

The Thrill Book

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AUG. 15, 1919
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THE HEADS OF CERBERUS
A New Serial by FRANCIS STEVENS

THE THRILL BOOK

SEMIMONTHLY

Vol. II

CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 15, 1919

No. 4

ONE NOVELETTE

The Man from Thebes *William Wallace Cook* 43

TWO TWO-PART STORIES

The Lost Days *Trainor Lansing* 103

The Terror of the Rats *Croydon Heath* 122

TWO SERIALS

The Heads of Cerberus *Francis Stevens* 3
In Five Parts—Part I

The Opium Ship *H. Bedford-Jones* 144
In Four Parts—Part IV (With complete synopsis of preceding chapters)

THREE SHORT STORIES

The Seventh Birthday *Ernest Pascal* 32

The Conqueror *Tod Robbins* 119

Tales of the Double Man *Clyde Broadwell* 135

III. My Duo-Ego Sweethearts

MISCELLANEOUS

Theophany—Poem *Harry Kemp* 31

An August Pathway—Poem *Freeman Harrison* 42

A Dangerous Girl *Charlotte Mish* 102

Simple Flowers—Poem *Charles Kiprooy* 118

A Very Short Story *Charlotte Mish* 134

The Heart's Horizon—Poem *Philip Kennedy* 143

DEPARTMENTS

Soldiers and Sailors Personal Relief Section 156

Cross-Trails *The Editor* 157

Interesting Letters from Our Readers 160

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AUGUST 15, 1919

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The Heads of Cerberus

Francis
Stevens



CHAPTER I.

"WELCOME, HOWEVER YOU COME!"

UPON an enameled iron bed in a small, plainly furnished room which dawn had just begun grayly to illuminate, a man lay unconscious.

His thin face, indefinitely boyish for all its gauntness, wore that placid, uncaring look which death shares with complete insensibility. Under him his right arm was doubled in an uncomfortable, strained position, while the left hand, bare, slender, and well cared for,

trailed, limp to the floor, by the bedside. On his right temple there showed an ugly wound, evidently made by some blunt, heavy instrument, for the skin was burst rather than cut. His fair hair was plastered with blood from it, and a good deal of blood had also run down over the side of the face, lending a sinister and tragic aspect to his otherwise not unpleasant countenance. Fully dressed in a rather shabby blue serge, both appearance and attitude suggested that the man had been flung down here and left brutally to die or revive, as he might.

The dawn light grew brighter, and, as if in sympathy with its brightening, the face of the man on the bed began to take on a look more akin to that of life. That alien, waxlike placidity of one who is done with pain slowly softened and changed. The features twitched; the lips, which had fallen slightly apart, closed firmly. With a sudden contraction of the brows the man opened his eyes.

For several minutes he lay quiet, staring upward. Then he attempted to withdraw his right hand from beneath him, groaned, and by a considerable effort at last raised himself on one elbow. Gazing about the room with bewildered, pain-stricken eyes, he raised his hand to his head and afterward stared stupidly at the blood on his fingers. He seemed like one who, having fallen victim to some powerful drug, awakens in unfamiliar and inexplicable surroundings.

As he again looked about him, however, the expression changed. What he saw, it seemed, had revived some memory that mingled with a new and different bewilderment.

In a corner of the room, near the one uncurtained window, stood a small, old-fashioned, black steel safe. The door of it was swung wide open, while scattered on the floor before it lay a mass of papers. From between loose pages and folded, elastic-bound documents gleamed a few small articles of jewelry. On top of the pile two or three empty morocco cases had been carelessly tossed down.

With eyes fixed on this heap, the man swung his legs over the side of the bed, and, staggering across to the safe, dropped on his knees beside it. He ran his hand through the papers, uncovered a small brooch which he picked up and examined with a curious, frowning intentness; then let it fall and again raised a hand to his head.

In another corner of the room was

a washstand with chipped blue bowl and pitcher. Toward this, without rising from his knees, the man dragged himself. Wetting a towel that hung there, he began bathing the wound on his temple. The cold water seemed to relieve the dizziness or nausea from which he suffered. Presently he was able to pull himself to his feet, and, having contemplated his disheveled countenance in a small mirror above the stand, he proceeded with some care to remove the more obvious traces of disaster. The blood fortunately had clotted and ceased to flow. Having washed, he sought about the room, found his hat, a worn, soft black felt, on the floor near the bed, and, returning to the mirror, adjusted it with the apparent intent to conceal his wound.

The effort, though attended by a grimace of pain, was successful, and now at length the man returned his attention to that stack of miscellanies which had been the safe's contents.

Ignoring the papers, he began separating from them the few bits of jewelry. Beside the brooch there was a man's heavy gold signet ring, a pair of cuff links set with seed pearls, a bar pin of silver and moonstones, and a few similar trifles. He sorted and searched with an odd setness of expression, as if the task were unpleasant, though it might equally well have been the pain of his wound which troubled him. As he found each piece he thrust it in his pocket without examination, until the displacing of a small bundle of insurance policies disclosed the first thing of any real value in the entire collection.

With an astonished ejaculation the man seized upon it, scrutinized it with wide, horrified eyes, and for a moment afterward knelt motionless, while his pallid face slowly flushed until it was nearly crimson in color.

"Good God!"

The man flung the thing from him

as if it had burned his fingers. In a sudden frenzy of haste he tore from his pockets the trinkets he had placed there a few moments earlier, threw them all back on the stack of papers, and without another glance for the safe or its contents fairly ran across the room to the door. Flinging it open, he emerged into a short, narrow passageway.

There, however, he paused, listening intently at the head of a narrow stairway that led downward. Two other doors opened off the passage; but both were closed. Behind those doors and throughout the house below all was quiet. Ever and again, from the street, three stories below, there rose the heavy rattle of a passing truck or cart. Within the house there was no sound at all.

Assured of that, the man raised his eyes toward the ceiling. In its center was a closed wooden transom. Frowning, the man tested the transom with his finger tips, found it immovable, and, after some further hesitation, began descending the narrow stairs, a step at a time, very cautiously. They creaked under him, every creak startlingly loud in that otherwise silent place.

Reaching the landing at the floor below, he was about to essay the next flight downward, when abruptly, somewhere in the rear of the ground floor, a door opened and closed. The sound was followed by swift, light footfalls. They crossed the reception hall below, reached the stair, and began to mount.

His face bathed in a sudden sweat of desperation, the man above darted back along the second-floor hallway. One after the other he swiftly turned the handles of three closed doors. One was locked, one opened upon a closet stacked to overflowing with trunks and bags; the third disclosed a large bedroom, apparently empty, though the bed had evidently been slept in.

He sprang inside, shut the door softly, looked for a key, found none,

and thereafter stood motionless, his hand gripping the knob, one ear against the panel.

