.

“It’s not as bad as it sounds,” he finally interrupted Tommy’s stammering attempts at speech. “I was merely thinking of something your President Adams told me a few days ago. It seems he has decided to purchase a country estate, and it has occurred to me that you might, by making the purchase in your name, add considerably to your reputation, and at practically no expense.”

“How much of an estate does Mr. Adams consider buying?” asked Tommy.

“It will be large enough to create the impression you desire, I fancy,” replied Mr. Worthington. “You know the Schuyler estate in Hastings?”

“What!” cried Tommy, and again was he thrown into stammering inability to express his thoughts. “Why, that is an immense affair! It must be worth a fortune.”

“It is mortgaged for a quarter of a million dollars,” answered Mr. Worthington drily, “but it is worth considerably less.

The Schuyler sisters are second cousins of Mr. Adams, and have been practically dependent on him for some years."

Tommy's eyes glowed as the dramatic elements of the situation grouped themselves in his mind.

"A quarter of a million dollars," he cried, "and a country place a mile big. Talk about spending—that makes automobiles look like peanuts. I'll buy it this afternoon."

"It's not for nothing, Tommy," chuckled Mr. Worthington, "that you are called 'speed-eater.' But even you cannot spend a quarter of a million dollars so rapidly. There must be negotiations—why, you have never even visited the place."

"Well, it's never too early to start," cried Tommy, on his feet and hat in hand. Come with me. It's a glorious afternoon and I have a car downstairs this minute."

"We have hardly authority," objected Mr. Worthington, "for such summary action. If you can withhold your impatience until to-morrow afternoon I shall make arrangements with Mr. Adams and settle the details as to price, etc., which even so precipitate a young man as yourself must realize are quite essential.

In spite of the fictitious nature of the whole affair, Tommy could not resist a thrill of ownership when the next afternoon they passed through the gates and entered the vast grounds of the estate which the laxness of genteel poverty had permitted to revert to a state of almost primitive wildness.

Tommy had expected to find the Schuyler sisters thin, faded gentlewomen with the traditional air of lavender helplessly laid away in an old drawer; but the two middle-aged women who received them in one of the great but rather bare front rooms seemed perfectly capable of discussing the business details of their property. The third and youngest sister, Miss Lotta, they said was about the grounds; but evidently they considered her opinions and judgment too immature to make it necessary to call her into the consultation. Although pathetically eager to have Tommy buy the inheritance which had long proved only a white elephant on their hands, the two sisters were quite as eager to make a good

bargain, and their bargaining was based on so accurate a knowledge of the mortgages and other factors affecting the estate that Tommy soon found himself compelled to sit an idle and not greatly interested listener, and leave the details to the competent manipulation of Mr. Worthington. Two weeks' experience as a speed-eater does not, however, qualify a man for being an idle listener; and the longing for motion stirred in Tommy's soul, so that at the first opportunity he excused himself by obtaining the ladies' permission to walk around and inspect the estate.

There is probably no artificial habit so easy to form as that of being transported on four motor-driven wheels, and therefore it was the most natural thing in the world that the initial strip of Tommy's walk around the grounds should be into his ever waiting automobile. The Schuyler dominions were really almost large enough to justify this method of locomotion, although Tommy's racing car did scant justice to the artistically planned sweep of the undulating drives, and made of the flowering hedges and tree-bordered walks the most dangerous of blind crossings. So deserted and unpopulated was the whole atmosphere of the grounds that the possibility of his reckless course throwing some chance foot-wanderer in the way of high speed death, did not occur to Tommy. Realization of danger came with sickening abruptness as, rounding one of the hidden bends at a rate that sent the gravel zipping out from under his tires, he saw, almost in contact with his radiator, the back of a girl.

No power of man could have stopped the car; and only by the mightiest of efforts could Tommy swerve the wheels and send himself crashing into the side hedge and plowing through a dozen yards of box brush. Looking back he saw the girl, frightened almost out of consciousness, unharmed in the middle of the path.

"Miss Schuyler!" cried Tommy, in an agony of contrition. "You're not hurt?"

Slowly the fright cleared from the girl's face. "I don't know," she answered uncertainly, and with a rueful little smile. "I haven't had time to find out yet, but"—and she shook herself experimentally—"I don't feel anything loose."

In unstinted measure Tommy covered himself with blame and approbrium, reviling his carelessness, belittling his intelligence and judgment, and begging her pardon in a dozen self-humbling phrases. While he talked the girl's composure returned and the color to her cheeks. Such is the elasticity of youth that within a very few minutes of the barely averted tragedy the two were laughing and talking as unconcernedly as though sudden death was a thing of common occurrence and minor importance. With interest they examined the car, lying half buried in greenery, and with relief they found that though badly scratched it was still able to perform its appointed functions. This important detail settled, Tommy explained his presence and introduced himself. At the mention of his name the girl lifted her eyes to him with a swift curiosity that made him twinge with shame.

"You have heard of me?" he asked rather bluntly.

Her eyes sparkled in audacious mischief. "Is it the same as Tommy Rommy?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, almost savagely, "also sometimes known as the speed-eater."

"You don't seem very proud of the title," she remarked innocently, and then with a glance at the abused car she added, "and perhaps you don't deserve it after all."

Mr. Worthington's negotiations with the Schuyler sisters were necessarily protracted, due to the involved condition of the estate, but that afternoon he was not pressed for time, and, as a matter of fact, he had said good-bye a full half hour before Tommy's return provided him with the means of actually leaving. Naturally a patient man, however, he made no complaint.

"It will be a great relief to those sisters," he remarked on the way home, "to be freed from this property. Of course it leaves them almost penniless, after everything is settled, but that is better than running into debt. After the sale they are going to move to California, they tell me. The youngest one, Miss Lotta, whom we did not meet, intends to teach school there, I believe, and the others will undoubtedly seek positions of some character."

"California!" cried Tommy, and the weight of that news seemed to depress his heart clear into his boots. The afternoon, a moment ago so swollen with triumph, fell as flat and lifeless as a punctured tire.

The proper manner of announcing his purchase required serious consideration to make it produce the most startling effect. Tommy's first inclination was to give a big dinner that night, and then at the highest point of convivial expansion, to launch the mighty fact upon his stunned guests. But further thought developed a more psychologically correct plan. Instead of making much of the purchase he would treat it as the merest commonplace—something he might do any day he felt like it. He would let it seem that a quarter of a million was an inconsequential tax on the vastness of his resources.

Cunningly Tommy laid his plans, and with all the nonchalance his pounding heart permitted walked into the Club that evening to execute them. But fate and the quickwitted newspapers saved his nerves that final ordeal. Almost at the door Blackmar met him, and in his eyes there shone the light of a new interest and a new hope.

It was to Ted Harper, however, that the real credit for the final outcome of Tommy's venture was due. Ted Harper was a promoter. His business was to hatch ideas, and incubate them to life by the warmth of an enthusiasm which, apparently, he could work up at a moment's notice.

Breaking in upon Blackmar's congratulations and eager inquiries, Ted Harper seized Tommy and into his ears poured a scheme that fairly quivered under his enthusiastic presentation.

"Tommy Rommy," he cried, "you're the champion speeder of the western hemisphere! A man who can start and put through a deal like that Schuyler estate all on the same day has a positive genius for speed. You're wasting yourself around here. What you want is something with speed in every inch of it, and that's the thing I've got laid out for you."

Ted Harper always talked profusely, but when he was a little intoxicated he talked more profusely. Usually it was more.

"Do you know what this town needs; this little old New York with its thousands of automobiles that are just eating their hearts out because there isn't a decent mile of road for them to try their gait on? I'll tell you. They need a speed-course; a place where they can go their limit with never a soul to stop them. The man that builds a speed course like that is going to do a great big public charity—and make a barrel of money."

Once started, Ted Harper had never yet been stopped. On and on he raced, and gradually from his talk emerged an inspired, if somewhat disconnected, idea. He wanted Tommy to build a great race track, to be called a "speed-drome," the greatest place of its kind in the country. For this venture he predicted—in fact, he promised—fame, fortune, and the undying gratitude of thousands yet unborn. It was a wild idea, worthy only of a drunken brain, and at first Tommy listened merely because of the fervid gusto with which it was presented, but happening to catch Blackmar's eye, he was suddenly electrified into eager attention. Blackmar was drinking in what Ted Harper had to say with all his ears, and as though his thoughts were spread out on his face, Tommy could read what was passing in them. Blackmar was considering, how well the Jersey swamp would do for the new speed-drome! When Tommy went to bed that night the only cloud in his heaven was—California!

It was the next afternoon that a low gray racing-car whipped the dust of a fair country road flanked on either side by the level undulations of the great New Jersey marshes. Tommy was at the wheel, and beside him, a smile of imminent victory on his face, sat Blackmar; while Ted Harper, forced to silence and with suspended enthusiasm, clung for dear life to the little side-seat on the running-board. This was the return of the special investigating committee of the New York Speed-drome Association from its official visit to the proposed site of that colossal enterprise. True to the spirit of its inception, the Association had been informally organized and started toward the fulfilment of its destiny without the loss of a needless moment. Poor Ted Harper, aroused in

the stupor of early morning, had been dragged to life and enthusiasm by the eagerness of Tommy; and Blackmar, no less willing to strike while the iron sizzled, had not proved a lagging member. By lunch the Association was in full swing, and now, its official act completed, was retiring to the quiet precincts of a private dining room at Shanley's to ratify the contemplated purchase.

It was after the demi-tasse that Blackmar got down to business.

"The proposition, Gentlemen of the Committee," he pronounced in a deep, overdone chairman manner, "is that the property offered by Charles Blackmar to the New York Speed-drome Association be accepted at the price of five hundred thousand dollars. I move that, as this figure seems reasonable——"

"The figure is not reasonable!" Tommy was on his feet. "I move that we refuse to consider this offer. It is a hold-up!"

Blackmar was almost stunned by the unexpected intensity of Tommy's opposition.

"Why," he stammered, "what's the matter with that figure?"

"Just this, Blackmar," Tommy answered. "I may spend money, but I'm not wholly a fool. That is twice as much as your land is worth and you know it. If that is the best you can do we will call the deal off right here."

Something in Tommy's words and manner flashed a sudden warning, and Blackmar realized that there was a strength in the young man's character that called for an immediate change of front.

"Well," he asked, and the playful banter of his tone was lost in the gruffness of anxiety, "what is it worth?"

"It is worth just three hundred thousand dollars, and not one cent more," replied Tommy.

For a moment the eyes of the two men wrestled, and then Blackmar weakened.

"All right," he agreed harshly, "but your ideas about robbery are mighty damned one-sided."

Now, Oh Clapham, smile! Chief of a hundred pen-driving slaves, smile! You have just seen that rebellious rabbit,

Romney, slinking by your office on his way to beg a job from his friend the President. One riotous month and he wants his job again. The repentant prodigal returns, and shall he have the fatted calf? Smile again! The fatted calf! Ha! Ha! Clapham cannot quite understand, though, what is going on in the President's office after Tommy has passed inside. Four Vice-Presidents have been summoned to the presence, and here is old Heissler, the road's own attorney, heaving himself through the bustling doors, and Mr. Worthington, too, who never appears except on great occasions. And why do they all look so pleased as they come out? Clapham's smile dries on his chops. He decides to postpone gloating until he learns further particulars; perhaps to-morrow—perhaps.

At last the moment came when President Adams and Tommy faced each other alone in the private office. The others had gone and a great peace seemed to have settled down, the peace that comes after a mighty struggle.

"Well, Tommy Rommy," asked the President. "How do you like railroading now?"

"There is more to it, Sir," Tommy answered, "than I supposed at the start."

"And I might say for your benefit," remarked the President, "that the C. & T. has found there is more to you than it supposed at the start. By the way, Mr. Worthington tells me that this little episode has had an unfortunate effect upon your relations with your Uncle William?"

"That seems to be true," replied Tommy, "but I hope to square myself in time."

"Perhaps I can set him right," volunteered the President with a smile as he reached for the telephone. "Is this Mr. William Romney? Well, Mr. Romney, President Adams of the C. & T. begs to congratulate you on your possession of a nephew whom the railroad has just seen fit to promote to the position of Sixth Vice-President. . . . Yes, your nephew, Tommy Rommy. . . . No, there is no mistake——"

"What did he say?" asked Tommy curiously.

"He didn't say anything," answered President Adams. "I think he has fainted."

For the last time Tommy stepped into his racing-car. To-morrow he might be Sixth Vice-President, but this afternoon he would be the speed-eater again. And with all his heart he craved speed, for it is eighteen long miles between New York and Hastings.

A Delicious Bit of Midsummer Fooling

Nieman's stories are always good and if you enjoyed the above don't miss his whimsical dog-days laugh next month.

"The Bishop and The Cannibal Maid"

Also

A Complete Novel by

ALICE M. WILLIAMSON

AUGUST SHORT STORIES:

OUT JULY 12TH

THE GHOST OF KYENG-POK

BY R.I.X.

(*One Time Secret Agent of Japan.*)

Author of "Ito's Phantom Battleship."

OFFICIALLY THE KEEPER OF THE GREAT SEAL OF KOREA COMMITTED SUICIDE; BUT DID HE? READ HERE THE TESTIMONY OF R. I. X. WHO WAS IN AT THE DEATH AND WHO KNEW SOMETHING OF THE GRIM SPECTRE OF SEOUL

THE world will never know the name of the Jim the Penman who inked in with a camel's hair brush and vermilion dye the forgery which put the stamp of fate on Korea. "Jim" is not even in character with this incident; Tatsu or Hori would be better, for the hand that wielded the fatal brush was yellow and the intelligence behind it not Caucasian.

Other facts the world will not glean, either—nor, knowing, could it understand. What became, in the end, of the Emperor's great seal; what terrible hand whisked this priceless bit of carved crystal into nothingness and glazed the eyes of Han Kyu-sul with terror transcending anything human? All—all in tune with the inscrutable mystery of Asia's shadow land—unplumbable for the perception of the white man. Where dragons still nest and the stones of ancient palaces sigh of blood stains that were fresh when Augustus Cæsar held Rome in his fist, you and I, mere children of the West, must grope like children in the enchanted wood.

My story begins with the close of the war between Japan and Russia ten years ago and has to do with incidents involved in the strangling of the ancient kingdom of Korea, the helpless pawn between the Bear's paw and the bayonets of Nippon.

It was no surprise to me, unofficial diplomatac agent under Japanese masters, when, less than a week after the signing of the Peace of Portsmouth, Marquis Ito, the strong man behind the curtain in Japan, called me to an audience with him in Tokyo. I flattered myself at that time that my work in the matter of the phantom battleship of Togo's fleet, concerning which I have written in these chronicles, had won me a place as close to Ito's heart as he ever

allowed any one to approach. For a foreigner, I seemed to have been permitted much of his confidence; there was always some little job in back door diplomacy which a white skinned agent could do better than one of his own people. So in this circumstance the great man unfolded his plans for me.

"R. I. X.," he said in his careful English, "perhaps Japan may consider some undertaking for the better welfare of Korea. Though Korea is far from the world, what we do there becomes gossip in America and Europe. Everything we do must appear in the—ah—proper light. You will go to Seoul and start a newspaper—a newspaper in English for foreigners there to read and especially for free circulation in America, where there is much suspicion of our motives."