Having ascended the stairs, the footsteps were now advancing along the passage. They reached that very door against which the man stood listening. They halted there. Some one rapped lightly.

With a groan the man inside drew back. Even as he did so he found himself whirled irresistibly about and away from the door.

A great hand had descended upon his shoulder from behind. That large hand, he discovered, belonged to a man immensely tall—a huge, looming giant of a man, who had stoken upon him while he had ears only for those footsteps in the passage.

The fellow's only garment was a Turkish robe, flung loosely about his enormous shoulders. His black hair, damp from the bath, stood out like a fierce, shaggy mane above a dark, savage face in which a pair of singularly bright blue eyes blazed angrily upon the intruder. This forceful and sudden apparition in a room which the latter had believed unoccupied, was sufficiently alarming. In the little sharp cry which escaped the intruder's throat, however, there seemed a note of emotion other than terror—different from and more painful than mere terror.

"You—you!" he muttered, and fell silent.

"For the love of——" began the giant. But he, too, seemed suddenly moved past verbal expression. As a somber landscape lights to the flash of sunshine, his heavy face changed and brightened. The black scowl vanished. Shaggy brows went up in a look of intense surprise, and the fiercely set mouth relaxed to a grin of amazed but supremely good-humored delight.

"Why, it is!" he ejaculated at length. "It surely is—Bob Drayton!"

And then, with a great, pleased laugh,

he had released the other's shoulder and reached for his hand.

The intruder made no movement of response. Instead, he drew away shrinkingly, and with hands behind him stood leaning against the door. When he spoke it was in the tone of quiet despair with which a man might accept an intolerable situation from which escape has become impossible.

"Yes, Trenmore, it's I," he said. Even as the words left his lips there came another loud rapping from outside. Some one tried the handle, and only Drayton's weight against the door kept it closed.

"Get away from there, Martin!" called the big man peremptorily. "I'll ring again when I want you. Clear out now! It's otherwise engaged I am."

"Very well, sir," came the muffled and somewhat wondering reply.

Staring solemnly at one another, the two in the bedroom stood silent while the invisible Martin's steps receded slowly along the hall and began to descend the stairs.

"And for why will you not take my hand?" demanded the giant with a frown that was bewildered, rather than angry.

The man with the bruised head laughed. "I can't—can't——" Unable to control his voice, he lapsed into miserable silence.

The giant's frown deepened. He drew back a little, hitching the robe up over his bare shoulders.

"What is it ails you, Bobby? Here I'm glad to see you the way I cannot find words to tell it—and you will not take my hand! Did you get my letter, and is this a surprise visit? You're welcome, however you've come!"

But the other shrank still closer against the door, while his pallid face grew actually gray. "May I—may I sit down?" he gasped. He was swaying like a drunken man, and his knees seemed to have no strength left in them.

"Sit down! But you may indeed." Trenmore sprang instantly to help him to the nearest chair, one arm about his shoulder in a gentle, kindly pressure. "Tell me now, did you really get my letter?"

"What—letter?"

"Then you did not. What ails you, man? You're white as the banshee herself! Is it bad hurt you are, and you not telling me?"

"No—yes. A trifle. It is not that."

"What, then? Have you been ill? Here, take a drop o' the brandy, lad. That's it. A fool could see you're a deathly sick man this minute."

Trenmore's voice was tender as only a woman's or an Irishman's can be; but Drayton shrank away as if its kindness only hurt him the more.

"Don't speak that way!" he cried harshly, and buried his face in his hands.

Very wonderingly, his host laughed and again put his arm about the other's bowed shoulders. "And why not, then?" he asked gently. "I should, perhaps, like to know why you bolt into my room in the early morn, bang to my door behind myself, and then try to repel my hospitable reception; but you need tell me nothing. For me 'tis enough that you're here at all, whom I've been wanting to see this long while more than any other lad in the world."

"Stop it, I say!" cried Drayton, and raised his head abruptly. His pale face had flushed deep, and he seemed to flinch at the sound of his own words. "I can't—can't take your welcome. I came here as a—thief, Terry Trenmore! And for no other reason."

The Irishman's blue eyes flashed wide.

"A thief?" He laughed shortly. "And pray what of mine did you wish to steal, friend Bobby? Name the thing and it's yours!"

"Terry, I'm not off my head, as you think. Haven't any such excuse. I

tell you, I'm a thief. Plain, ugly t-h-i-e-f. thief. I entered this particular house only because I found a way in. I didn't know it was *your* house."

In the midst of speech Drayton paused and started suddenly to his feet. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "I had half forgotten. Terry, I wasn't the only—er—burglar here last night!"

"And what are you meaning now?"

"Your safe was opened——"

Ere he could finish the sentence Trenmore had turned, crossed the room, and was pushing aside a silken curtain, hung from ceiling to floor, near the bed. It disclosed a squared, nickelled-steel door, set flush with the wall. After a moment's scrutiny he turned a freshly bewildered face to his visitor. "Broken open? But it's not! My poor boy, you are out of your mind this morning. It's a doctor you are needing."

"No, no. I don't mean that one. I mean the safe upstairs, in the small room at the front."

"Is there one there?" queried Trenmore. "I didn't know of it."

"What! This isn't your own place, then?"

The giant shook his head, smiling. "For why would you be expecting to find Terence Trenmore tied to a house of his own? It belongs to my own cousin, on the mother's side, whom I'll be glad for you to know, though he's not here now. But you say there's been robbery done abovestairs?"

"I'm not—exactly sure. There was something so strange about it all—— Come up there with me, Terry, and look for yourself."

Either because of the brandy he had swallowed, or because the first shame and shock of confession were over, Drayton seemed to have recovered some measure of strength. He led the way upstairs to the front bedroom, and answered the Irishman's question with a slow gesture toward the violated safe.

Trenmore stood thoughtfully over the neglected pile of papers and more or less valuable jewelry, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his bathrobe, brows drawn in a reflective scowl. "And what," he asked, "were they like, these queer thieves that left their plunder behind them?"

"I didn't see them."

"What?"

Drayton's boyish, sensitive mouth quivered. "If you don't believe me, I can't blame you, of course. By Heaven, I think it would be a relief if you would call in the police, Terry, and end the whole rotten affair that way. I wish with all my heart that they'd put me where they put my partner, poor old Warren!"

"And where is that? It's riddles you're talking."

"First in jail and now in his grave," answered Drayton grimly.

The Irishman flung back his great, black-maned head angrily.

"Bobby, my boy, we've had enough of that make of talk! I can see with half an eye that much has happened of which I know nothing, for I've been back in old Ireland this two years past. But for what sort of scoundrel do you take me, to throw over the man I've best liked in my whole life, and just because he chances to be in a bit of trouble? As I said before, 'tis a doctor you are needing, not a policeman. As for this," he pointed to the rifled safe, "it was my thought that you did things here last night of which you have now no memory. Others here? 'Tis not in the bounds of reason that two different thieves—pardon the word; it's your own—should honor this house in one night!"