This command was not as surprising as might be. Ito, conservative as he was, had learned the power of the printed sheet during the war with Russia when he founded a news bureau and fed all the papers from New York to San Francisco with Japanese honey. Nor was he setting an impossible mission: I had once dabbled enough in journalism—pungent, Parisian journalism at that—to make a stagger at editing. Foreign style papers in Japan ten years ago were pretty primitive institutions anyway. Once a young American in Yokohama printed the story of Jonah and the whale in his news columns, justifying himself by saying that was news to many Japanese readers, at least.

"Your editorial policy," Marquis Ito continued, "will be to prepare the Korean people for—improvement. Yes, improvement by Japan. They—how shall I say it?—need instruction in preparation for their best good. You will draw on the Dai Ichi

bank there to any reasonable sum. Your paper will not make money. We do not care for that. Now go—and in three weeks send me the first copy.”

Typical of the man Ito were these terse instructions. In a hundred words he had launched me on a project which any other man would have taken months to consider and days to outline. He wanted no questions asked, no objections raised; I had my orders and he cared neither to know nor hear anything more until results were produced.

The struggles I had in that doleful clutter of mud houses and clay people, Seoul, the dead city of a forgotten past—have no place here. Enough to say that in three weeks to the day I had the first copy of the *Seoul Press* in Ito's hands. Also that before I had been in Seoul twenty-four hours I was caught in the full tide of plot and intrigue. The decrepit old town buzzed with rumor and stirred under secret councils and midnight sessions of goat-eyed conspirators. Over the highballs in the dreary Seoul Club of foreigners, under the canopy of the Great Bell where the hat peddlers gathered, the same question was whispered: “What is Ito going to do?” Swiftly, surely the Japanese tentacles searched out and closed around every little artery of the decayed old Korean body politic. The Il Chin Hoi flourished for a while as a secret patriotic society opposed to Japanese influence and then was bought over by the Japanese. Soothsayers and witch doctors close to the person of His Majesty fell one by one under the spell of gold from Ito's chest. Even the Emperor's ministers became smitten by the stealthy infection of gold lust and wavered. For all of this, I, with my paper, played the part of Greek chorus. Every native type sticker in my shop who set up a stickful by so much gave a push to the tottering ruin of his country's independence.

My favorite rambling place in moments of idleness during these first weeks in Seoul was the Kyeng-Pok Palace enclosure. Permission to enter at any time I had from Megata, the Japanese Richelieu at court. There in the silent groves of cypress and cedar, amid the ruins of summerhouses set in flowering lotus pools and in weed grown

courts where once flapped the banners of Ghengis Khan's tribute bearers, I found a certain awesome delight in roaming. On an occasion I even dared climb weathered steps to the galley of Queen Min's summer-house and peek through a hole in the oiled paper window. There on the floor lay tumbled bedding, the shards of a glass globe shorn in twain by a sword stroke. A withered flower stalk, cobweb covered, was still sticking from the top of a bronze vase. The room had not been touched since that night of Oct. 8, 1895, when Queen Min had been hacked to death by the swords of Japanese assassins and her body burned on a rude pyre in the deer park. From that night Kyeng-Pok palace yard had been a place deserted, shunned by the Koreans.

Laugh if you will—you who read this under the snug security of the family lamp—there on the porch of Queen Min's summer house the spirit of the murdered queen was abroad. I felt it in the musty breath of that darkened room; heard her whisper from the pine bough that scraped the eaves. She cursed me in the thin voice of the disembodied.

The blow Korea dreaded fell early in November. Ito came on a battleship.

The dictator was received with ostentatious pomp on the part of the Japanese and slavish humility was shown him by those among the Koreans who had sold their souls. The old Emperor shivered in his stuffed boots, knowing full well that the day of reckoning for all his petty bluffs and childish plottings was at hand. The batty old boy could not be sure of any of his ministers, nor even of the members of his household. A shadow of past centuries of power was his only reliance.

Swiftly came his awakening.

Early on the evening of November 16, a Japanese runner brought a message to me at my rooms at the Astor House. “Be at Japanese Residence at eight o'clock,” was the command. I went by rickisha through the dark streets to the big white home of the Japanese Minister. Even as my puller drew me through the stone gateway into the Minister's grounds I heard the quick *tra-a-atra-a-a* of a bugle over on the dark mass of Nam San Hill, where the

Japanese troops were barracked. That bugle call seemed to crystallize the vague, brooding spirit of impending action which had kept the city in an ague since the arrival of the master. Another Jericho trembled to its fall before that trumpet blast.

The large entrance hall of the Residence was filled with the understrappers of the Japanese régime in Seoul—nervous little secretaries in evening dress and orderlies of the army of occupation, all shifting and milling in suppressed excitement. Hagiwara, Ito's secretary, was awaiting my arrival. He whisked me past the wooden-faced sentries guarding a rear door and into the presence of Korea's nemesis.

Ito sat behind a teak table with Gen. Hasegawa, commander of the Nam San garrison, and Megata, adviser of the Korean Treasury, at right and left. Japan's Bismarck, always a grotesque and stuffy figure out of his accustomed kimona, sat bolt upright in his starched evening shirt as if it were a steel cuirass; the gem of the Rising Sun blazed on his breast. His blocky face was as expressionless as the painted portrait on a mummy case.

"R. I. X.," he said, when I had made my bow before him, "there is work for you to-night." Hasegawa, the warrior, impatient at the ways of diplomacy, shifted his sword with a petulant gesture. He plainly resented the intrusion of a white skin in a purely yellow affair.

"We go to the Palace to confer with the Emperor's Ministers on a matter for the good of Korea," Ito continued evenly. "You will accompany us. Your business will be to watch Han Kyu-sul, the Prime Minister. Han Kyu-sul will not favor what we propose to-night. He is a stubborn man; but he will be made afraid and he is a coward at heart."

"He should hang!" grunted Hasegawa in Japanese.

"In good time," Ito purred. "But not before he serves a purpose. R. I. X., it will be necessary to-night that the Emperor's seal of state be stamped on a certain document. The Emperor will oppose this, Han Kyu-sul will oppose it. When he grows afraid he will try a trick. He will take the great seal—his Majesty has it now—and try to hide

it so we cannot use it ourselves. We will permit him to attempt this, R. I. X.; but you will recover it from him. That is all."

Thoroughly mystified by Ito's partial revelation of an objective, I knew better, nevertheless, than to ask questions. I was bowing myself from his presence when he spoke my name sharply.

"R. I. X., you are to do this because you are not a Nippon man. We must be in a position to say to the world with truth we Japanese did not forcibly cause the great seal to be used. You understand?"

A half hour later I was in a carriage alone being driven through the silent streets of the capital toward the Palace. Ahead in another carriage were Ito, Hasegawa, and Megata. A troop of cavalry clattered alongside as a guard. Dread made every house and shop a dead black wall; not a one of the timorous native rabbits dared peek from his door at this rattling cavalcade of the conquerors. The hour of Korea's death was a silent one, fraught with terror. When we came to the broad space before the Palace I saw what that single menacing bugle call had conjured out of the night. Rank on rank, stood a regiment of Japanese troops, bayonets fixed and pointed outward against the terror stricken city to catch on their steel hedge a possible desperate charge by twelfth-hour patriots. The wicked snouts of two machine guns flanked the gate of the Emperor's house one at either pillar. The last of Korea's rulers was a prisoner behind implacable steel.

I will not attempt to describe in detail the events of the ensuing hours. The Japanese executioners of a nation were none too gentle with the strangling cord and I found a place for pity in my heart, sadly blunted, alack, by the common experience of my profession. Nor did I relish the part I had to play that night; I say this much in self-extenuation.

In the council room of the palace the Emperor's ministers met the three cold dictators from Japan. I saw them file in after Ito and his associates had their seats. In their absurd horsehair bonnets and wadded garments they looked like some sort of vegetable ghosts. On the face of each man was the stamp of the doomed. In

another part of the Palace the batty old Emperor shivered among the faithful few of his eunuchs and chamberlains who had stuck by him, awaiting he knew not what.

As for myself I remained in an antechamber just off the council room, so close I could catch occasionally the guttural snarl of Ito's voice on the other side of the door. With me were a group of Japanese secretaries and orderlies. They smoked innumerable cigarettes and conversed in cracked whispers. The atmosphere was electric with the tension of affairs beyond the locked door. A ludicrous jarring note in the dynamic high pressure of the occasion I will never forget. In the anteroom's exact centre stood an elaborately carved tabourette of teak and ivory, supporting on its inlaid top a china cuspidor, white glaze with pink roses painted around the outrageous thing. Relic of some shrewd Yankee salesman's visit to Seoul I took it.

Hour followed hour and suspense tightened with the slow drag of time. From behind the door of the council chamber the hum of voices sounded interminably—the querulous whine of a pleading minister, the short, gruff grumble of Ito and the monotonous sing-song of the interpreter. Occasionally through a half opened window came the clatter of gunbutts on stone and the jangle of accoutrements, potent hints by the Japanese jailers that no twelfth hour surgery could save the dying Korea. But the ancient kingdom whose war banners were known across the Yalu before William of Normandy came to England was yielding the ghost hard. The occasional cries from the sickroom, despairing cries of the Emperor's ministers, told that.

It was after midnight that a lock rattled and Hasegawa's war-mask face appeared at the crack of the door. One of the little orderlies jumped to receive orders. A folded slip of paper passed from Hasegawa's hand to his and a whispered word to his ear. The orderly turned as the door shut and approached me.

"For Mis-ter R. I. X.—from Marquis Ito," he said and handed me the note. I read the scrawl, in Ito's ragged hand, with my back turned to the others in the room feeling the lancing of their eyes.

Prime Minister goes to consult the Emperor. Wait in the garden—east wing of Palace—show this as pass through troops or guards. If he attempts escape, follow—seize *outside* Palace grounds and bring what he may bear away back at once.

ITO HIROBUMI.

I left the room without a word, passed the two Japanese infantrymen on guard at the outer door of the Palace with a nod and was stopped by a little captain on post at the edge of the shrubbery flanking the drive to the great gates beyond. The light from his pocket flash on the heavily inked "Ito Hirobumi" brought the little captain's hand up to the salute; I was free to follow my orders.

More like a plain burglar than a member of the unofficial arm of the diplomatic service I felt as I circled the dark bulk of the Palace toward the east wing, which I knew to be the Emperor's private quarters. There lights were shining through three French windows opening upon a stone balustrade; against the yellow shades, foreign style as were all the furnishings in this modern home of Oriental Majesty, fell the silhouettes of figures within—clownish, distorted goblins of lampblack moving in a golden field. I found a good vantage point in the shadows of a great Yalu pine perhaps fifty feet away from the balustrade. I was alone. By crafty Ito's orders no guards had been thrown behind the Palace; a clear way of escape lay invitingly open back through the new Palace compound to the ancient wild-wood of Kyeng-Pok adjoining in the rear.

Fascinated I watched the silhouettes pass and re-pass on the amber shades—saw protesting hands raised in mimic exhortation or, maybe, fear. Evidently the Prime Minister was finding it hard to convince the doddering old Emperor that the end of all things Korean was at hand. The tragic pantomime continued for the better part of a half hour, I should estimate. Then came the expected.

One of the long French windows was cautiously opened and a pinched yellow face beneath a fly-screen hat was thrust timorously out. I thought I could see the terror of a hunted rat in the eyes beneath the absurd hatbrim. A long searching scrutiny and the questing head was followed stealthily by the white and purple

robed body of Han Kyu-sul. He closed the window softly behind him and as he stood for an instant outlined against the glowing shade I saw that his left hand clutched tight to his breast something tied in a silken scarf—something bulky and blocky. The great seal in its silver carved casket! I was as sure of that as of anything in human probability.

With an agility surprising in a man so old, Han vaulted from the low balustrade to the ground five feet or more below. There he hesitated just the fraction of a second, then stooped low and commenced to run straight through the ragged copses of the park toward the wilderness of Kyeng-Pok beyond. His white garments below the purple tunic gave me the flash for pursuit. Paralleling his course, I had little difficulty in keeping him in sight until I suddenly found myself against a twelve-foot wall, the boundary between the old palace enclosure and the new. Right and left along the shadow block of the wall I looked; nothing moved.

Very cautiously but with hurrying pace I turned to follow the wall to the point where I believed the fugitive must have come upon it. Sure enough, after a hundred feet or so, I stumbled upon a heap of stones fallen from a rift. Up to the break in the masonry I skipped just in time to see a blur of white, like a will o' the wisp of the marsh, fade into the shadow of trees beyond. I was over the wall and driving at top speed toward the flitting sprite; a thick bed of autumn leaves muffled the sound of my steps. But the mold served my quarry equally. Upon my eyes alone could I depend to track him.

Here was the most surprising development of this night of portent:—Han Kyu-sul, the Korean, the Minister of State in this land of ravaging superstition and shadow, had set his foot within the haunted domain of the murdered Queen. Where no Korean had dared venture for ten years this harried and desperate statesman was now dodging like a criminal in flight. From every trodden leaf, from the wind bent tops of the black pines must have come to his affrighted ears the murmur and whisper of her unlaid ghost.

And he was making this supreme sacri-

fice to crawling fear in a final desperate effort to prevent the consummation of his country's downfall. Brave old Han!

Now that he was not technically in the Palace grounds nothing remained but to put the distasteful end to my task—close with the Minister and snatch the seal from him as I would pluck a taffy stick from a child's fist. This highwaymanry was immediately imperative; in fact, any minute he might give me the slip in this wilderness of hedges and ruins, though apparently he was not yet conscious of pursuit. Once he escaped me the great seal would be gone for all time and I would be shamed before Ito. So I quickened into a run, bearing straight for the spot where I had caught the last flash of white.

Around the corner of the deserted library, with its uptilted cornices like skinny witches' arms stretched in exorcism, and I saw a crouching figure scuttering across the Court of Lions. I stuck by the shadows under the lee of the old seraglio's wall and made the near edge of the court just as my quarry disappeared into a jungle clump of dwarf hemlocks on the opposite side. A mossy stone lion at my elbow turned his head and laughed at me—yes, laughed with eyeballs goggling. A vagrant wind sent a chill down my back; it reeked of the decay of centuries. Every little alarm nerve in my body was twittering, so had the eeriness of the place and the repulsiveness of my mission worked upon me.

I lost the flying Minister then—lost him for a terrible minute of despair. Furiously I crashed through the thicket of hemlock, caring not what noise I made; vainly I explored the bare and draughty gallery of a summerhouse, standing ghostly by the lip of a murmuring waterfall. Not a sign of the furtive white figure.

Rounding a corner of masonry, remnant of a fallen wall, I found myself suddenly on the edge of the lotus pond—a small lake it is, with an artificial island in its midst upon which stands the most beautiful ruin of all Kyeng-Pok, the Hall of Congratulations. Just as I came there a fluttering daub of white showed through the gloom from the bridge linking the island pavilion with the shore—showed for an instant then faded like a wraith into

the shadow of the great columns supporting the upper gallery.

Exultingly I made for the bridge, knowing now that Han Kyu-sul had no avenue of escape. From the shadowy Hall of Congratulations there was no egress save by the zig-zag bridge approach. I crouched low—so low against the railing that I was almost on my hands and knees—and followed the acute turnings of the ancient causeway out to the high loom of shadow which was the great pavilion. Below me all about the wind stirred curled and rusty lotus pads; their harsh edges screeched against the film ice on the surface of the pond. But for that, silence—the silence of tombs and waste places. Nothing human was there save Han Kyu-sul and I, his pursuer.

A cry—a dreadful, shuddering cry cut short in its crescendo of horror!

I was frozen.

Silence again, scratched by the plaints of the lotus pads stirred by the wind.

My hair raised and my heart was pumping to choke me as I crept forward cautiously—step by step. Still silence.

The porch of the Hall was gained, then the shadow-streaked interior where the columns rose in triple ranks like slaves set to the eternal task of holding the ponderous gallery and roof on their shoulders. The pavilion is open to the weather on all sides; even in this dark hour a dim light, or lighter dark, prevailed throughout its interior.

Near the dais where stood the throne chair I stumbled over a dim white bundle. My pocket cigarette lighter had to serve me then. A snap and the tiny flame made a pinpoint of radiance in comparison with which the clotted gloom about was monstrous. I stooped and looked.

Han Kyu-sul lay there unscathed but quite dead. His lips were still open as when his cry was cut from them. But his eyes—oh, his eyes! Nothing human—naught in this world had seared them so with the brand of horror.

In one hand lay a corner of a silken scarf outflung. But the casket of the great seal which that scarf had wrapped—it was gone!

This much only remains for me to tell: The Treaty of Protectorate between Japan and Korea, dated November 17, 1905, whereby the weaker nation yielded all but the shadow of sovereignty—that even, soon to go—bore the names of all the Korean Ministers save that of Han Kyu-sul. It bore also the vermilion imprint of the Emperor's great seal. That was a pretty forgery, the work of a clever Japanese artist's brush. The great seal itself has never been found.

It was announced by the Japanese—but not believed by the Koreans—that Han Kyu-sul had committed suicide. I alone know the truth about his death. But do I know?

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THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CLEEK

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BY T. W. HANSHEW

HIGH UP ON THE CLIFFS OF CORNWALL STOOD THE CHURCH OF THE SEVEN SAINTS; AT THEIR BASE STRETCHED A LINE OF DRY BEACH; AND SOMEWHERE BETWEEN LAY THE CAVE THAT THE MISSING BOY HAD EXPLORED. WHETHER HE HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED OR MURDERED HAD BAFFLED THE LOCAL POLICE UNTIL CLEEK BROUGHT TO BEAR UPON IT HIS AMAZING KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS SCIENTIFIC.

I

IT WAS one of those gorgeous June days, when the countryside was astream with sunshine, and the sky a wonderful turquoise river, upon the bosom of which floated a thousand little cotton-wool cloud boats, drifting serenely on into an eternity of sapphirine sea; while even the hedgerows themselves, decked out as they were in all the gay green of summer leaves and summer blossoms, took on that bright, vivid crudity of tint that only the sun—Nature's greatest master-hand—knows exactly how to mix.

In the garden of the little house out there where the lazy, sleepy old Thames reached out a finger to touch the edge of Little Barholm and then ran on a bit into the heart of it, Captain Horatio Burbage, leaned on the handle of his spade—with which he was digging at the root of a fine yellow "William Allen Richardson," and passed a hand over his streaming forehead.

"Hot work, eh, Mrs. Condiment?" said he, with a twitch of the head in her direction and a healthy, happy laugh.

"Don't be stayin' out too long in the heat, Capt'n; it's not good for us old 'uns, say I," responded Mrs. Condiment practically. "That rose'll wait until the evening, I'll be bound, and it'll be cooler then."

Then she stopped suddenly, and threw up her hands, giving vent to a little screech of surprise as, down the long white ribbon of a road that stretched away at the bottom of the little wicket gate, a figure slowly wended into view, and came near to them so that the sun shone upon the red, per-

spiring face of it, and the round, fat body upon its twinkling fast-moving legs.

"Mr. Narkom, as I'm alive!" she ejaculated, running down the garden pathway with a flutter of white apron-strings and a flapping of black silk skirts. "Good afternoon, sir. And will you be pleased to come inside then? The Captain'll be that pleased to see you."

The Captain—or, to give him his proper name, Cleek—reached out a mud-stained hand, and gripped the Superintendent's, at the same time favoring him with a wry smile.

"Well, you old spoil-sport," he said, with a lurch of the shoulders, "come to hunt me out again, have you? Mrs. Condiment, you might get us a cup of tea, while I have a chat with Mr. Narkom out here in the sunshine. Ah, that's right. Well, what is it this time, old friend? A case, of course."

The Superintendent sank down upon a rustic seat, and mopped his streaming forehead with a white silk handkerchief. His face looked troubled, concerned.

"Yes, it is a case, Cleek," he said dejectedly, with a deep-drawn sigh, "and the very devil of a one, too. Boy disappeared, not a trace, not a sign. Absolutely vanished. No clue to be found. No person who saw him after he left for that walk along the seashore. Stepped off the edge of the earth, so to speak, and not even a footprint to show where he did it, too!"

"Hello!" said Cleek with a strong, rising inflection, "that sounds interesting! Disappearance, eh? How old was the lad, and when did it happen, or how? Or, no;

better wait for the details until after that cup of tea Mrs. Condiment's promised us. Then I'll change into a few decent 'duds,' and come along with you. I'll be bound that Lennard and the limousine are dodging somewhere in the background down that road there. Ah! I thought so! Tea ready, Mrs. Condiment? All right. Come along, Mr. Narkom, and have a wee drappie. Just a dash in your 'tay' will pull you together after your long journey, and then we'll hear all about your adventures afterward."

They went inside the little house, and found tea waiting for them in the tiny drawing-room, with Mrs. Condiment's best chira in honor of the visitor. Then Cleek turned again to his companion.

"Now," said he with a sigh of resignation, "to return to our muttuns. You say it was a disappearance, Mr. Narkom, and that the person in question is a boy? Of what age?"

"Ten. Son of the Luton-Baybers, biggest people in Portreath. Own miles of countryside, rich as Croesus, and as nice a family as you could wish to meet. Mother, father and the little chap."

Cleek pursed up his lips and gave forth a low whistle of surprise.

"Cornwall, eh? Devil of a journey, and you're expecting me to go there, of course."

"Yes, if you only will, old chap. The case is a sad one. Listen. Last Tuesday week, June the tenth, as you'll remember, by the calendar, little Ronald Luton-Bayber was watching the workmen upon St. Jude's Church, which has been in repair for some time. The church itself is an old ruin of feudal times, a beautiful place, but utterly useless as a place of worship since seventeen-sixty—something, for in that year it was almost totally destroyed by fire. The spire still stands, though, and a goodish part of the actual body of the building itself, but the south nave was entirely destroyed, and the whole place is at present being put into repair by a certain Mr. Joshua Burnaby, a rich, elderly gentleman who has but lately come to live in the neighborhood, and has already erected a library for the people, and a rather marvellous drinking-fountain in the middle of the village square."

"Hum! Quite an embryo Carnegie," gave back Cleek serenely, as he sipped his tea and lit a cigarette. "And where, may I ask, did this amiable church-restorer come from in the first instance, eh?"

"Yorkshire. He's a mill-owner, or something of the sort, I believe, and the village people literally worship him. That church has been their joy and pride since time began. It's one of the sights of the place, and the statuary, I believe, is considered very beautiful. There are some very fine images in gilt that used to stand in niches some six feet over the church door, and across the front of the building, eight of them, and Mr. Burnaby is having those that have gone to ruin replaced with others as nearly like the originals as possible. But that's not the case, Cleek. As I was saying, young Ronald was walking along the cliff toward the church——"

"So it stands on a cliff, then? That's an interesting situation for a place of worship, isn't it? I don't remember hearing of a church that stood on the edge of a cliff."

"Yes—right on the edge, with nothing in reach of it for a quarter of a mile on either side. The cliff is hardly a proper one, though, being in reality a high edifice of ground, jutting out over the caves where in the olden days the people hold that the smugglers used to congregate. He was watching the workmen, with his governess, Miss Doritt, when Mr. Burnaby came up and spoke to him. Miss Doritt says he was most kind to the boy, and offered to take him inside to see the interior repairs, if he'd care about it. But the lad was afraid of the darkness, and wouldn't go. So she took him home again. But she impressed upon me how perfectly charming the man was, and remarked also that he had the most beautiful eyes she had ever looked into."

"Hum. And is the gentleman a bachelor? If so, he'd better mind his *p's* and *q's*. Or perhaps I should say, his 'eyes,' where the ladies are concerned, or one will be landing him yet. And who is this Miss Doritt?"

"Daughter of the Rector of the village. A slim, sweet-faced girl with reddish hair and blue eyes. Been with the family for three years. Well, to continue: Next

day, Ronald wandered out by himself, and did not return until almost dark, when the family were distracted with fears for his safety. The coast is lonely and very rugged, and the coast-line neither straight nor smooth. There are many pitfalls for unwary feet, and they were afraid the boy had fallen down one of the many crevasses. But he hadn't, for he returned home none the worse for his little walk alone, and full of interest in a certain 'Mr. Andrew,' with whom he declared he had had a nice long talk upon the seashore. It seems that the boy had chanced upon the entrance to a cave at the foot of the cliff and after exploring it in a half-timid, half-eager fashion he had turned back and met 'Mr. Andrew' on the sands. And now the strange part of the story comes, Cleek. As it happens, there isn't a person in the village by the name of Andrew, from one end of it to the other. The boy vanished the next day, after he had taken another little walk, unknown to his governess, and the last person who spoke to him was an old peasant woman upon the cliff, half-way toward St. Jude's Church, who told him he should not be out alone at such a dangerous place."

"And what answer did the boy make?"

"The woman said that he replied that he wouldn't be alone long, as his friend Mr. Andrew had promised to show him something, but that it was a big secret, and he couldn't tell her."

Mr. Narkom leaned back in his chair, and took a large mouthful of tea. His eager eyes sought Cleek's thoughtful face.

There was silence for some minutes; then:

"Rather careless governess that, to let the child wander alone two days in succession," said he suddenly, with an uplifting of the eyebrows. "I should have thought after the first time that——"

"Mrs. Luton-Bayber had had a slight attack of influenza," interposed Mr. Narkom, "and Miss Doritt has had to nurse her. The parents are literally distracted, Cleek. Mrs. Luton-Bayber sits all day long in his nursery, and can't be moved out of it, and the father too has settled into a sort of coma of despair, and doesn't seem to see or know anything. Miss Doritt,

too, was almost beside herself with grief when I saw her, and kept saying that it was all her fault that the boy had got out alone, and that she ought to have been more careful. Mr. Burnaby, I am told, called immediately at the house, the day after the disappearance, and offered his services in any way that he could. He even organized a search party of his own workmen, and took them off the work at the church so that they should hunt for the missing child. Every cave on the coast was scoured for him, every inch of the countryside, every crevasse, every cranny. But hide nor hair of him there was none. There, that's the case, Cleek. What do you make of it?"

"I'll tell you later, when I've looked into it a bit," responded Cleek, twitching back his head. "Another cup of tea? No? Well, I'll be off and away, and change my clothes, then, for it's a long, long way to Cornwall, and the sooner we're on the scene of the disaster the better for all concerned."

II

THEY found it a "long, long way to Cornwall" indeed, but at last even that way was traversed, and they stood at the front door of a big, rambling old country-house, low and long, with gabled roof and ivy-covered walls, awaiting admittance to its precincts. That was not long forthcoming, and when Mr. Narkom, with Cleek at his side, passed into the low-ceiled drawing-room, it was nearer luncheon than breakfast, for they had traveled all night in the limousine, and had not even waited to snatch forty winks at the village inn, where they stopped for breakfast.

Mr. Luton-Bayber himself ushered them into the room, and then closed the door softly behind him. His face was the face of a man in awful anguish of soul, his eyes looked restless and haggard, and there were deep lines of care about his narrow, close-lipped mouth.

"I don't know how to begin, Mr. Headland," he said listlessly, after Mr. Narkom had performed the necessary introduction, and "Mr. George Headland" stood confessed before them. "It's all been so terrible and unwarranted. The local police could make nothing of it, so I took the

matter into my own hands, and sent to Scotland Yard at once. Mr. Narkom here kindly came down by the next train. He has told you all the details, I expect?"

"Most of them, certainly," gave back Mr. Headland in his slow, stupid voice. "No suspicion of foul play, I suppose? Or kidnappers? Was your boy likely to come into any property which might induce some unscrupulous rascal to hold him in ransom? I take it, Mr. Luton-Bayber, that you are a man of means. Pardon the question, but a policeman, you know, has privileges which an ordinary gentleman has not."

"Yes, certainly," responded Mr. Luton-Bayber quietly. "My business is a great one—or was, for I have since sold it for an enormous sum of money, which my only son Ronald would one day inherit. In fact, now, he owned most of the farm lands about here—arable culture, Mr. Headland, was my line, but on a very great scale, and I had theories which happened fortunately to 'strike it good,' as our American cousins would say. Ronald was the youngest landowner anywhere around, and the tenants of the different farms that belonged to the little chap took a great delight in dubbing him 'the little Squire', and always sent their rents in to him. It delighted him a good deal. My nephew, young Geoffrey Fawcett, only son of my eldest brother, is next of kin. He a fine young fellow, and is staying with us now. High-spirited usually, but of late I think something has been preying on his mind, for he has grown morose and silent, and hardly speaks to anybody but little Ronald. Now that the boy has—gone, Mr. Headland, he is desolate—as we are; absolutely desolate."

Mr. Luton-Bayber paused a moment and drew a deep breath. His eyes searched Cleek's face for any sign, any clue. But if there were any, Cleek did not show it.

"Hum!" said he slowly, pinching up his chin between a thumb and forefinger, "I should like to see this new heir very much indeed. You don't, of course, connect him in any way with the disappearance, I suppose? Wasn't in any money difficulties or anything of that sort?"

"Good God, no. Not that I know of!

The idea has never entered my head. No, certainly not. Geoffrey has nothing whatever to do with the case, that I can swear. Why, he simply idolizes Ronald, and Miss Doritt——"

"I take it that that was the lady who was with the boy on his last walk in company with someone else, was it not? Could she be called? I should like to hear her account of the story from her own lips. You never can tell, you know, as the small boy said when he broke the barometer, just exactly what kind of weather is likely to follow after the sunniest day. Thanks very much. . . . Ah, and this is little Ronald's governess, is it? How d'you do, Miss Doritt? I understand from Mr. Luton-Bayber here that you were the last person to accompany the boy upon any walk which he did not take alone. I am right, am I not?"

Miss Doritt bowed her head.

"Yes, Mr. Headland," she said unevenly, drawing in sharp breaths between each word, and Cleek noticed that her eyes were extraordinarily reddened as with much weeping. "Ronald and I went for our little walk down to St. Jude's Church to watch the rebuilding. It was a favorite pastime of his, and he never tired of looking at the workmen on that huge scaffolding across the face of the church, pasting the new stone bricks with mortar and setting them in their places. He would watch for hours, if I'd let him, and the golden statues particularly took his fancy. His 'yellow boys' he called them, and he knew every one of them by some pet name or other."