By way of reply, Drayton removed his hat, and for the first time Trenmore saw the ugly wound its low-drawn brim had concealed. "They gave me that," said Drayton simply. "The room," he continued, "was dark. I

came over the roofs and down through the first transom I found unfastened. I had just entered this room and discovered the safe when they, whoever they were, came on me from behind and knocked me out."

Trenmore's lips drew in with a little sympathetic sound. "Ah, and so that's why you're so white and all! But tell me, was the safe open then?"

"No. They must have done the trick afterward. I was left lying on that bed. And I may as well tell you that this morning, when I found myself alone here and that stuff on the floor, I was going to—was going to finish what they had begun."

"And what stopped you?" Trenmore eyed him curiously from beneath lowered brows.

"This." Stooping, Drayton picked up the thing he had flung so desperately away half an hour earlier. It was a thin gold cigarette case, plain save for a monogram done in inlaid platinum.

Trenmore looked, and nodded slowly.

"Your own gift to me, Tony. I think a power o' that case. But how came it there, I wonder? The other day I mislaid it—— Likely Jim found it and put it here while I was in Atlantic City yesterday. When I returned Jim had been called away. I wonder he did not put it in the wall safe, though, that he lent me the use of; but all that's no matter. What did you do after finding the case?"

"I tried to get out, but the transom had been fastened down from above. So I made for the front door. Your servant intercepted me, and I—I hid in your room, hoping he would pass on by."

"And that's the one piece of good luck you had, my boy!" cried Trenmore. Grasping Drayton's shoulder with one great hand, he shook him gently to and fro, as if he had been the child he seemed beside his huge

friend. "Don't look like that now! I'm not so easy shocked, and if you've seen fit to turn burglar, Bob Drayton, I'm only sure 'tis for some very good cause. And let you arrive through the roof or by the front door, it makes no difference at all, the way you're here now! Martin and I have the place to ourselves for a couple of days. Jimmy Burford's a jolly old bachelor to delight your heart, but he lives at his club mostly and keeps but one manservant, and him he took to New York with him when he was called away. We'll do fine with Martin, though. The boy's a born genius for cooking."

"You mean that you are only visiting here?" asked Drayton hesitatingly. Trenmore seemed taking it rather for granted that he was to remain as a guest, who had entered as a very inefficient burglar.

"Just visiting, the while Viola is enjoying herself with some friends in Atlantic City. You know it's no social butterfly I am, and too much of that crowd I will not stand, even for her sake. D'you mind my ever speaking to you of my little sister Viola, that was in the convent school near Los Angeles? But I'm a dog to keep you standing there! Come down to my room while we fix that head of yours and I get myself decently dressed. Then we'll breakfast together, and perhaps you'll tell me a little of what's been troubling your heart? You need not, unless——"

"But I will, of course!" broke in Drayton impulsively as he at last grasped the friendly, powerful hand which his innate and self-denied honesty had prevented his taking except on a basis of open understanding.

Gathering up the stuff on the floor in one great armful, Trenmore bore it down to his own bedroom, followed by Drayton.

"I'll advise that Jimmy get him a new safe," chuckled Trenmore as he tossed his burden on the bed. "If there's

aught of value here he deserves to be robbed, keeping it in that old tin box of a thing. But perhaps I'm ungrateful. I never thought, so freely he offered it, that he had to clear his own things out of this wall safe to give me the use of it. I'll be kindly and share it with him from this day, and if there's anything missing from this lot I'll make the value up to him—so be he'll let me, which he will not, being proud, stiff-necked, and half a Sassenach, for all he's my mother's third cousin on the O'Shaughnessy side. So I'll do it in a most underhanded and secretive manner and get the better of him."

Still running along in a light, commonplace tone which denied any trace of the unusual in the situation, he again rang for Martin, and when that young man appeared bade him prepare breakfast for his guest as well as himself. The servant, a young fellow of nineteen or thereabouts, did his best to conceal a not unnatural amazement; but his imitation of an imperturbable English manservant was a rather forlorn and weak one.

He went off at last, muttering to himself: "How'd the fellow get in? That's what I want to know! He wasn't here last night, and Mr. Trenmore ain't been out of his room or I'd have heard him, and I never let his friend in, sure thing!"

Not strangely, perhaps, it did not occur to Martin that Mr. Trenmore's mysterious friend might have come a-visiting through the roof.

CHAPTER II.

"DUST OF PURGATORY."

LESS than an hour later, Robert Drayton, amateur burglar and so shortly previous a desperate and hunted man, sat down at table in the respectable Philadelphia residence he had fortunately chosen for his first invasion. His wounded temple was adorned with

several neatly adjusted strips of plaster, and if his head ached, at least his heart was lighter than it had been in many a day. This last, as it were, in spite of himself. He felt that he should really be cringing under the table—anywhere out of sight. But with Terence Trenmore sitting opposite, his countenance fairly irradiating satisfaction and good cheer, poor Drayton could not for the life of him either cringe or slink.

The breakfast, moreover, proved Martin to be what his master had boasted—an uncommonly good cook. Before the charms of sweet Virginia ham, fresh eggs, hot muffins, and super-excellent coffee, Drayton's misery and humiliation strangely faded into the background of consciousness.

Trenmore was an older man than he, by ten years of time and thrice their equivalent in rough experience. The two had first met in Chicago during the strenuous period of a strike. Drayton, unwise enough to play peaceful bystander at a full-grown riot, had found himself involved in an embattled medley of muscular slaughter-house men and equally muscular and better armed police. He had stood an excellent chance of being killed by one party or arrested by the other, and none at all of extricating himself, when Trenmore, overlooking the fight from the steps of a near-by building, and seeing a young, slender, well-dressed man in a struggle he had obviously no place in, came to his aid and fought a way out for the two of them.

Later they had joined forces on a long vacation in the Northern woods. Drayton was then a rising young lawyer of considerable independent means, high-strung, nervous, and with a certain disposition toward melancholy. In the Irishman, with his tireless strength and humorous optimism, he found an ideal companion for that outdoor life, while Trenmore, well read, but self-educated, formed a well-nigh extravagant

admiration for the young lawyer's intellect and character. And Terence Trenmore, his faith once given, resembled a large, loyal mastiff—he was thenceforth ready to give at need all that was his, goods, gains, or the strength of his great brain and body.

Following those months in Canada, however, Drayton returned to Cincinnati, his home. The two had kept up for some time a desultory correspondence, but Trenmore's fortune, acquired in the Yukon during its early days of glory, permitted him to live the roving life which suited his restless temperament. His address, changed so frequently that Drayton found it difficult to keep track of him, and as the latter became more and more desperately absorbed in certain ruinous complications of his own affairs, he had allowed his correspondence with Trenmore to lapse to nothing.