"Just so. And you met any one upon that walk, Miss Doritt?"

"Yes—Mr. Burnaby. It is he, you know, who is doing the restoration work, and a kinder gentleman it would be difficult to imagine."

"Made a good impression, eh?" Cleek's eyes twinkled for a moment.

"He was very courteous, and very much of a gentleman," she gave back in some confusion. "And he spoke so kindly to Ronald, and asked him if he would like to go inside. But Ronald was always afraid of the dark, and the church is gloomy and full of shadows, so he refused

to go. A short time after that, we returned home. That is all I can tell you, Mr. Headland—quite all.”

Cleek's eyes sought her face with a sort of mute enquiry in them that made the color rush to her cheeks.

“Sure that's all, Miss Doritt? Every bit?” he responded quietly. “Just think again. It's my business, you know, to read people's faces, and I can read yours. That's not—‘quite all,’ is it?”

She flushed again and shifted her eyes to Mr. Luton-Bayber's face. Then they came back to Cleek's.

“Well,” she stammered at last, “there—there's really nothing more of consequence, Mr. Headland, only an old woman's stupid curse—an old woman in the village whom the villagers call a witch.”

Cleek twitched back his head like a terrier scenting a rat.

“Hello!” he rapped out sharply. “What's that? An old woman's curse, eh? Sometimes curses cover up—other things. I should like to hear exactly what that curse was, Miss Doritt, if you don't mind.”

She hesitated a minute, and looked back again at Mr. Luton-Bayber.

“We were passing her cottage in the village one day, and she was sitting at the door with an old clay pipe in her mouth. It made Ronald laugh, and foolishly—and also very bad-manneredly—he called out to her, ‘Old clay pipe! Old clay pipe!’ The name so infuriated Old Jeanie, as she is called, Mr. Headland, that she picked up the pipe and threw it after him, screaming a curse meanwhile about his dying ‘in the sunshine when the first quarter of the moon was up’.”

Mr. Luton-Bayber glanced up with sharp eyes into Miss Doritt's face.

“I have never heard that story,” he said quickly, with sudden suspicion. Miss Doritt flushed.

“I know. Because I have told it to no one. It was only an old woman's stupidity, and Mrs. Luton-Bayber is so superstitious that I thought it best not to tell her. And then the thing quite passed from my mind. But Ronald and I never went that way any more.”

“Quite so. And the first quarter of the moon was up some few days ago, wasn't

it? Curious coincidence, but one can hardly set much store by it. That's all, I think, Miss Doritt. And now, sir, if I might see a portrait of the boy.”

A large colored photograph, heavily framed, hung upon the opposite wall, and Mr. Luton-Bayber pointed to it.

“There he is,” he said, with a world of sadness in his deep voice. “There's my bonny boy, Mr. Headland. A handsome lad, but very small for his age.”

“Yes, certainly doesn't look a big child. What was his height?”

“Something more than three feet. And he was thin, too. Small bones.”

Cleek looked long into the pictured face, with its yellow curls and large, wide-open blue eyes. The child was certainly handsome, the photograph showed that, but he was remarkably undersized for a boy of ten years, and he was, as his father had said, thin almost to leanness.

“Well, I certainly can't find anything here,” said Cleek after a quick look round the room and a glance at the stricken father's face as his eyes dwelt upon the portrait of the boy he had lost. “If I might go up to his nursery, sir? Thanks. No, don't bother to come. Up on the right-hand side of the stairs, you say? Very well. I won't make any mistake. Coming along, Mr. Narkom? Very good.”

The two men passed out of the room, and up the passage toward the stairway.

“Any ideas, old chap?” whispered the Superintendent eagerly as he trudged up in the wake of his famous ally. Cleek looked back over his shoulder.

“Yes. A few. Firstly, why does Miss Doritt paint her eyes red in that rather overdone manner? I should think any one but a rank fool would be able to discern that ‘unnatural grief.’ And likewise why had she kept the story of the curse so carefully to herself? No one with any grains of common sense would believe that. Unless the whole story was a hoax and a blind. Those little meek mouse women, you know. Ah, well!” He stopped on the top step and smiled down at the Superintendent puffing and blowing in his wake. “It's a sure thing, dear friend, that you must not add any more to your waistband, or you'll be having to carry escalator ap-

paratuses about with you to climb stairs, and there's something very 'rotten in the state of Denmark,' which I'm going to put my finger on, and put it there, too, in a brace of shakes."

They reached the nursery, and left it, after having glanced in through the half-open door to where the sound of a woman's sobbing came to them through the silences and sent the dagger of sympathy piercing their two hearts.

They descended the stairs again in silence, and passed on down the long shallow hall toward the drawing-room door, where the sound of men's voices came to them. There were two newcomers there; one was a short, thick-set man, with graying hair and heavy eyebrows that were like miniature mustaches, and truly the kindest, blue eyes that ever looked out of the mirror of a human face.

"Gad! but there's a sunny temper, or I'm a Dutchman," commented Cleek as they passed into the room. "Looks like the sort of person who was made for reliability—a human prop for other and weaker props to lean against. Mr. Burnaby, I take it. Pleased to meet you, sir. Headland's the name—George Headland of Scotland Yard. Mr. Luton-Bayber called us in on the case to investigate."

"Glad to make your acquaintance," responded Mr. Joshua Burnaby with a little formal, old-fashioned bow and a smile that showed two rows of extremely white teeth. "This is the most awful tragedy that I have come upon in all my travels. Terrible, sir, terrible! My poor friend here—what it must mean to him to lose his only son!"

Cleek felt an instinctive liking for the man. Then he turned toward the other newcomer, and gave him a quick glance from under his narrowed eyelids. "A fine young fellow" Mr. Luton-Bayber had called him, but hardly "a fine young fellow" did he appear. For, in the first place, he had that particular kind of eyes which are set rather too close together over the bridge of a thin, high nose, his brow was low and rather forbidding, and his mouth a narrow thread of scarlet set into the mask of his lean face. One shoulder drooped rather lower than the other, and

he kept continually shifting his feet and running a finger under the edge of his collar as though he were a very nervous man indeed.

"Either a guilty conscience, or a fool," Cleek mentally designated him as he shook hands with the gentleman, and put a question or two to him in a rather abrupt voice. "Haven't quite made up my mind which. But if this is some people's idea of a 'fine young fellow', well, show me the other kind." Aloud he remarked:

"And where were you at the time of the boy's disappearance, if I may inquire? Were you in this house, or not?"

The young man shifted his feet uneasily. When he spoke there was a catch in his voice, as though he were making up his mind whether to speak or not.

"No," said he finally, "I was not here. F-fact is, Mr. Headland, I was seeing a man in Redruth, which is close by here, on—on business."

"I see. And business of a very personal and private character, I take it, from your tone?"

"Yes. Entirely personal and private."

"Just so. Well, Mr. Luton-Bayber, there is nothing to be discovered here, I'm afraid. And before I go up to Truro to look up some little matters in connection with the case, I'd like to take a stroll in the village, if I may. Never been to Cornwall in my life, and haven't the faintest idea what it is like. If someone will be so kind as to accompany me——"

Someone was, after Mr. Luton-Bayber had shot a glance of some disgust and amazement at the altogether casual manner in which "Mr. George Headland" had dismissed the affair for the moment; and that someone was no less a personage than Mr. Joshua Burnaby. He laid a hand upon Cleek's arm, and smiled his fresh, sudden smile.

"Come along with me," he said cheerily. "I'll take you along and show you our church, and what my men are doing to it. It'll interest you, if you've any eye for beauty of architecture. You coming along too, Mr. Fawcett? Oh, very well, then; perhaps Mr. Narkom will accompany us as well. Good-bye for the present, Mr. Luton-Bayber, and for God's sake don't

look so troubled and anxious. We'll find your boy, I promise you!"

Then they passed out of the room, and left the stricken man alone. The road to the church led them along the cliff's edge, by a narrow zig-zag path worn through the grassy slope by continual feet. The cliff itself shelved over some fifteen or twenty feet above the rocky beach, where a strip of sand, white and loose as dry salt, showed them that the water never reached quite so far up upon this particular portion of the shore. Fifteen minutes' walk brought them in sight of the building, a handsome pile of ruins set upon the cliff like the nest of some solitary eagle, with neither sight nor sign of any habitation for some distance round. In the afternoon sunlight Cleek could see the golden statues upon its front glistening like great nuggets, and the scaffolding about it was alive with little moving spots that were the workmen upon their task.

"Looks a fine place," said he, with a deep-drawn breath of admiration as they walked up the broad gravelled pathway and stood still, looking up at it. "That's what I call real philanthropy, Mr. Burnaby, returning to a nation one of its own treasures of the past. They're doing some splendid work those men of yours, with that frontal. Hardly tell it from the original."

Mr. Burnaby fairly beamed with delight. He slid his hand through Cleek's arm and drew him forward for a closer inspection. One of the men was standing by the great open doorway, with a recumbent golden figure lying ready to be hoisted to its niche over the centre of the door, and Cleek stepped further forward to inspect it. Then he bent down suddenly and picked something out of the gravel and put it into his pocket with a smile of satisfaction.

"Bit of my favorite lichen," said he, answering Mr. Burnaby's inquiring look. "Grows on old places like this, and I'm a fair fool over botany. Keep specimens and all that. What are the statues made of, if I may ask? Marble or stone, or what? They're very fine."

Mr. Burnaby leaned over and whispered something in his ear.

"Plaster," he said with a little knowing

smile. "Nothing more or less than common plaster. That was a little idea of my own. We took the original statues, which were mutilated and broken in parts, and poured the stuff over it. When it hardened it left a perfect model, and the finishing touches were put on afterward, and the gilding done. Smart, wasn't it?"

"Very," gave back Cleek enthusiastically. Then the others came up, and the conversation became general. Mr. Nar-kom showed an Englishman's delight in the restoration process and admired everything in his voluble way. Then he called Mr. Burnaby to come over and introduce him to the foreman of this wonderful work, and Cleek and young Fawcett stood alone. Suddenly Cleek dived again, picked up something, sniffed at it for a few moments, and put that too in his pocket.

"Bit of a collector," he explained to the interested young man. "Always poking my nose around somewhere to see what I can find. Policeman's business as well, you know, Mr. Fawcett, and I'm no sluggard at the task. They're beckoning us; we'd better go in."

He followed in the wake of the two men, and they entered the church together. It was very beautiful in the interior, and now that the roof had been built over the main body, one noticed that the height was enormous. At the high altar they paused to admire the carving of the wood of which it was wrought, and Cleek pointed to a little door, also carved, which lay at the back of it, and seemed to point to some secret hiding-place.

"Where does that lead to?" he said in his interested manner. "That door—I presume it *is* a door, though I know they were in the habit of carving panels behind the altarpieces in the good old days. Looks a fine bit of work."

"Yes," assented Mr. Burnaby, "it *is* a fine bit of work, I believe. They say that some secret cupboard lies behind it, but I've tried many times to wrench it open, but it's too much for my poor strength, and the years have swollen the wood so that it will not budge."

"I see. Well, I suppose we'd better be getting on now. It's nearly tea-time, and I'm as hungry as a hunter. And I promised

Miss Doritt I'd show her the way to plant those bulbs she was so interested in." Cleek noticed the quick, sharp look of jealousy that Mr. Fawcett threw at him, and drew his own conclusions. So that was the way the land lay, was it? Hum! A match, most possibly. But how could a girl like that Miss Doritt— Then suddenly he twitched back his head and gave a little noiseless laugh. "Birds of a feather!" and all the rest of it. Then they passed out of the church into the afternoon sunlight. A workman was hoisting the gold figure up in his arms with a good deal of care, and Cleek stepped forward instantly.

"Here," said he, "let's lend a hand. Bit difficult, eh? Wait a moment; I'll hold it for you until you get that ladder straight. Steady now! Fine representation, Mr. Burnaby. Even my somewhat limited teaching will tell me that it's supposed to be the Infant Samuel, eh? . . . Yes? I thought so. There, that's it. Got him fast, have you? That's all right. Good afternoon."

Then he spun upon his heel and rejoined the group that was waiting for him at the bottom of the wide drive, and together they walked back along the cliff to the Manse, and the stricken parents of the lost child.

Mr. Burnaby left them at the door, and young Fawcett went with him, as he wanted some stamps in the village; so Cleek and Mr. Narkom walked into the drawing-room together. Mr. Luton-Bayber was standing at the window, looking out. He turned at the sound of their footsteps and approached them; his face was lined and furrowed with the sorrow that was eating its way into his soul.

"Good afternoon," he said in a dull, lifeless voice. "I hope you've enjoyed your walk, gentlemen. I can hardly expect you to have discovered any clue as to my poor boy's whereabouts. That would be asking too much."

"But not more than I am willing to give," replied Cleek, the queer little one-sided smile traveling up his cheek. "I can say nothing at the present, Mr. Luton-Bayber, but if you will meet me here in this drawing-room to-morrow morning at

eleven, I may have something that will throw some light upon the case. No—I tell you I can say nothing as yet—I can give no hope. The night will show. But for the present, I am going down to the village to interview Old Jeanie and see if she has anything to tell me. And, by the way, if you can find out exactly what kind of business detained your nephew in Redruth on the afternoon of June the eleventh, I'd be much obliged. Good-bye for the present—and you might get him to be with you in the morning when I return—and Miss Doritt. That's all, I think. Good day."

Then he spun upon his heel, and beckoning Mr. Narkom, left the astonished gentleman staring after his retreating figure, a newly-aroused suspicion growing in his mind, and incredulity marked plainly upon his countenance.

III

AT ELEVEN the next morning, Cleek had said, but it was nearly a quarter to twelve when he at last made his appearance, followed by a white-faced, excited Superintendent, and stepped into the old-fashioned drawing-room where already Mr. Luton-Bayber was seated, with young Fawcett leaning against the mantelpiece, looking down into Miss Doritt's upturned face, while Mr. Burnaby made a fourth to the little group.

"Thought I'd just look in on you and see if there were any news," he said, as he greeted Cleek with outstretched hand, a genuine welcome shining in his eyes. "Got to get off to Truro by the twelve-thirty train, to see about some more 'church' stuff hasn't arrived and the men are waiting for it. Can't get on, poor beggars. Tell us what you know, Mr. Headland, for pity's sake. I'll wager none of us have slept a wink for anxiety. Have you found poor Ronald yet?"

Cleek shook his head.

"No," he said gravely, "but I've got some news of him, which is something. Will you all put on your hats and walk down with me toward the cliff? Old Jeanie is to meet us there at one, and there is a little matter with regard to a certain gentleman's business upon the

afternoon of June the eleventh that wants looking into. You will? Ah, I'm glad. Can I fetch your hat for you, Miss Doritt? I saw it hanging in the hall. Been out for an early walk, haven't you? I thought I saw you at eight this morning by the cliff, or perhaps I was mistaken. Ready? Very well, then, we'll be moving on, for time is short, and I've got to get back to London this afternoon by the five o'clock train."

Miss Doritt's pretty pale face went a sort of brickred at Cleek's allusion to that "early walk," and at the mention of that "certain gentleman's business on June 11th," all eyes instinctively turned toward young Fawcett, until he was fairly beside himself with that miserable self-consciousness that people of his temperament show under such circumstances. A move was made toward the front door, and the whole party set forth along the cliff's edge toward the church, where Old Jeanie had promised to meet Cleek.

Her cottage was the nearest place approaching it, and as she was supposed to be on the other side of ninety, walking was hardly one of her pastimes. "But she wouldn't hear of my bringing you all down to her house," he said, in reply to Mr. Luton-Bayber's inquiry. "She persisted that she would rather meet us here by the church—didn't want her house 'overrun with the pack of 'em' was the unflattering way she expressed it. Ah, and here we are, with half-an-hour to wait. Might show us round, Mr. Burnaby, won't you? I could see this place over and over again, without getting tired."

Mr. Burnaby drew out his watch and looked at it.

"Haven't got much time," he said with a shake of the head, "but I'd be glad to show you what I can." Then he made a move toward Cleek and whispered something in his ear, giving a guarded look back to where young Fawcett was chatting with Miss Doritt, the morning sunlight streaming down upon his pale face and narrow, close-set eyes. Cleek nodded significantly.

"Yes," said he in an undertone, and then, "Not a word, mind you. But this morning, Old Jeanie—she saw him with the boy—yes—hush! he's coming. . . .

Might take us inside, Mr. Burnaby. I'll be bound that the rest of the party haven't seen the place as closely as I have."

The rest of the party hadn't, and so Mr. Burnaby led the way inside, and Cleek, coming last, jostled against young Fawcett's figure and sent the great door swinging upon its hinges with a clang.

"Clumsy fool!" he ejaculated as they all turned their heads at the sound. "Banged it with my elbow. Hope I didn't hurt you, Mr. Fawcett? So careless." He slipped a hand out and quietly turned the key in the door, and put it into his pocket. Then the party advanced toward the altar and stood before it admiring the carving of its frontal piece.

"That bit of work at the back is what gets me," commented Cleek as they moved in a body toward it, Mr. Narkom at his left side and Mr. Burnaby at his right, with Luton-Bayber, Miss Doritt, and young Fawcett bringing up the rear. "Finest thing in the place, to my thinking. No, no, Mr. Fawcett, come back here; I've something particular I want to say to you, and I don't want you wandering off while I'm saying it. About that little business on the eleventh."

He wheeled suddenly upon his heel and bent his eyes upon young Fawcett's startled, dough-white face. There was a little flutter in the group, Mr. Luton-Bayber stepped forward as if to speak, Mr. Burnaby settled his mouth into a line which said plainly. "I told you so!" and Miss Doritt gave out a hasty, terrified scream.

"Thought you'd bluff it out, did you?" threw out Cleek in a voice of thunder as the young man tossed back his head and began stammering explanations as fast as it was possible to conceive them. "But not if I know it. My name's not Cleek if I don't know a criminal when I see one."

"Cleek!" The word came from them in an astonished cry.

The queer, one-sided smile looped up the corner of his mouth and as he had been speaking his fingers had touched a tiny button in the carved panel, and it had slid noiselessly back, to reveal a dark, cavernous opening, down which ran a flight of narrow stone stairs.

"Just Cleek of Scotland Yard, gentlemen, at your service," said he serenely, "and in this little matter with Mr. Fawcett here——"

Came the sound of a sudden scuttle of footsteps, a quick, hasty exclamation, and then, before you could say "Jack Robinson" Cleek had whirled round upon the swiftly-moving figure of Mr. Joshua Burnaby, as he was in the act of slipping through the aperture, and catching him by the leg in a little bit of ju-jitsu that he had learned in those dark days that had gone, brought him crashing to the floor, where he lay, a squirming, wriggling, screeching Thing, with Cleek's hands locked about his throat, and Cleek's knee planted firmly upon his chest.

"Got you! Got you, you infernal hell-dog!" rapped out that gentleman sharply, as there came the sound of a sharp click-click and the bracelets glittered upon the prisoner's wrists. "Got you as safe as houses, thank God, before you and your little tribe can go on with your game of cheating the King of his lawful rights, or of slaughtering any more innocent children just because they happen to have got a peep into the inner workings of your little concern! Mr. Narkom, give those boys a whistle, and we'll have the whole gang in harness in a brace of shakes. That's it, that's it! Here's your man, lads, and take good care that the 'kind' gentleman doesn't slip through your fingers, for he's as slippery as the proverbial eel. Now then, gentlemen, come along!"

"Good God!" It was Mr. Luton-Bayber's voice that spoke—Mr. Luton-Bayber's voice filled with an awful anguish, a terrified awakening. "Slaughtered innocent children, you said, Mr. Cleek? What did you mean? Surely not Mr. Burnaby—surely not *he*?"

"Surely *yes*," gave back Cleek softly. "God! but I'd give my soul not to have to break this awful thing to you, sir. That's where the hard part of this kind of game comes in. But it's got to be done—it's got to be done. The lad's—*gone*, Mr. Luton-Bayber, beyond hurt, beyond harm, and the body is hidden here, in this church, where all eyes can see but only the chosen few can understand. . . . Steady

there, steady! It'll be harder for the wife than for you, you know, and it's a man's part to carry the heaviest burden. . . . You want to see it, then? Very well. But first, there is this other little matter that cannot wait, and he, poor lad, can."

Then he beckoned to the little band of blue-coated constables that were standing near, with the prisoner in their midst, and waved those who held him away.

"Take him to the local prison until Mr. Narkom is ready for him," he said in a cold, harsh voice. "The less time one spends in the company of such a devil the better. Come, gentlemen." He led the way down the dark little staircase, behind the panel, while they followed after him, stumbling in the semi-darkness. Down, down they went, almost into the bowels of the earth it seemed, until, of a sudden, the stairs stopped, and they stepped out into a wide cavernous, rock-bound place, with a tiny passage-way which led out into still another cave, and from thence to the sea-shore. The place was littered with picks and shovels, and the instruments that men use to extract metals from the earth, and there were trays full of broken earth-crust crumbled almost into dust in the search that had been made through it.

Here Cleek stopped and turned toward them.

"Don't expect you'll find many left, boys," he said to the men who stood waiting for his commands, "but hunt the place through. Every nook, every cranny. Don't let one escape. They got the men working on the front, haven't they? Good. Now, get along with you. . . . Gentlemen—Miss Doritt——" he turned toward them and threw out his hands in a little theatrical gesture that so much belied the character of him, "in this innocent-looking place you find the den of one of the smartest gang of Government thieves in existence. True successors to those 'smugglers' who used to use this very cave for the carrying out of their contraband goods. The office building of Mr. Joshua Burnaby's staff of miners, who are here for the purpose of extracting pitch-blende, and who have, by now, made a pretty penny out of it too, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Mr. Cleek!" The name came in-

voluntarily from young Fawcett's lips. "Pitch-blende, sir?"

"Yes, pitch-blende, Mr. Fawcett. That particularly rare ore which, as you know, is extracted from the metal uranium, and is the substance from which radium is chiefly obtained. Our friend Mr. Burnaby must have discovered its existence here, for Cornwall is one of the very few spots in which it is to be found, and put his ingenuity to work immediately. His restoration of the church was a good excuse for getting natural admittance to the place, and the smugglers of old helped him in his plan by unconsciously building him a workshop right among the ore itself. But the process of extraction is necessarily a long one, and one has to have money in the first place to exploit it, for the pitch-blende, after its extraction from the uranium, has to be boiled in a concentrated solution of carbonate of soda, and the residue dissolved in hydrochloric acid. The radium and other metals are then precipitated in the form of insoluble sulphates by the addition of sulphuric acid. I've no doubt that we should find a complete laboratory in our friend Mr. Burnaby's house, if we took the trouble to look, but we've proof enough here without that. What's that, Mr. Fawcett? How did I find out?"

"Why, that little bit of lichen which I picked up in the pathway yesterday told me. Its species was a very special one, so special, in fact, that, like the pussy of the fairy story, I 'smelt a rat.' It was, in fact, a lichen that took the form of a piece of that particular kind of earth-crust which contains uranium. Then that oak panel at the back of the altar-piece, which Mr. Burnaby showed Mr. Narkom and myself yesterday, was another clue in the right direction. I noticed that the carving upon it was of a more modern, more cultured school than that which had conceived the altar-piece, and the edges of it had a smooth polished appearance as of the passage of fingers constantly upon it. Also, when I put my hand against it, it jarred silently, as if it had been often opened. Last night, Mr. Narkom and I sallied forth—when the rest of you good people were in bed—and came down here to investigate.

And we found out—which, after all, is a policeman's duty, Mr. Fawcett, just as I happened to find out that the reason of your little jaunt to Redruth, to see a man 'on business,' was to procure a marriage license made out in the name of Miss Rose Doritt and yourself, and apportioned to take place this morning at eight o'clock. It was luck that guided me into the Town Hall, where I saw a man making out a record of that particular license right under my very nose—luck and Old Jeanie combined, for she seems to be a person who knows everybody else's business a great deal better than her own."

He looked at the two faces of the young couple and saw the truth of his statement written upon them. Mr. Luton-Bayber gazed from one to the other like a man demented.

"Married?" he said blankly. "You two married?"

"Yes, and likely to be very happy, too, I should say, from the look of them," threw in Cleek softly. "Mr. Fawcett, forgive me. I didn't think you had it in you, you know. To run away with a girl like that, out of hand, because she had refused you repeatedly, and then bring a marriage license to wave in her face. Women always loved, and always will love, the cave-man ancestor rather better than the polished descendant of to-day. Come, let us get back into God's daylight again, and find the end of the riddle at last."

He turned upon his heel and led the way once more up the narrow stone stairway into the body of the church, and from there out through the great doors, which he unlocked quietly with his key, into the sunshine. Mr. Luton-Bayber followed him with a stricken, age-old face.

"My boy!" he kept saying softly to himself. "My own little Ronnie! Where is he, Mr. Cleek? Where is he?"

"Up there," said Cleek quietly, pointing one arm above the church door to the seventh niche, where the Infant Samuel sparkled and shone with its coating of new gold. "Hidden in that figure, and set up as one of God's own little angels, Mr. Luton-Bayber. Steady, man, steady! God! I can imagine what the shock must

be, but the choice was surely a happy one, if there is anything to find in it that can have the element of happiness marked there. Sit down a minute, old chap, and rest yourself. There!" as he led him to an oak bench that stood on one side of the church door, for the weary to rest before entering into its sacred precincts. "That's better! What?—you want to hear all about it? Very well, then, I'll tell you. In the first place, I made the discovery yesterday, when I came here with that brute-beast, and saw the figure lying on the ground ready to be hoisted into place. He told me the statues were plaster casts, but when one of the workmen lifted it up, it struck me that there was more than 'plaster cast' in that particular figure, if not in the others. So I gave him a hand with it, just to see. The weight was something under five stone—and four stone odd was about the average weight of a boy of ten—the rest of it went in the stuff that was on the body to cover it.

"Secondly, with my finger-nail I had flaked off a bit of the gilt, and found that there was some other sort of substance which had a strong smell underneath. It proved to be varnish. And the height of it, too—roughly, I should say it is about three feet six, the height of your boy, Mr. Luton-Bayber, from what you tell me. The—the odor that hung about the thing gave me the final clue. No doubt that arch-fiend had another statue of the Infant Samuel all ready to put up in its place when opportunity afforded, but he chose that devil's hiding-place for the time being, until he could get the body away for good.

"And—What did you say, Miss Doritt? Why did he murder the boy? Why, for the simplest of reasons. You remember the lad's story of the discovery of a cave and his subsequent talk with a man called Andrew upon the seashore? Andrew was Burnaby himself, of course. The child did not know his name and the man gave that one as an extra 'blind.' The boy had obviously walked into the place unknowingly, and Burnaby was afraid he would go home and talk about it to every one else. You can very easily see how

Burnaby's undoing might have been brought about by the boy's absorbing interest in the cave and his very natural desire to share his discovery with his parents. No doubt Burnaby made a bargain with the lad to meet him the next day, and then—that was the end. The child was probably strangled and the body carried down into the cave, and his abominable work done there.

"I think that is all. The riddle is solved, and I'll be getting back to London to the unravelling of other riddles. Mr. Luton-Bayber," he went toward the anguished figure upon the bench, and laid a hand upon the stricken shoulder, "good-bye, and God give you the solace that I cannot. To have lost your boy—your only boy! But the years are long yet, and perhaps—who knows? He may send you another one in his place. Miss Doritt," he crossed back again to where the young couple were standing, looking into each other's eyes, with a sort of mingled happiness and shamed grief that was very apparent upon their faces—"don't try and make grief come when it isn't there to show for itself. You know what I mean—you must. If you didn't love the boy as you felt you ought—"

"I—I couldn't, Mr. Cleek, I couldn't. He was such a—a little beast to me; so rude and unmannerly and horrid—and now, when he's gone—"

"I know, I know. But there was no need for those reddened eyelids, was there? And you need not have felt called upon to grieve—like that. Sincerity, you know, is the chief essential. But youth has much to learn, and I wish you all the happiness in the world. Good-bye, Mr. Fawcett, and good luck to you. Good-bye, all. Mr. Narkom, time's getting short, and I'm keen for the river and the roses again."

Then, with one long last look at the figure of the man for whom life had lost all its joy, in that other little life that had gone out of it, he gave a short, sharp sigh, looked up into heaven, as if to solve the greater riddle there, and swung onward along the cliff's edge, with his hand in Mr. Narkom's arm, and was silent for a long, long time.

SCALPS

By ANDREW SOUTAR

HOW THE SCALP-HUNTER JUSTIFIED HIS NOMENCLATURE IN A MANNER WHOLLY DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY IN WHICH HE EARNED IT. . . A STORY OF INDIA WITH ALL THE THROB-BING INTENSITY THAT CHARACTERIZES LIFE ON THE FRONTIER

EVEN to this day, it remains a mystery why half the women in the hill stations made fools of themselves for the sake of so insignificant a man as Major Bilberry, known from Burmah to Agra as the Scalp Hunter. Many an Adonis with influence behind him and brilliant promise lying ahead had come out to India in the belief that he could carve a triumphant way through the love-country; but always the small, freckled figurehead of the Scalp Hunter had bobbed up at the very moment that victory seemed assured. He was a direct contradiction of all the stories that are told of women's love for the noblest of God's creatures. He was short, and almost unpleasant of feature; there was no polish in his manners, although his voice was wonderfully tender on occasion; he had no money, save that which the government chose to give him for his services. All the same, no one ever cast aspersions upon the Scalp Hunter as a soldier. His record in the north was as good as that of any other man whose name could be recalled readily to the lips. His experience was pretty wide, and he knew as much about the native mind as was good for any man to know. He loved fighting, he loved gambling, he loved taking risks—because he used to say that he hadn't a single soul in the world dependent on him—but he loved intriguing with women more than anything else.