Their appetites pleasantly quelled at last, and cigars lighted, the two men adjourned to the library and settled themselves to talk things out.

"You've been in Ireland, you say ——" began Drayton, but the other interrupted with raised hand.

"Let that wait. Do you not guess that I'm fair burning up with curiosity? There, there, when you look like that you make me want to cry, you do! Tell me the name of the scoundrel that's been driving you and I'll—I'll obliterate him. But don't act like the world was all black and you at your own wake. Sure, there's no trouble in life that's worth it! Now, what's all the wrong?"

Drayton smiled in spite of himself. The big man's good humor was too infectious for resistance. His face, however, soon fell again into the tragic lines drawn there by recent events.

"It can be soon told," he began. "You know we had a very fair legal practice, Simon Warren and I. Up there in the woods I'm afraid I talked a lot about myself, so I don't need to

tell you of the early struggles of a couple of cub lawyers. It was Warren, though, who made us what we were. Poor Warren! He had married just before the crash, and his young wife died three days after Simon was sentenced to a ten-year term in the penitentiary."

"So? And what did your partner do to deserve all that?"

"That is the story. We had built up a good clientele among the Cincinnati real-estate men and contractors. Simon specialized on contracts, and I on the real-estate end. We had a pretty fair reputation for success, too.

"Then Warren found out a thing about Interstate General Merchandise which would have put at least five men behind the bars. Unluckily for us they were big men. Too big for us small fry to tackle, though we didn't quite realize that. They tried to settle it amicably by buying us over. We were just the pair they were looking for, they said. And Warren and I could have each cleared our twenty-five thousand a year at the work they offered.

"Well, we'd have liked the money, of course—who wouldn't?—but not enough to take it as blackmail. Simon stuck to his guns and laid the affair before the district attorney. Before we could clinch the matter, Interstate Merchandise came down on us like a trip-hammer on a soft-boiled egg.

"Oh, yes, they framed us. They got Simon with faked papers on a deal he wouldn't have touched with a ten-foot pair of tongs. Of course we went down together. The disgrace killed his wife. Three weeks ago Simon died in prison of tuberculosis. That or a broken heart——

"And I—well, you see me here. I got off without a jail term. But I'd been disbarred for illegal practice, and what money I had was all gone in the fight. After that—I don't know if it was for revenge or that they were still

afraid of me, but—Terry, those Interstate devils hounded me out of one job after another—broke me—drove me clean out of life as I knew it.

“Yesterday I landed here in Philadelphia without a cent in my pockets, hungry and with no hope or faith left in anything. Last night I said, ‘So be it! They have killed Simon, and they will not let me live as an honest man. But, by God, I’ll live!’ And that is the way criminals are created. I have learned it.”

Drayton ended with a catch in his voice. His clear, honest eyes were bright with the memory of that desperate resolve, so utterly alien to his nature, and his long, sensitive fingers opened and closed spasmodically.

Then Trenmore did a strangely heartless thing. Having stared at his friend for a moment, he threw back his head and laughed—laughed in a great Olympian peal of merriment that rang through the silent house.

Drayton sprang to his feet. “By heavens, Terry, I wish I could see the joke! But I’m damned if there’s anything funny about what I’ve been through!”

As abruptly as he had begun, his host stopped laughing and forced his face into solemnity. But his blue eyes still twinkled dangerously.

“Sit down—sit down, man, and forgive me for a fool of an Irishman! Should you kill me right here for laughing, I’d not be blaming you—and my heart aching this minute the way I can’t wait to get at the crooks that have ruined you, and as soon as may be we’ll go back to your home, you and I, and see what there is to be done. But for why I laughed, sure you’re the most original criminal that ever tried to rob a man! You get in, you locate the crib—did you call it a crib, Bobby?—all in good form. And, by the way, were you thinking of carrying the safe away in your pocket? Or had you a

stick of dynamite handy? Well, some obliging professional comes along and works the combination for you and leaves the door open. You awaken from pleasant dreams to find all that was inside, or most of it, lying right at your feet. And what is it you do? You flee as if from the devil himself, and if I hadn’t stopped you you’d be straying about the streets this minute as near starvation as you were before!”

Drayton forced a smile for his friend’s good-natured raillery. He could not be angry at ridicule so obviously meant to dissipate self-condemnation in laughter. “I could hardly begin on you, Terry,” he said. “And speaking of that, I’ve already enjoyed more hospitality than I have any right to. I’m cured of crime, Terry; but if you have any idea that I am going to load myself down on you——”

Springing up with his usual impetuosity, the big Irishman fairly hurled Drayton back into his chair.

“Sit down! Sit down there where you belong! Is it load yourself you’re talking of? It’s to be loaded with me you are! Do you know that my very life’s been threatened?”

“Please don’t joke any more, Terry,” protested the other wearily. “I’ve not gone into details, but all the fun has been crushed out of me in the last year or so.”

“Take shame to yourself, then! But this is no joke. You’ll well believe me it’s not when you’ve heard it all. Stay here now a minute, for I’ve a thing to show you.”

In no little wonder, Drayton obeyed while Trenmore left the room and ascended the stairs to his bedchamber. A few minutes later he returned, and, drawing his chair close to Drayton, dropped into it and disclosed the thing he had brought. It seemed to be a glass vial. About six inches in length, it tapered to a point at one end, while the other was capped with silver, daintily

carved to the shape of three dogs' heads. These heads, with savage, snarling jaws, all emerged from one collar, set with five small but brilliant rubies. The vial was filled to the top with some substance of the color of gray emery.

"A pretty little thing," commented Drayton.

"Aye, 'tis a pretty little thing," the other assented, staring down at the odd trifle with frowning brows. "Now what would you be thinking it might be?"

"I could hardly say. It looks like a bottle for smelling salts. What is that stuff inside?"

"Ah, now you're asking! And what do you think of the handsome silver cap to it?"

"Really, Terry," replied Drayton with a touch of impatience, "I am no judge of that sort of work. It is intended, I suppose, to represent the three-headed dog, Cerberus—the one that guarded the gates of Pluto's realm in the old mythology. The carving is beautiful."

Trenmore nodded. "It is that. And now I'll tell you how I came by it. You know it's an ignorant, rude man I am; but hid away somewhere inside me there's a great love for little, pretty, delicate things. And though I've no real education like you, Bobby, I've picked up one thing here and another there, and when I happen on some trifle with a bit of a history it just puts the comether on me, and have it I must, whether or no.

"Behind that small steel door you saw in the wall of my room I've some amazing pretty toys that I'd not like to part with. I'll show you them later, if you care, and tell you the tales that go with them. Did you read in the paper last month how Thaddeus B. Crane was after dying and all his great collection to go at auction?"