Someone who professed to know him more intimately than the others stoutly maintained that Bilberry's intrigues were very innocuous affairs, and he challenged any one to point to a single instance of the Scalp Hunter having wilfully wronged man or woman. "Give the devil his due," that someone had said. "If the women choose to run after Bilberry and to make his life

a regular burden to himself, don't you think he ought to be pitied rather than condemned? Because you can't shake off an infatuated woman with merely a shrug of the shoulder."

That someone had been hushed into brooding silence by the rude retort that probably he hadn't paid Bilberry a card debt.

Those were very trying days in the north, and for some months the nerves of the hill station had been kept on edge by repeated risings of the tribes across the frontier. Besides, the monsoons were overdue, and the heat and the drought became a positive misery.

Colonel Dippar had come up to Doonajhi as a comparatively untried man, but the station forgave him everything—even his objectionable habit of scolding his wife in public—forgave him everything, because of that very wife. She was a very beautiful woman, probably six or seven years his junior; and it was ludicrous that she should be the mother of the young lieutenant who was out in the East for the first time.

Dippar junior is worth a few words of description. In the first place, he should never have been put into the Service. Poetry was more in his line, and although no one ever doubted his courage, or even his ability, it was easy enough to the veterans to see that his lightness of spirit was based on the hope that always there would be peace. His laughter was that of the youth who had never felt a wound. He had the fair skin of a girl; his hair was of the thin, wavy nature that women are supposed to love; he played tennis adorably, and could make a speech to the ladies as cleverly as even the Scalp Hunter. Indeed, one of the more flippant souls twitted Bilberry upon the advent of a new rival; and Bilberry, instead of digging out from

his lurid vocabulary some biting retort, frowned, and walked away in silence.

On the night that Colonel Dippar "messed" his officers at his bungalow, everyone noted the reticence of Major Bilberry. Throughout dinner, he seemed to be troubled, and the more observant marked the exchange of glances between him and the Colonel's wife. No word passed between them, save at the conventional introduction, and even then he had spoken almost gruffly. "Bilberry," said young Truner to his right-hand neighbor, at the table, "must be getting old, or tired of hunting. Usually he shows his hand so openly. The moment his eyes rest on the bird, up goes his gun."

It was two months later that the great trouble came—two months later when Major Bilberry prepared to add another scalp to his girdle. For some time there had been a great deal of desultory sniping. Ram Pindi, lying across the hills, had become unconscionably bold, and although at first his raids were regarded as cheap pilfering—his men snatched only the cattle of the villagers—the time came when he put his strength to the test by coming too close to be comfortable. Eventually, news was received from headquarters that a village of "friendlies" thirty miles up-country was actually in a state of siege, and the Colonel was instructed to send up a small force from his station to put an unholy fear into Ram Pindi and his friends. There were a number of young officers in the station at the time who were dying to show their mettle, to get a chance of a line in a dispatch—good boys, all of them, and some of them good soldiers. But the expected happened. Colonel Dippar might be as impartial as the recorders of his career had said he was, but who can blame him if the pride of the father outweighed the impartiality of the soldier? Here was the chance for his boy, Lieutenant Dippar. On the face of it, it was a simple task. Only a hundred Ghurkas could be spared to make up the punitive expedition; but the native non com's were all well-trying men. As young Truner said in that disappointed voice of his, it was one of those soft paths to glory and to the hearts of the women that occur only once in a lifetime.

The orders went forth that Lieutenant Dippar was to take charge of the expedition, and for two days the station was all bustle and excitement. The day before the expedition was to set out, Colonel Dippar went down the country for thirty or forty miles to consult Abou Kli, a "friendly" who was supposed to know as much about Ram Pindi as the latter knew about himself. You see, the Colonel was not going to leave anything to chance. His "boy!" He was always talking about his boy, and of the line from which he had sprung. It might have been unsoldierly, but some of the old veterans who had sons of their own seemed to understand.

The Colonel was not expected back before daybreak. At midnight, the Scalp Hunter made his way to the Dippar bungalow. He was at great pains to hide his movements. His native orderly went with him, and he left the man in the servants' quarters, with instructions to keep their attention diverted.

The bungalow was a two-story affair, and before entering it Major Bilberry made a rapid yet careful study of the structural arrangements. There was a light gleaming behind the window-screen immediately above the veranda. Making certain that he was unobserved, he threw up a little gravel. The screen was opened a few inches. The Scalp-Hunter whistled softly the note of a bull-frog. The light behind the screen was doused. Bilberry went up a pillar of the veranda with the agility of a cat. Within three minutes he was behind the window-screen.

"Why don't you light the lamp, Eileen?" he said.

Someone in the darkness breathed sharply. A match was struck. Bilberry remained standing near the window, until Colonel Dippar's wife had lit the lamp. He watched her movements with admiration glowing in his small blue eyes.

"As beautiful as ever, Eileen," he said, as she raised her head from the lamp and looked toward him. "The years have been very kind to you."

She did not speak, but the filmy lace at her bosom moved up and down. She had changed her dinner dress for a wrapper of deep purple; her dark hair, untouched

by a single strand of gray, was loose in its folds; the big eyes were unusually bright, yet apprehensive.

Less than a yard from the window through which the Scalp Hunter had entered was a thick curtain of beads. He had opened this, and some of the strings were still resting on his shoulders as he stood there regarding her. Opposite him was a similarly beaded doorway. Before opening her lips, she went to this doorway, drew aside the curtain and listened intently for a full minute. Apparently satisfied, she came back to the centre of the room.

"Well?" he queried. "Have you nothing to say? There was a time when you joyed in my pretty speeches. I said just now that you were as beautiful as ever. I meant it, Eileen. No one would take you to be more than thirty-five."

She shook herself, and with difficulty found her tongue.

"For God's sake, don't!" she pleaded. "Have you no appreciation of the risk I am taking?"

"It's the risk that makes the adventure worth the candle," and he twisted his little yellow mustache. "Bless my soul! It's like old times to see you standing there nervous and trembling. Do you remember the first night that——"

Her whisper of "Hush!" was really a cry of pain, and she went again to the doorway to listen.

"My dear Eileen," he said, calmly, "don't let your nerves get the better of you. I love adventure, but I'm not so foolish as to ignore all the risks. You may depend on my orderly, Hassan, to keep the servants out of ear-shot. That's what I pay him for. I was saying that it seems like old times to find you here alone. I can hardly believe that twenty odd years have passed since we dreamed our dreams together. That makes you forty-two, Eileen—forgive the brutality in recalling it—but you're as sweet to-day as then."

She whispered again, "For God's sake, don't!" but he only smiled at her fears.

"Tell me," he said, "what were your thoughts when you found me up here—when I sat opposite you at dinner that night?"

"Have you brought them?" she pleaded, and held out her hands toward him.

"Don't let us talk about the letters now," he said shortly. "I'm not in the mood. My mind is swinging back to the young days. What a shame it is that we become old! My heart is as young as when first I met you. And yours——?"

"You promised to bring me the letters."

"Did I?"

Her face was the picture of agony, and frequently her eyelids closed completely, as though she would hide even from herself the storm that was going on behind them.

"I'll pay your price."

He laughed softly. "Already you have paid half," he said.

"By agreeing to see you here alone?"

"That's the risk that makes the adventure worth the candle."

"You realize what it would mean to me, if——"

"My dear Eileen, the Colonel is down-country, so why worry?"

"The years have made you brutal," she said, bitterly. "I am ready to pay the price."

"For a dozen foolish letters."

"Written when I was a girl. If you were a man worthy the name, you would not torture me with them now."

He sauntered to the sideboard, and calmly helped himself to a "peg" of whisky. As he raised the glass to his lips, he said in a bored kind of voice: "Surely you don't mean to say that you didn't mean all you wrote?"

"The price—name your price! Have you no thought for me?"

"So much, my dear Eileen, that I have cherished those letters for twenty years. Will you believe me when I tell you that on occasions when I have felt dull and depressed, I have taken those letters from their hiding-place and read them again and again?"

"You are playing with me—torturing me."

"That which a man loves most he tortures."

Her fingers were plucking at the lace on her wrapper.

"If it's money you need, I'll get it."

He lowered his glass, and said in mock reproach: "What a fall was there, Eileen! From lover to blackmailer! Surely you

don't mean that? If I thought you did, I'd—I'd go back."

She took a step toward him, as though she feared he would carry out his threat.

"Oh! yes," he said, "they're here," and he took a small package from his pocket. "Stay here," he warned her, "I like to look at you as you stand in the middle of the room. Eileen, you are beautiful. There's not a wrinkle in your face. You're as fresh and sweet in expression as when you were out here as a girl. Are you happy with Dippar?"

She made no reply, but her lips were moving almost imperceptibly, and she was looking past him, as though making up her mind to some drastic action.

"Why do you place so much value on these letters, Eileen?"

"Because," she said, with biting irony, "in the hands of a man like Major Bilberry they may be misconstrued."

"But you loved Bilberry in those days. You say as much in these letters."

"I was a girl," she repeated.

"I placed a tremendous value on them. That's why I wrote to you the other day to advise you that I still had them. I wanted to prove to you that although you had gone from me, although you had given your life to another, your heart was still in my keeping."

She was still plucking at the lace.

"I know that I have done wrong," she said. "When your note came I should have shown it to my husband, instead of—instead of trying to temporize with you."

"No, no," he said, "you did the right thing in the circumstances. Just think of it, Eileen! What a terrible scandal you would have started in the station. And do you think the colonel would have been so ready as all that to believe you? I know men better than you do."

"I don't doubt it," she said, and again that note of irony was in her voice. "You have had so much experience."

"Of irate husbands—jealous husbands—foolish husbands? You're quite right, Eileen. Between you and me, it's the jealous husbands that provide all the fun in this God-forsaken country."

"I ask you, again, to name the price," she said.

"They're priceless, Eileen. Money couldn't buy them—although, God knows, I need money."

"Five hundred pounds?"

He whistled.

"Five thousand wouldn't buy them."

"God pity me!" she murmured.

He went up to her, holding the package of letters in his left hand. His voice changed. There was deep and sincere yearning in his eyes.

"Eileen," he said, and held the letters temptingly toward her, "if these poor things are of value to you, you may have them——"

"Major!"

"On one condition."

She looked about her in a frightened manner.

"A kiss," he said, and there was no smile in his eyes.

Perhaps, in that moment, he felt some of the agony with which she was moved, for he seized her left hand and raised it to his lips. He held out the letters.

"They're yours," he said. "I wish—yes, sincerely I wish—that I had burned them the moment after I read them. I didn't mean to hurt you, Eileen. I know that I'm a cad—in some things. Perhaps, it's because I've been spoiled. If it came to a pinch, I believe I'd give my life for you. There, I've said it, and I mean it. My record out here is not so white that I can bear to contemplate it without a blinking of the eyelids; but I'm afraid I would have it blacker than night itself, if the compensation were you. I don't know why I wrote that note to you the other day, unless it was because of the strange twist in human nature that I referred to a little while ago—that men torture those whom they love most. Don't think for a minute that it was jealousy that prompted me to drag these poor simple letters out of obscurity. Colonel Dippar—I'm going to be very frank with you, Eileen—doesn't interest me one little bit. I'm afraid that there are many traits in his character as a soldier that do not appeal to me. I don't think that we shall get on very well together. As a fact, I have already made representations to headquarters that my health demands a change of station. . . ."

Are you very much in love with your husband?"

There was convincing emphasis in her reply: "I love him more dearly than anything else in life."

"Lucky man," said the Scalp Hunter, and hung his head.

And it was at that moment that they heard the clatter of ponies' hoofs, and a voice that thrilled them both shouted angrily to a native groom to take charge of the pony. It was Colonel Dippar. They heard him rush on the veranda beneath them, and for the first time in his life it could be said of Major Bilberry that he lost his nerve. It was the woman who first regained her senses. The Colonel was coming up the stairs. There was no time to escape. She clutched the Major by the lapel of his coat, and hurried him behind the heavy bead curtain near the window overlooking the veranda.

"For my sake—for your own sake," she whispered breathlessly, "keep silent. If you attempt to leave now, he will hear you. Stand behind this curtain, and don't move. I'll go to meet him, and take him to another room, and then you can make your escape."

He stepped behind the curtain. She lowered the lamp. The Colonel had reached the landing of the stairs. He was calling excitedly: "Eileen! Where are you?" And then he threw open the door and came in.

The guilty flee when no man pursueth. For a second her nerve went again. It occurred to her that someone had shadowed the Major from the fort and apprised Colonel Dippar of the nocturnal visit, and that a crisis was imminent. But there was no sign of accusation in the white face of Colonel Dippar. It was sympathy for which he had come racing back over thirty odd miles.

"Rupert!" she stammered, "What has happened? I'll turn up the light——"

"No, no!" he said in a whisper. "Keep it low. My God, Eileen! Something's happened. I'm breaking to pieces. I want help—your help."

She caught hold of his arm.

"Let us go into my room," she urged.

"No, there's someone in there—your maid, I believe. You can't get rid of her.

I don't want her to see me. She'll guess that something's wrong. We'll stay here. Make fast the door—see that none of those damned natives are outside."

He pushed her toward the door, and paced restlessly to and fro. She came back hardly knowing what to do. She saw the curtain at the window move slightly, and in her fear she was about to place her hand over her husband's mouth.

"Listen, Eileen! This is between ourselves. My heart's broken. If it were not for you, I believe I'd go outside and finish it."

She was swaying, her whole mind racked by a thousand conflicting thoughts.

"Eileen, it's about our boy."

Again the curtain moved, but the Colonel's back was toward it.

"Rupert, dear, there's no one next door. Let's go in there."

He stopped his pacing, and turned on her almost angrily.

"What's wrong with this room? What's the matter with you, Eileen?"

"Nothing, Rupert," she said, quickly. "You've upset me, startled me. What can I do? What has happened to the boy?" And yet she didn't want him to answer, dreading some awful secret which the listening man behind the curtain must of necessity hear.

"They were going out to-morrow. It was his chance, as I thought—one of those chances which can make a man as easily as a three years' campaign. And you can't realize how I've set my heart on Gerald winning his spurs. His heart's not in the game, but it only required a little encouragement like this to make a man of him.

Now, she was holding his hands. The worst seemed over. It occurred to her that the Colonel had been allowing his thoughts to dwell on possibilities, and that the instinct of the father was killing that of the soldier.

"News has come through by a friendly native that this is not so easy an affair as we all imagined. The whole thing is a ruse on the part of Ram Pindi. We are bound to send up a force of a hundred at daybreak. We can't afford to increase it by one. Ram Pindi has gathered his men together. Four of the tribes have united,

and the only pass through the hills will be a veritable death-trap by to-morrow night."

"Then, why send them?" she asked.

He thrust her from him with roughness.

"It wasn't likely that you'd understand," he said. "The force is bound to go. The orders from headquarters are that they shall go. They have to take their chance. Now do you see the position?"

Very bravely she replied: "I'm not afraid for Gerald. He has the courage of his ancestors, and if it is his fate——"

Then came the rudest shock of all. Colonel Dippar swung round on his heel and tottered toward the couch. He sat there in silence for a minute, and she watched him with big, staring eyes, the while her senses were swimming.

"Gerald's funk'd it," said the wretched man on the couch. "It's true. Oh! my God, Eileen! He's funk'd it! I left him half-an-hour ago. God forgive me, I nearly shot him."

She turned her eyes toward the curtain. There was no movement to betray the listener. The Colonel laughed bitterly, and reached for the decanter.

"Funk'd it!" he repeated in a dull voice. "And perhaps he's not to blame, for it would have meant going to his certain death. There's only one way out of the difficulty." (He began to speak rapidly and with some fierceness.) "Already I have given out that he is ill, and dared him to show his nose outside his room for four days. If it were known that he has played the coward, it wouldn't be only his honor that would be sacrificed, but mine, and that of all who belong to me. I shouldn't be able to hold up my head in the presence even of the native soldiers. But I've fixed it, Eileen. I'm going to send—whom do you think?"

She did not speak. It is not unlikely that she didn't hear, for her eyes were riveted on the beaded curtain.

"I'm going to send that woman-hunter, Major Bilberry. Ever since I've been here the oily-tongued devil has been complaining of his lack of chances. He shall have one now."

Her lips moved pitifully. "Rupert!" she groaned.

"He shall have his chance," the Colonel repeated, rising, and stamping the floor. "They call him the Scalp Hunter. I guess he won't take many more scalps. Anyway, he won't be much loss to the Service. I don't suppose that in all his career as a soldier he has done one single thing that counts to his credit. He's a blackmailer, Eileen—I've heard that from more than one. It was my intention to make representations to headquarters that a change of station would be beneficial to him. . . . Besides, he's a single man."

"Rupert!" she said again. "Let me see Gerald first."

He crashed his right fist into the palm of his left hand.

"I came for sympathy," he said, raising his voice to a shout, "and you, his mother, stand there and keep on interrupting. Have you no love in your heart for him? . . . There, I'm sorry I said that. Of course you love him, even as I do. He's our only boy, Eileen, and if anything happened to him I think it would be the end of all for me, as it would for you. Don't you see my position, Eileen? I thought I was doing something for him, something that would help to make a big man of him. Instead of that, I've deliberately shown him the way to death—possibly to mutilation. I've been through hell during the last three hours. I've seen him shot down from his horse, and lying there in the sun, lying until night, when the women came out. Our boy! And it seems only yesterday that I was dangling a toy soldier over the rails of his cot."

He broke down completely, and sobbed into his hands. Her face was turned to the curtains, and although she could not see Bilberry, her straining eyes pleaded for pity.

"I thought I was made of sterner stuff," the Colonel sobbed, "and I believe, Eileen, that if it had been in fair and open fight, his death would have left me, not unmoved, but thankful that I had given something to my sovereign. But it's the baby that I can't get out of my eyes. The death-trap to which I might have sent him is yawning before me now. . . . No one knows of this. When I put Bilberry in charge to-morrow, I shall have to warn

him that the task will be more serious than we feared, but I dare not tell him the truth."

He broke off there, and as though he were ashamed of the tears that were streaming down his cheeks, went from the room. She heard him stumble along the corridor, heard the door of his room clash; then, like one walking in a sleep, she went to the curtains.

"Major," she whispered, "come out."

There was no answer. She went a little nearer, and drew the beads aside.

There was no one there!

The window was open. She crept back to the couch, and her eyes closed. What had the Scalp Hunter heard?

The room began to sway. A native "boy" heard a thud on the floor, and came quickly up the stairs. He was dashing water over the white face of the woman when Colonel Dippar returned.

Ram Pindi, you will find, if you look up his inglorious history, achieved only one big success as a rebel against British arms. In the Pass of Gerabaw, his three thousand natives wiped out the force of Ghurkas under Major Simeon Bilberry. The victory would not have been won so easily had the Major paid heed to the warning of Colonel Dippar, but the relations between the two officers were so strained that advice from either was an impertinence to the other. Colonel Dippar counselled a feint at the pass and a hurried movement to the south—twenty miles, if necessary.

"Draw them away from the pass," he urged, "and once you get them in the open, you'll find that your Maxims will clear the way to the village."

Major Bilberry had inclined his head—more to hide the sneer on his lips than in deference to rank.

He led his men straight to the Pass, exhorting his native non com's with forebodings of carnage and rapine in the village if they did not arrive within a given time.

When the hail of bullets swept down the pass—when every crevice in the sun-baked rocks thrust out a tongue of flame—the Scalp Hunter ordered the charge—the running of the gauntlet. Saddles were

emptied as though a reaper had passed with mammoth blade, the rocks reverberated with shrieks and curses, and Ram Pindi's men closed in, worming their way down the arid slopes like hungry wolves moving to the feast. The Scalp Hunter fought as only the women of his idle moments could have dreamed of his fighting. He was among the last score to go toppling down, but even as he lay on the blistered ground, his lower limbs trapped beneath the weight of his dead horse, he continued to empty cartridge after cartridge. Then a film came over his eyes; he still heard the cracking of the rifles, but the sound came from an immeasurable distance; the burning pain in his left shoulder became more acute, then eased, somewhat—the senses were sinking to sleep. . . .

When again he opened his eyes, there was a great stillness around him; night had come. He tried to extricate his legs from the jumbled mass that was lying across them, but the sharp pains that shot upward to the very base of the skull told him what had happened. His revolver lay a foot away. From somewhere in the darkness to the right of him came the sobbing swan-song of a dying Ghurka. The Scalp Hunter called out a cheery message; it was all that he could do to help the beggar in his passing.

From his tunic, Bilberry drew forth the letter which he had written "in case of emergency." It was addressed to Lieutenant Dippar, and contained a white feather. On the note-paper was written: "Give my regards to your father. The enclosed is my last scalp. Tell him I said so—that I sent it to you."

He fingered the letter for a few moments, then deliberately tore it to shreds.

"It's the wrong time to be ironical," he said, with a foolish little laugh. "Besides, an eavesdropper deserves all that he hears about himself."

He lay quiet for a while. The moon was bending down toward him; fitful shadows were moving about the dark slopes of the further hill. Then, out of the silence, came the chanting of fanatical women.

The Scalp Hunter reached for the fallen revolver, with its one remaining cartridge. . . .

THE REDDEST DAY

By WALTER SCOTT STORY

DOWN TO SANTA MARINA WHERE THE FLOTSAM AND JETSAM OF HUMANITY ARE BACK WASHED FROM THE WORLD OUTSIDE CAME A MAN FROM THE EAST WITH A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR ONE OF ITS NUMBER. READ HOW THE COMPOSITE RÔLE OF WITNESS, COUNSEL, AND JUDGE WAS THRUST UPON THE NEWCOMER ON HIS REDDEST DAY, DOWN THERE NEAR THE MEXICAN LINE

UNDER the dirty red-and-white awning in front of the saloon at the end of the rickety wharf in Santa Marina, a square-shouldered man, with a slouch hat drawn low upon his brow, sprawled in a wooden armchair by the door, his feet outstretched, his hands folded over the pit of his stomach as meekly as an archbishop's. He seemed to be asleep; but he wasn't.

As Sanderson, just off the *Los Angeles*, stepped from the blistering boards of the wharf to the sun-baked sand, he paused a moment to glance disgustedly at the clustered huts of the town sweltering in the sand dunes, which rolled from the bay's shore and stretched in desolate terraces to a straight line across the blue of the sky; and, after that glance, quite as naturally and as innocently, looked at the man by the doorway.

"Who the blazes are you looking at?" demanded the lounge, belligerently, sitting upright with great suddenness and glaring at him with keen hard eyes.

Taken aback by the man's quick fierceness and resentment of a mere casual glance, Sanderson hesitated a moment, and in his hesitation the other jumped to his feet.

"Looking at?" repeated Sanderson, angrily, but far from wishing trouble. "I was looking at you. Hope it didn't hurt. Can you direct me to a lodging?" Then he saw that the fellow was not looking at him, but past him. "Beg pardon," he began.

The lounge did not look toward him, but as he spoke whipped out an ugly blue-steel revolver and fired twice—bang! bang!

Sanderson—fear leaping cold in his throat like a dead frog—saw the jabs of streaking fire, seemed to feel the heat, saw the cloud-

lets of acrid smoke swirl, and the reports sounded in his ears like the break of mountain thunder.

Upon the second shot, the lounge turned upon his heel, slipped around a corner and was gone. Instantly, the saloon disgorged a score of excited, red-faced, rough men—counterparts of the shooter—and the sands before the wharf became miraculously alive with others from elsewhere.

Sanderson, still holding his grips, felt the blood come back to his pulses; he swayed a bit, but realized—wonderingly—that he was unhurt.

The men from the saloon and the beach, paying no attention to him, rushed past him and out upon the wharf.

When he turned, he saw a half dozen of them coming in toward the saloon holding a limp body, the others, buzzing angrily like hornets, following close behind. As the group pushed into the saloon, he saw the man they were carrying. It was the gray-haired skipper of the schooner *Los Angeles* from which he had just landed, and his evil face, still red was turned toward him.

He followed the rough crowd into the wide bar room, and himself had a drink.

In three minutes the skipper of the *Los Angeles* had gone.

"Dead?" queried Sanderson, soberly, speaking to a tall, stalwart man who had elbowed beside him at the bar.

The big fellow turned a brown, soft eye upon the neatly-dressed, clean-cut man from San Francisco. "Dead as the proverbial door nail," he answered, in a pleasing tone. "And I'd hate to have his account to settle before getting my harp. He was meaner than blue vitriol."

"Well, he's dead now," cried someone. "And he was old."

"Surely," agreed the big man, smoothly, turning from Sanderson to the speaker. "But truth is truth. He was a mean skunk—old and mean. Should I lie about him?" He spoke evenly, coolly, in his smooth pleasing voice and obviously above the par of Santa Marina stock.

"Who shot him?" demanded another man.

"This fellow knows—if he didn't do it himself," declared the big man, moving from the bar and indicating Sanderson with a careless wave of the hand.

Sanderson had need of his nerve at this juncture. Before him the men of Santa Marina—abalone men, pearl fishers, city gutter refuse, and prison leakings—red-faced, evil-eyed, wolfish—formed an eddying semi-circle before him and penned him at the bar, in concert firing excited questions at him.

"I can't answer you all at once," he said.

"Let Ed Davis question him!" shouted one of the bartenders.

The men quieted upon the word, and the big man with the fine voice turned to him with a slight smile.

"Did you shoot the old chap?"

"Course he didn't," interjected another bartender. "I seen him standing with the bags in his hands when the shots was fired."

"Tell your yarn, friend," commanded Davis quietly.

Sanderson told his tale in a few short sentences, describing the shooter as well as he could.

"And what are you here for?" demanded someone of the group as soon as his last word was out.

Sanderson made no response, but he noted that as he hesitated the fierce faces glowered upon him.

"What are you doing here? What'd you come for?" persisted the questioner, with an oath.

"I'm here looking for a man named Raymond E. Bartlett, of Albany, New York."

Everybody in the room broke into coarse laughter, their mood changed on the instant. As they roared, however, they looked at Sanderson and from one to another all over the place.

Ed Davis leaned against the bar and,

shaking, laughed till the tears glinted in his eyes. What a simple chap this dude from San Francisco!

"That your name, Ed Davis?" called someone.

"Are you Raymond, Jim Hosmer, you old pirate!"

And so they called jeeringly from one to another, enjoying themselves extremely.

Sanderson, who knew Santa Marina by repute—the worst hole on the California coast, within a hop, step, and a jump or a sailor's prayer from the Mexican line—smiled at his own words.

"Fortune left him somewhere?" gibed a small man at the bar.

Sanderson calmly nodded in the affirmative.

"More like he brings an invitation to a hemp dance," suggested another.

At this suggestion, the humor of the gathering changed again—as suddenly as before and as thoroughly. The faces set hard and fierce, and the semicircle reformed and glared at the man from San Francisco.

"I'd suggest, Mister," purred Ed Davis, "that you tell who and what you are and where you came from and why you are here and where you are going. As for me, however," he continued, in a smooth drawl, "I don't believe you're a man of the law."

"Spit out! you," urged two or three of the throng, fiercely impatient.

"Gentlemen," began Sanderson, slowly, "I am a man of the law—a lawyer." He was thankful at this moment, mighty thankful, that he was not a detective, which was what they were inclined to believe. "I have come down here," he went on, "looking for one Raymond E. Bartlett, formerly of Albany, New York. Bartlett left home on the run four years ago, supposing he had killed his rival in a love affair—in a square fight. It will be to his advantage to return to Albany. That's my whole story—my whole reason for coming to Santa Marina."

For a moment no one made any comment and Sanderson with a good show of coolness bore their suspicious scrutiny, ready to answer questions.

"Would you know your man if you saw him?" asked Ed Davis, at length.

"Yes," answered Sanderson, lying promptly. As a matter of fact, he had never seen Bartlett, had no photograph of him, and was quite at sea, not even sure that he was in Santa Marina.

A short, broad-shouldered fellow with a fiery eye and a crooked nose elbowed into the front of the circle.

"You're a lawyer, are you?" he demanded brusquely.

"Yes,"

The short man turned upon the room with a grin, speaking rapidly and gesticulating as he spoke.

"Old Tarlton's been croaked dirty in cold blood, boys," he said. "It must a-been Sid Corson that done it. He was sitting out in front here this afternoon. This fellow here's a lawyer. Good God! ain't we going to have *no* law here? We ought to git Sid by the heels, and the 'Frisco sharp can try him fair and honest—and we'll have a hanging to fill out the day. That old fool never hurt *me*. Ain't we going to have *no* law?"

"Yes, let that cuss try him!" roared several in delight.

"We kin have a reg'lar court right here!" bellowed another.

The crowd stormed profane approval of the novel entertainment, and Harwood Sanderson, seeing the rôle to be forced upon him, grew cold with dread.

"A good idea!" put in Ed Davis, and he grinned at the lawyer. "What do you say, friend?"

"I'm not constituted——"

An ominous growl, merging into a chorus of angry comment, arose as he began to frame a refusal to aid them in their humor; and their bickering drowned his words.

"*We* constitute you judge," announced Ed Davis, coolly, after he had at length silenced the room, "and we'll sit at six—or as soon as we can coax Sid into the centre of activities."

"And I hope," burst in the stocky, fierce-eyed man who had proposed the entertainment, "yer judgment's good. If it ain't—we may hang you, too."

"Let's have a drink," suggested somebody.

Sanderson drank a whiskey willingly

enough, pressed against the bar by the surge of ruffians athirst for blood and keen for a new amusement—mockery of the court where most of them should have stood as prisoners. It was plain to see that Corson was not a popular man in Santa Marina.

"I suggest," cried Sanderson, "that you be sure the *Los Angeles* doesn't cast off. I want the crew as witnesses."

"Witnesses, hell!" laughed a man nearby. "*We'll* do. We're good enough for Sid—the stuck-up son of a robber!" The rascal growled savagely, his eye gleaming.

Sanderson saw that the whole matter at the moment was treated as a huge joke, but, also, he saw that among the crowd there were not a few who obviously intended that it should be carried to the extreme.

He turned to Davis, who looked down at him with a quizzical smile and covertly winked.

"You're not for this?" he whispered, quickly, mightily relieved by the wink.

"I'll jump for Sid at the end—if necessary," returned the other in a low tone. "But most of this gang's out to do him now. Just struck 'em so."

"I want that schooner detained," cried Sanderson.