"I didn't notice."

"You wouldn't. You'd something

worse to think of. But I did; so I remembered this which I had heard the fame of, and to that auction I went three days running until they came to the thing I wanted. 'The Heads of Cerberus,' it's called, just as you named it like the clever lad you are. It's old, and they say 'twas made in Florence centuries ago. But I'll read you the bit of description Crane had for it."

He produced a sheet of time-yellowed paper. "'The Heads of Cerberus,'" he read. "'Said to have been carved by Benvenuto Cellini for his patron, the Duke of Florence. Its contents have never been examined. The legend runs, however, that the gray dust within it was gathered from the rocks at the gates of Purgatory by the poet Dante, and that it was to contain this dust that the duke required the vial. More probably, from a modern viewpoint, the contents are some sort of poison, which a Florentine duke may well have carried in self-protection or for the destruction of his enemies. The vial itself is of rock crystal and the cap—closed with cement—a peculiarly beautiful specimen of sixteenth-century work. It is probably a genuine Cellini. It passed into the hands——' But I'll not be reading the rest. It tells the names of those who have owned it, and the astonishing number of them that died violently or disappeared from the face of God's earth, and no more trace left of them than a puff of smoke from your cigar!"

Drayton's lips twisted to an involuntary smile.

"A very extraordinary history," he commented. "Dante, Benvenuto Cellini, and Dust from the Rocks of Purgatory! May I ask what you paid?"

"Only five hundred. There'd word got about that Crane was no good judge and that there were more copies than originals in his collections. The regular collectors fought shy, and I misdoubt Crane's widow realized the half of what

he'd spent on the lot. There was little bidding for this. The tale's too extravagant, and most would not believe it a true Cellini. However, no sooner had I got it and walked out of the sales-rooms than a gray-haired old party came running after me and caught me by the sleeve.

"'And is it you that bought the Cerberus?' he demands. 'It's myself that did,' I conceded him. 'And will you sell it again to me?' 'I will not,' says I. 'Not for twice what you paid for it?' inquires he with a cunning look in his eye that I did not like. 'No, I'll not,' says I. 'Nor for two or four times what I paid for it. I am a gentleman collector. I am not a dealer. I bought this for myself and I will keep it. Good day to you, sir,' says I, and with that I walked on.

"But do you believe he would accept my polite rebuff? Not he. He runs along by the side of me, taking three steps to my one. 'If you'll not sell it me you'll be sorry,' he keeps on saying. 'It should be mine. I went to buy it, but my chauffeur run over a man on Broadway. Confound the fool! The police took my chauffeur and delayed me till I came too late for the bidding. I'd have had it if it cost me five thousand, and that's what I'll give now, if you'll sell.'

"By then I'd taken a real dislike to the man with his persistence and his sharp eyes. In plain words I told him if he'd not desist from following me about I'd be calling an ambulance, for he'd be needing one shortly. 'You can join in the hospital the poor devil your car murdered,' says I. And at that he takes a squint up at me sideways, like I was an elephant he'd just discovered himself to be walking with and him thinking all along I was just a small pigling, and he turns white and stops dead in his tracks. The poor midget! I'd not have laid my little finger on him for fear of crushing him entirely.

But for all that he gets courage to shake his fist and call after me, 'You'll be sorry for this. You don't know what you've bought and I do! I'll have it yet!'

"Well, I thought no more of the silly madman that day. But on the next I received a letter that came to me at the hotel where Viola and me were then stopping. It said that if I'd not sell for ten thousand I'd sell for worse than nothing, and to put an ad in the paper if I'd changed my mind.

"Of course, I did nothing. But from that day I've had no peace at all. Twice my baggage has been gone over, and last week two thugs in black masks tried to hold me up in Jersey City. The poor devils are in the hospital this minute; but they could not or would not tell the name of the man who employed them.

"There have been two more letters which I'll show you presently, and the last was addressed here, showing how the fellow has watched and spied on my movements. In it he declares that my very life shall not stand in the way but he must have the Cerberus. I'm a man of peace, and it's fair getting on my nerves.

"Last night they must have tried again, and it's a wonder I was not murdered in my bed! You've come in the nick of time to save me from nervous prostration, Bobby, lad, for it's little they can do against the two of us, your brains and my brawn!"

Now it was Drayton's turn to laugh. The picture of Terence Trenmore suffering from nervous collapse, or caring two straws for all the crooks and madmen in America, was too much for his friend. He laughed and laughed, while the Irishman stared at him in a grieved surprise which only added fuel to his hysterical mirth.

"And why," demanded Trenmore indignantly, "why wouldn't I be thinking of you when I want a lad at my side?"

Jimmy, my host here, is a fine man, but not the one to consult on such a mysterious matter, life meaning to him just business, with his club for diversion, heaven help him! And were he not a distant cousin of my own mother on the O'Shaughnessy side, Jimmy and me would have never become acquainted. And wasn't I meaning to go clear to Cincinnati next week, just to be asking your advice? And does that list of folk who have had ill luck from the Cerberus—does that mean nothing at all? I tell you, I need your help and counsel, Bobby, and it's glad I am that you are here to give it!"

Drayton suddenly perceived that the Irishman had been entirely serious throughout. The tale was not, as he had believed, a mere excuse seized on with intent to delude him, Drayton, into feeling that he might be of value as an ally. Hidden away in one secret corner of his friend's giant heart there dwelt a small, imaginative and quite credulous child. "Dust from the Rocks of Purgatory!" It was that which had fascinated Trenmore, and it was that more than any dread of midnight assassins which had driven him to appeal to his lawyer friend. What he wished was moral, not physical, backing.

"But, Terry," said Drayton, sobered and really touched by this unexpected demand upon him, "if the thing bothers you so much why not sell and be rid of it?"

Trenmore's mouth set in a straight, obstinate line. "No, I'll not," he declared. "They cannot bully a Trenmore, and Viola says the same. But if I could I'd lay hands on the old villain that's after it the way he'd trouble us no more, so I would!"

"Have you tried the police?"

"To be sure."

"How about the auction rooms where you bought it? If this persecutor of yours is a collector, they might know him there by description."

"That I tried myself before I troubled the police. One young fellow remembered the old villain, and remembered him asking my name. They keep a register at the salesrooms. But as for the villain's own name, no one there seemed to know it."

"Well, then——" Drayton cast about in his mind somewhat vaguely. Then an idea struck him. "By the way, Terry, have you opened the vial and had the contents analyzed?"

Trenmore's blue eyes flashed wide. "I have not!" he exclaimed with considerable energy. "For why would I be intruding on such a matter? Surely, in the place where that Dust come from, they'd not be liking me to meddle with it!"