"Make her fast, some of you fellows," bawled Davis, good-humoredly. "We want to do this up shipshape. Get out there and make her fast!"

Inflamed by drink and passion, keen for evil amusement for their idle hours, but still goodnatured in the main, the crowd surged from the saloon. A number of them ran down the wharf, boarded the *Los Angeles* and by threats and persuasion induced Andrew, the burly mate, and the five hands to join in the hunt for the man who had shot their skipper.

The main body, like wolves, disappeared down the streets from the saloon in quest for Sid Corson, the others coming from the wharf and following.

Excited and distressed, Sanderson dropped into the chair occupied an hour before by the man he was going to try.

The whole thing seemed unreal—the wild nightmare of a fevered sleep. Only a little while before he had been on the dingy, dirty *Los Angeles*, as uncomfortable and as

irritable as a man cares to be; but now he was in a mental hell. He was alone, and he thought hard. What could he do? He would have left the place if he could, but he could not get away by water, and walking was hardly more possible than flying.

As he sat perspiring under the awning, tortured by his problem and ordeal to come, two of the bartenders came into the open.

"If Sid puts up a scrap," said one, "some of them fellows won't do no more jobs on this coast."

"You're right, Bill," agreed the other. "When Sid shoots, things drop. Best gunman from here to Alaska, he is. But he won't put up no scrap, 'cause he'll know it's a joke."

Sanderson tactfully broke into the conversation, and with little trouble learned considerable about Santa Marina and its principal inhabitants.

"Sid swore he'd blow the old man's head off," asserted Bill, as Sanderson turned the conversation to Corson.

"Old Tarlton cheated him rotten on a pearl deal, and I knew he'd get him. The old cuss oughter a-known better'n to come in."

The quest for the gunman lasted but a short time. With a pounding pulse and a shiver coursing up and down his spine, Sanderson heard the men of Santa Marina coming down to the waterfront, cursing and growling and shouting delightedly. They surged into the sunshine before the saloon bellowing and bawling in mere good-nature, a knot of fierce, red-faced ruffians, gallows-ripe. In the midst of them, his arms bound behind him, walked the shooter. Corson's face, clean-cut and intelligent, but hard, was blanched a little under the heavy tan; but the fellow was composed, and his glance was partly amused, partly contemptuous. He had not run away at all. He supposed he had no reason to run. He had yielded himself readily to the whim of his rough companions, believing that as they said they were playing with him; but no sooner was he secured than he saw that with some it was more than a joke.

"There's going to be law in this town, Corson," declared the short, stocky man who had suggested law and a court.

Corson looked him over with a glitter in his eyes.

"That so, Jack Ryan?" he said coolly. "If I'd a seen you in the bunch, I wouldn't a-stood for the joke. Well, boys," he turned carelessly from the other's glare—"come on with the fooling. I got to be getting ready to go out to-night on a trip."

"There's the judge, Sid," cried Ed Davis, with a laugh, pointing out Sanderson, who arose at the doorway with a whitening face.

"Some of you fellows grab the judge and git him inside!" bawled Ryan.

A dozen brawny rascals rushed upon Sanderson, and roughly, but laughingly, hustled him into the barroom, which instantly filled with the noisy, thirsty crew, with Corson forced into the centre of the place.

Drinks were next in order, and in a pandemonium of argument and laughing suggestion the ruffians further excited themselves with the mixture of fusel oil and wood alcohol some devil had dared dub whiskey.

"Clear a space! Clear a space!" roared the crowd.

The men broke finally from the bar and fringed the room, leaving Corson in the centre and Sanderson against the bar, his elbow held by the smooth-tongued Davis.

Erect and contemptuous, Corson shot a glance about the room, finally eying Sanderson. He grinned a trifle, and shrugged his shoulders. He knew his danger, saw it clearly, and was unafraid.

Sanderson was aware of other eyes fixed upon him as he returned the prisoner's glance. He was conscious than many of the crowd now intended serious mischief.

"Hang him!" roared Jack Ryan, with an oath. "Didn't he plug old Tarlton—a gray-headed man. *That* don't go even here! Does it boys?"

The crew of the *Los Angeles*, who had hated the skipper, growled savage approval of the sentiment; and most of the Santa Marina ruffians likewise shouted agreement.

"Get busy, you lawyer shark!" shouted someone.

"That's right! That's right!" echoed the pack.

Sanderson cleared his throat, and, shaking off Davis' hand, stepped from the bar.

"Gentlemen," he began, with a coolness amazing to himself, "I must testify that to the best of my knowledge the prisoner shot Tarlton in self-defense."

"You're a liar!" roared several men in an ugly tone.

"He probably did," cried another. "Everybody knows how Tarlton screwed Sid on the deal last April, and I heard Sid warn him he'd plug him on sight. The old fool had a gun in his hand when we picked him up, too."

A blow was struck in the crowd, the man who had just called "liar" angered by the words of defense; and a quick brawl began in one corner. The crowd began to take issue, the majority against Corson; and its temper all around was ugly. They were inflamed with drink and practically all were intent on a mock trial for amusement and a sure hanging for still further amusement and satisfaction.

Ed Davis bellowed out to the pack of rascals, his voice ringing steel-like, and he held the uneasy, fiery mob on the point of a free-for-all. In a moment or two the tussle in the corner ceased, although the men there buzzed profanely and were ready to burst into a worse row than before.

"And," went on Sanderson, raising his voice. "Tarlton came ashore, seeing Corson asleep, as he supposed, and followed behind me to shoot him down."

"Hang him!" screamed someone, infuriated.

The crowd weaved threateningly, but made no rush.

"In Santa Marina," declared Sanderson, in his clear, precise tones, "you want fair play, for you're all in the same boat. As far as I understand your ethics here, the prisoner was justified in shooting."

"Tarlton was old enough to be his father!" shouted a tall ruffian directly across the room from the lawyer.

"Not a great while ago," asserted Sanderson, looking the villainous group over with a tightening of the heart, "a stabbing affray occurred here—one man stabbed another in the back and finished him." This he had gleaned from the bartenders.

An angry growl went through the crowd. Davis smiled calmly, and exchanged a glance with Corson.

The ruffians cared nothing about Sid's deed as a deed or the manner of it; they hated Sid, who scorned most of them, and they wanted amusement.

"Why," demanded Sanderson, suddenly, putting out his hand in a compelling gesture. "was not that stabber tried for a dirty deed?"

"Because," came the answer, hoarsely, "we didn't have any damn lawyer here!"

"That man is here now," put in Sanderson, quickly. "His name—"

Before he could name the man—which, however, was unnecessary—Jack Ryan, his face flaming with wrath, leaped from the ring and started with an oath across the cleared space, his hand at his rear pocket.

"Easy, Ryan—easy—get back into the reserved seats, Jack," cried Davis, stepping beside Sanderson and confronting the rushing desperado. His voice was even and calm; he met Ryan's red glare, and waved him back toward the ring.

"Hang him! Hang him! To h—I with the lawyer!" roared Ryan's friends. "And hang the shark, too!"

Stepping still further from the bar, cool, pale-faced, but unafraid, Sanderson, eying the crowd steadily, held up his hand—and gained a hearing.

"Boys," he began, "I've told you why I came here, began to tell you—and Corson is the man I seek."

The gunman stared at him, started to speak, but, meeting Davis' eye, suddenly closed his lips and remained silent.

"He is the Raymond Bartlett I came for. I'll tell you his whole story now—briefly. He and a friend fell in love with the same girl. Corson—or Bartlett—fought the other man, and, believing he had killed him left the states in a hurry. The other man lived, however, and—did not get the girl. The girl is waiting for Bartlett—or so I understand. About two months ago Bartlett's uncle died and left a substantial fortune for your friend. Bartlett's mother is alive, boys, an old lady—such a mother as many of you have had—or have. She's waiting for—for our prisoner; has been waiting day by day these four years, hoping, hoping to hear from the son, seeing the days and the years pass, but never ceasing to hope—and to pray. Corson is Bartlett.

You said yourselves this should be but a joke—principally on me. Now, boys, all you who are hot against him for the moment, give him a square deal. He's little more than a boy—young enough to be the son of many of you. Give him a chance to get back into God's country. He has everything before him. He has a chance now to leave Santa Marina and all it means, a chance to go home and live free, out of the cold shadow of the law."

Sanderson seemed inspired; he was inspired. Never in his career at the bar before or after, did his tongue frame a stronger or better plea. His voice was like a harp. He moved the drunken crew, touched them, swayed them.

As he concluded, Ed Davis strode across the room and with his clasp knife cut Corson's bonds and clapped the shooter on the back.

"Hang him!" bellowed Ryan, seeing the turn of sentiment, and his cry and that of his particular friends seconding it drowned Sanderson's last words. "Hang him! Hang him! The lawyer's a liar. Plug him!"

A revolver shot thundered in the bar-room. Then the mob took sides—passion burned up suddenly like flames from an oil well—and bedlam broke loose. Ryan, who had turned the crowd, whipped out his revolver and fired. The pack of ruffians, shouting and cursing, closed instantly in a deadly brawl with fists and revolvers and knives.

The sailors of the *Los Angeles*, ducking frantically, fought clear from the mêlée and escaped.

Sanderson drew Corson from the surging, infuriated mass, and, unnoted, they gained the door, darted from under the awning and dashed down the wharf after the fleeing sailors.

They could hear the roar of the crowd, the shouts and the crackling of pistol shots. These sounds became louder and louder, and they knew the men were coming fighting into the open before the saloon. They dashed on frantically, elbow to elbow, and leaped to the deck of the *Los Angeles* as the crew began to push desperately clear of the wharf.

Sanderson turned from the rail, hot and

trembling, but breathing thankfully as he saw the strip of water widen between the rail and the pier.

"Lord!" exclaimed Corson, with a quick, panting laugh, "you're all right. Those fellows were out for me. I thought at first it was only a joke." He paused a moment, then grinned at the other in self-congratulation. "I'm much obliged to you," and he put out his hand and shook Sanderson's very heartily. "They ain't got nothing on me in the states—not in California, anyway, and I'll go back and work. But, say, Mister, just for your satisfaction I'll tell you the truth. The old man *was* gunning for me, and he was coming under your lee with his gun out." He ceased abruptly. "Look!" he cried. "Look! Look at that gang! Davis is coming down to take a parting shot. They pinched my gun—and I'll duck!"

The men of Santa Marina were a struggling, fighting mass before the saloon. One man—a tall fellow—drew apart from the fracas and came running down the rickety pier, and Sanderson recognized him as Davis.

Davis came on, and he did not slacken his pace as the bow of the schooner swung outward. He reached the side of the wharf, and, without pause, shot up from the planking, cleared the seven feet of space and landed sprawling, rolling against the foremast and lying there for a moment or two without moving.

The fighters now of one mind, came rushing down the wharf as the vessel swung before the slight breeze and began to move outward over the bay, blood-red in the blazing late sun.

Davis got to his feet and, paying no attention to the men on the wharf, turned to Sanderson.

"You've had an exciting day, my friend," he said, coolly, "a red-letter day. Eh?"

"My reddest day," returned Sanderson, laconically, realizing that the experience had been but of a day and not of years.

"You're a remarkably fine liar," observed Davis, at length, a smile on his handsome face. "But I suppose it's your business."

"Yes," responded Sanderson, coldly, and for the first time it occurred to him that his mission had been an utter failure

and that he was homeward bound with nothing accomplished for his client in the east.

"But," added Davis, quickly, laying a hand on his shoulder, "I admire you for it. You turned a fine trick. It was clever and nifty to tell such a yarn. But Bartlett might have hated Corson. He might have spoken. What then? Eh?"

"You're Bartlett!" exclaimed Sanderson, searching his face and suddenly putting out his hand in conviction. "Are you?"

"Yes, I'm—Bartlett," admitted Davis, after a slight hesitation, "and I'm going home if you've told the truth." There

was a bit of a catch in his smooth voice, and his face softened as he gazed at the bringer of news—or a treacherous trick of the law.

"It's God's truth man," returned Sanderson.

Davis put out his hand, and after a grip in silence he broke away and went forward. Sanderson, happy and satisfied, sat down on the rail and lighted a cigar.

The blood-red sun, with its fiery banners, dropped down over the clear-cut top of the uppermost desolate sand hill, and the dirty, battered *Los Angeles* in the afterglow dropped serenely down the swashway to make the open sea.

Three Unusual Features For Next Month

THE MAN WHO SAVED OTHERS

By John Kenneth Turner

A story dealing with a very vital present-day problem. It tells of a one-man fight against the Demon Rum, and of how that fight was won for others through the man's own great need.

UNDER THE WHITE CLOAK

By F. St. Mars

An animal story full of charm and interest for the lovers of the out-doors. It is an innovation for Short Stories. It tells of the adventures of a family of ermines which were plunged into the great war and played their part with an intensity only equalled by that of the chief participants.

THE BISHOP AND THE CANNIBAL MAID

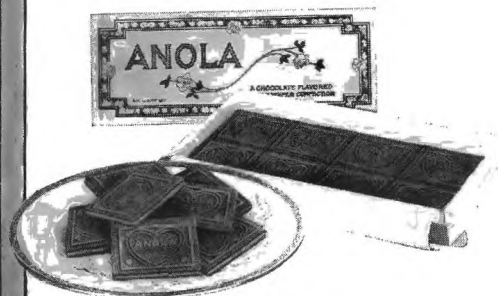
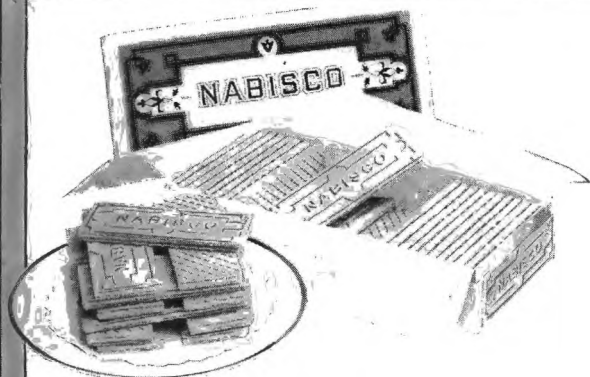
By C. Wells Nieman

A story of whimsical humor by an author whose name has become familiar to the readers of Short Stories during the last year. A piece of nonsensical fooling for the dog days.

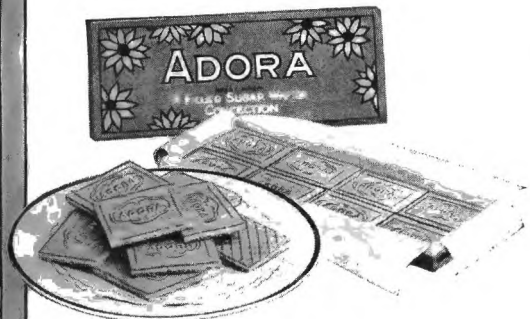
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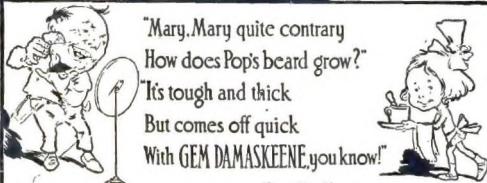
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