Drayton firmly suppressed a smile. The price of friendship is tolerance, and he was too grateful and too fond of his Irishman to express ridicule. "I really believe," he said gravely, "that, admitting the Purgatory part of the legend to be true, the Dust is too far separated from its origin, and too many centuries have elapsed since it was placed in this vial for any real danger to attach to it. And who knows? There may be diamonds, or some other jewels, hidden in that close-packed dust. If there is a question of the vial's authenticity as a Cellini it can't be the vial itself that your mysterious collector is ready to pay ten thousand for. Why not open it, anyway, and find out exactly where you are?"

The Irishman scratched his head with a curious expression of indecision. Physical dread was a sensation of which he was happily ignorant; but he possessed a strong disinclination to meddle with any affair that touched on the supernatural. He had bought the vial for the sake of its reputed creator, Cellini. Then his attention had become focused on the "Dust" and the uncanny description accompanying it, and while obstinacy forbade him to let the thing

go by force, still it was to him a very uneasy possession. Had no one arisen to dispute its ownership, Trenmore would probably have rid himself of the Cerberus before this.

"Well," he said at length, "if you think opening it is the wise way to be doing, then let us do it and get it over. But myself, I dread it's a foolish trifling with powers we know little of!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Drayton. "That Dante-Purgatory stuff has got your goat, Terry. Not," he added hastily, "that I am ridiculing the story, but you will admit that it is slightly—just slightly—improbable. Here!" He snatched a newspaper from a near-by table and spread it on the floor between them. "Give me that vial and I'll see if it is possible to get the cap open without injury. We mustn't risk any vandalism. It is a beautiful piece of work, Cellini or no Cellini."

Feeling in his pocket, he drew out a serviceable penknife, opened the large blade, and took the crystal vial from Trenmore's still reluctant hand. As the description had stated, the hinged cover, besides being fastened with a tiny hasp that formed the buckle of the jeweled collar, was cemented down. The cement showed as a thin, reddish line between silver and crystal. The lower sections of hinge and hasp were riveted to the crystal.

Drayton ran the point of his blade cautiously around the red line. "Hard as steel," he commented. "After all, perhaps we can't open it."

A flash of relief lighted Trenmore's heavy, anxious face. He stretched a quick hand to reclaim the vial, but Drayton drew back. Opening a thin, small blade, he tried the cement from another angle.

"Aha!" said he triumphantly. "That does it. This stuff is old. I can't cut it, but you see it's easy to separate the cement from the crystal by running the blade underneath. And now—careful

does it. There! Let's see how the hasp works."

He fumbled with it for a moment. There came a little snap, and the cover flew up as if propelled by a spring. At the same time a tiny cloud of fine, grayish particles arose from the open vial. They gleamed like diamond dust in the sunlight.

With a quick gasp, Trenmore sat back in his chair. Though the room was cool, his face was shining with perspiration; but Drayton paid him no heed. The ex-lawyer's curiosity was by this time fully aroused, and it was unclouded by any wraith of the superstition which claimed for the gray powder so unnatural an origin.

Without hesitation, he stooped and carefully emptied the vial upon the paper at his feet. The Dust was so finely pulverized that he had to proceed with the utmost care to prevent the stuff from rising into the air. At last the vial was empty. A dark heap, resembling gray flour or powdered emery, had been its sole contents.

"I was wrong," remarked Drayton, sitting up with the Cerberus in his hand. "There was nothing there but the Dust."

Now it was strange that after all his nervous dread and horror of the Dust, Trenmore should have done what he did. Perhaps, having seen Drayton handle it without harm, he had lost this fear; or it might have been the natural heedlessness of his impulsive nature. Whatever the explanation, as Drayton ceased speaking his friend leaned over and deliberately thrust two fingers into the powder, stirring it about and feeling its soft fineness.

And then occurred the first of that series of extraordinary incidents which were to involve both Trenmore and Robert Drayton in adventures so weird, so seemingly inexplicable, that for a time even Drayton came to share his friend's belief in the supernatural qual-

ity of that which had been guarded by Cellini's Cerberus.

There sat the two friends in Burford's pleasant, sunlit library. Outside the frequent clang or rattle of passing traffic spoke of the "downtown" district which had crept up about Jimmy Burford and some other stubborn old residents of Walnut Street. There they sat, and the city was all about them—commonplace, busy, impatient, and skeptical of the miraculous as Drayton himself. Somewhere at the back of the house Martin was whistling cheerily about his work.

Leaning back in his chair, Drayton's eyes were fixed on his friend, a huge figure in his loose gray morning suit—a very monument of material flesh, bone, and muscle. The sunlight fell full on him as he bent above the Dust, bringing out every kindly line of his heavy, dark face. Drayton saw him stir the Dust with his fingers. And Drayton saw a small cloud of the stuff rise toward Trenmore's face, like a puff of thin, gray smoke.

Then Drayton cried out loudly. He pushed back his chair so sharply as to overset it, and sprang away from the newspaper and its burden.

Above the floor still hovered the thin gray cloud, growing thinner every moment as the particles settled again through the draftless air. But where was Trenmore?

There had been a quivering and a wavering of his great form, as if Drayton saw him through a haze of heat. And with that, as easily and completely as a wraith of smoke from his own cigar, the giant Irishman had—vanished!

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES.

IN his first moments of stunned surprise it seemed to Drayton that the end of all things had come. The maddest, most impossible surmises flashed

across his mind. He scarcely would have felt further amazement had Lucifer himself, in all the traditional panoply of hoofs, tail, and brimstone, risen sudden and flaming through the midst of that dreary-hued heap of mysterious Dust. Had the tables and chairs begun to move about the room on their own legs it would have appeared only the natural sequel to such an event as had just transpired. Indeed, it seemed strangely terrible that nothing more should occur. That Nature, having broken her most sacred law, the indestructibility of matter, should carry her sacrilege no further.

But had that law been broken? Was it possible that by some unheard-of property the gray powder had noiselessly, without shock or visible sign of explosion resolved the great body of his friend into the component gasses to which all matter may, in one way or another, be reduced? Or was he, Robert Drayton, stark mad, and had the whole absurd, horrible episode been a part of some delirious dream?

There lay the crystal vial on the floor, where he had dropped it in his first dismay. There was the newspaper, with half of a bargain-sale advertisement extending from beneath the gray heap. And now he became aware that in the library a bell was ringing with a regular, monotonous persistence.

Scarcely knowing what he did, Drayton crossed the room and lifted the telephone receiver from its hook.

"Hello, hello! What? Yes, this is Walnut 6700. What's that? Mr.—Mr. Trenmore? Yes; he's here. No—I—I mean, he *was* here a moment ago. No; I—don't know where he is or when he will be back. My God, I wish I did! What's that? You are—*whom* did you say? . . . Oh, my Lord!"

Drayton dropped the receiver and stood staring in blank horror. After a while, leaving the receiver to dangle and click unheeded, he turned and

walked slowly back toward the chair on whose broad arm Terence Trenmore's cigar still glowed behind a lengthening ash. With a slight shudder he forced himself to pass his hands carefully over the chair's entire inner surface, seat, arms, and back. The leather covering retained a trace of warmth from its recent occupant; but it was most indubitably empty.

The enormity, the unprecedented horror of the whole situation swept up on Drayton like a rising tide, wiping out for a time all thought of the telephone or the person to whom he had just been speaking. With a dazed, sick look he again circled the newspaper and its burden, righted his own chair, and sat down. He had a queer feeling that some one had just played a particularly cruel practical joke of which he was the victim.

And yet—what if that gray Dust had really possessed just the terrific, unbelievable history with which Trenmore had credited it?

He strove to arrange his facts and premises in a logical and reasonable order, but found himself continually returning to that one scene—he, Drayton, sitting where he now sat; Trenmore opposite, bending over the paper; the cloud that rose, gray and nebulous, and hung in the air *after his friend was gone*.

Presently he was again roused from his stupor, and again by a bell. The sound came faintly from the rear of the house. Drayton waited, thinking to hear Martin pass through the reception hall on his way to the front door. Again the bell rang, and this time in a long, steady, insistent peal. Some one seemed to have placed a finger on the button and determined that it should not be removed until the door opened. Martin must be out, on an errand perhaps.

Half dazedly, as he had answered the phone, Drayton at length responded to

this new demand. As he unlocked the front door and opened it a burst of summer sunshine rushed in and with it the small, angry figure of a much perturbed young lady.

"Where is he? What has happened to my brother? Who was that man at the telephone? Answer me instantly, I say! Where is my brother, Mr. Trenmore?"

The questions beat upon Drayton's ears like blows, rousing him to some semblance of his normal self-possession.

"You are—you are Miss Trenmore?" he asked in turn, though a sudden conscience-stricken remembrance smote him and assured him that she was. He had terminated that telephone conversation so very abruptly. No doubt the girl had run in from Atlantic City to see her brother, called him up, and

"I am Viola Trenmore, and I want my brother. Where is he?"

Drayton faced her with a feeling of helpless fright, though in herself, Trenmore's sister was of no terrifying appearance. Nearly as little as her brother was large, she looked even younger than the seventeen years Drayton knew to be hers. She had her brother's eyes, azure as an Italian sky, and her straight, fine brows and curling lashes were black—beautifully so and in vivid contrast to the clear white and rose of her eager face, flushed now like an excited child's. Her close-fitting blue hemp hat, trim boots, and tailored linen suit, all matched in color the bright, clear hue of her eyes. Despite his desperate preoccupation, Drayton's first sight of Viola Trenmore brought him the same momentary flash of joy that comes with the sight of a bluebird in springtime. She was like a bluebird, fluttering in from the sunshine. His troubled mind scarcely recognized the thought, but always afterward he

remembered that first beauty of her as the flash of a bluebird's wing.

"What have you done with him?" she demanded, while from those blue eyes there blazed the very twin spirit of Terence Trenmore—Terence the impetuous, angered and scorning all caution.

"I hardly know what to tell you, Miss Trenmore," began Drayton hesitatingly. "Your brother is not here. He has gone— Oh, but I don't myself know what has happened, or whether I am sane or crazy! Come in here, Miss Trenmore, and you shall at least hear the story."

Puzzled now, and watching him with a sort of alert wariness, Viola obeyed his gesture and entered the library. And there, in halting, broken sentences, Drayton told his incredible tale. He showed her the Dust on the paper, the empty crystal vial, the half-smoked cigar, whose fire had expired some minutes since, like a last living trace of the man who had lighted it.

And somehow, as Drayton talked, he *knew* that it was all true, and that Trenmore was dead. Dead and dissipated to the elements as thoroughly as if, instead of a bare half hour, ten thousand years had slipped by since his going. Grief clutched Drayton's throat, and he finished his story in a hoarse, barely audible whisper.

"And so—he was gone! Like that. And nothing left. Nothing but that infernal stuff there that—that murdered him—my friend!"

For one moment the girl stood silent, and Drayton thought that she also was dazed, as he had been. But suddenly she flung back her head with Trenmore's very gesture.

"I don't believe you!" she cried vehemently. "I don't believe you! Did you expect me to believe you? Do you take me for a babe just from the nurse's arms? Who are you that are here in my cousin's house, answer his tele-

phone and his door, and meet me with this mad lie about Terry? I recognize that vial! And I know that some one has been trying to steal it from my brother. Are you that thief, and have you murdered Terry, as you threatened you would?"

She advanced upon him, her eyes two pools of blue, indignant fire; but the man stood his ground. "I am Robert Drayton," he said.

"Robert—Drayton! But you are not. Mr. Drayton is a good friend of Terry's, though I've never met him, and some way you know that and think to deceive me! But Mr. Drayton would not treat me like this. He would not lie to me. He would not——" Sobbing at last, she broke off and clenched her little hands fiercely. "I'll show you!" she cried. "I'll show you what I think of you and your lies, and then I'll make you tell me the true story!"

Before Drayton, springing forward with a cry of wild protest, could prevent, she had dropped on her knees beside the heap of Dust. Another instant and her white-gloved fingers had again raised that ominous gray cloud.

It rose in a spiral swirl——

For a second Drayton still saw her as a vague, translucent blur of blueness, shading into pinkness where her face had been. Then the air shimmered and cleared, and once more the unfortunate young man stood alone in Burford's pleasant library. This time not so much as a lighted cigar remained to remind him of recent companionship.

Mr. Robert Drayton began to swear. Serious profanity had never come easily to his lips. Now, however, he heard himself using phrases and words which he had not even been aware that he knew; a steady, low-voiced, earnest stream of expressions whose utterance gave him the strangest satisfaction and relief. He swore for two minutes without a pause, then trailed off into silence. The superhuman tension had been

broken, however, and he could again think.

This abruptness and totality of disappearance, that left him not so much as a corpse to mourn, awoke in him emotions different from any he had ever experienced. He found that he could not think of Trenmore and his sister as other than alive, nor rid himself of the idea that in some way they were yet present in the library. Not though the very clearest memory informed him that before his eyes those two had been resolved to nothingness.

Pondering on what he should do, however, it came to him that in honor only one course lay open. Had he been content to indulge Trenmore's superstitious regard for that infernal Dust, he would have been left confronting no such ghastly mystery. The fault, by this reckoning, was his. Let him pay, then.

With a firm, resolute tread Drayton approached the sinister gray pile, and of all its victims he alone loosed its deadliness knowingly—or believing that he knew.

Ten seconds later the library was empty of human life.

On the mantelpiece stood a clock which then pointed to the hour of nine-thirty. It ticked on solemnly, dutifully, wholly indifferent to any wonder save the great and perpetual miracle of Time itself. Minute by minute the long and the short hands crept over the dial, and on the vast looms of Eternity thread by thread was added to the universal fabric of the Past.

Ten-twenty-five, and Young Martin, out marketing among the stalls behind the Reading Terminal, was very cheerful over some exceptionally large, juicy oranges. Mr. Trenmore liked oranges. The young man added two dozen of the fruit to his order and started homeward.

Back there in the library the Cerberus still gleamed where Drayton had

flung it down. The Dust still lay on its newspaper, whose matter-of-factness seemed to deride all mystery connected with divorce, murder, or the wonderful cheapness of lace blouses and lingerie at Isaac Fineheimer's Grand Ninety-nine Cent Sale.

And as Martin, on his return journey, crossed Juniper Street, five squares away, a caller arrived at number 17—on Walnut Street.

He was a short, rotund young gentleman. Attired in a suit of dark green, neatly matched by socks, tie, and the ribbon on his well-blocked panama, the one false note in his color scheme was struck by a pair of bright, too-bright tan shoes.

Twice he had passed the house saunteringly; then boldly ascended Mr. Burford's sedate white marble doorsteps. Boldly indeed he walked up and in at the open door; but once inside his demeanor underwent a change. No cat could have slunk more softly through vestibule and hall; no hunting animal could have been more keenly alert for any sound within the quiet, empty house.

He made straight for the stairs; but with one yellow-shod foot on the first step he paused. Through a half-open door he could see part of a large, book-lined room. Was it empty?

After short hesitation the rotund green gentleman stole over and peered cautiously round the edge of that door.

An instant later, and he had darted across the library with a silent, amazing celerity of movement. His attention, it seemed, had been caught by the Cerberus, gleaming in the sunlight. Picking up the vial, he examined it with swift care, thrust it in his pocket, and turned to leave. His cherubic face now wore the look of one who has achieved good fortune with almost suspicious ease; his pleased smile was half doubtful, and as he moved softly toward the door his small, darting eyes

glanced from side to side quickly, thoughtful of hidden danger.

Unluckily for him, however, the real danger in that room was not hidden. It lay in full sight on a newspaper, flat on the floor between two chairs that faced one another companionably.

Curiosity has been many times proved a fatal weakness.

How far the extraordinary affair might have progressed, how many of Philadelphia's citizens, innocent or otherwise, might have entered that library and been tempted to investigate the harmless-looking gray peril on its floor, had not Martin been a careful and conscientious young man, is a problem for speculation. Fortunately, however, Martin was what he was. At exactly eleven o'clock he entered the library, seeking his employer. Finding the room empty, and having searched the rest of the house in vain, he came to the natural and entirely correct conclusion. Mr. Trenmore was not at home.

The front door had been left open. Martin closed it. Then he returned to straighten the library and empty the ash trays.

Over the fatal Dust he hesitated. Was this gray, floury stuff rubbish left here to be thrown out? Arbitrary and uninstructed action never appealed to Martin. With wise caution—how wise he would have been panic-stricken to learn—he folded the newspaper together, taking pains that its contents be not scattered, made a neat packet of it, and tied it with red tape from the table drawer. This packet he carried upstairs and laid on Trenmore's chiffonier, where there could be no question of its being overlooked.

After that Martin sought the lower regions to prepare luncheon for Trenmore and his guest.

And in the library—that room of

abominable and innocent-looking emptiness—the clock ticked solemnly on.

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE THE GRAY DUST LED.

WHAT Robert Drayton expected when, without one glance for the world he felt himself to be forever leaving, he so deliberately followed the two Trenmores, he scarcely knew. Death, certainly. Perhaps annihilation of the very soul in his body.

As he bent above the Dust, his back to the sunlight and to life, he was conscious of neither regret, fear, nor curiosity. He had reached that blank wall which seems to rise in moments of great crisis—a sense of *nowness* that cuts off past and future, leaving for standing place only the present, an infinitesimal point.

Carefully copying the actions of those who had preceded him, Drayton touched the Dust, first gently, then, in sudden haste for the end, giving it one vigorous stir with his forefinger.

Had he been a conventional suicide tugging at a trigger the result could have come no more promptly. As he had seen it rise before, so it rose now—that grim cloud which to Drayton presaged dissolution.

It reached his face, was in his eyes, his nostrils. With that came dizziness and a strong physical nausea. His mouth tasted sharply bitter, as if he had swallowed quinine. Drayton shuddered and gasped. He saw everything through a gray mist. The room was filled with it. It was a mist composed of thin, concentric rings, swirling slowly with himself for axis. The rings became thicker, denser—till he could perceive nothing else—till he could not see his hands, when, stretching them out to catch at a chair or table, they came in contact only with the air.

The bitter taste and the sickness increased. His hand was on the floor

supporting him, and the floor felt strange; the carpet unlike any weave of human making. Presently even the dizziness and nausea were forgotten. He had attention only for that strange carpet. He could have sworn that what he touched with cautious, investigatory fingers was not carpet at all, but grass! Surely it was grass—long, matted, a tangle of brittle-dry blades.

While he still explored this odd phenomenon, the blinding grayness about him began to thin. All around him appeared the changing outlines of shapes, gray and mutable as the mist itself, but still shapes of a sort. Rapidly now these grew more coherent, solid, and acquired a more than shadowy substance, until, all in a moment, the gray, swirling veil was withdrawn.

Unless every sense of his body lied, Drayton was crouching on the ground in open air. Those gray shapes he had glimpsed were the fallen stones and broken walls of some old, ruined building.

Unspeakably bewildered, Drayton staggered to his feet. There before him stretched the broad level of a wide green plain, across which a low sun stared him in the face through a strata of reddened cloud. The ruins near which he stood crowned the summit of a little hill, all overgrown with that dry, tangled grass which had so puzzled him in the mist. Here and there a few small trees had sprung up among the stones. He heard their scant, yellowish foliage rustling stiffly in the slight breeze.

Turning slowly, he perceived that the hill of the gray ruins was the first of a low range of foothills, above whose summits in the east loomed the white peaks of mountains.

Following amazement, Drayton's first impression was one of intolerable loneliness. In the sky of this strange, wide world he had invaded not a bird flew; mountain, hill, and plain lay desolate,

empty of any living creature; no sound broke the stillness save the gentle, unhuman whisper of the warm breeze, blowing from the plain upward across the hills.

And yet it was all very real; very convincing and earthlike. The shadows of the ruins stretched long and dark away from the almost level rays of the sinking sun. Stretching forth his hand, Drayton laid it cautiously upon the stone of a broken wall. The rough granite felt dusty and hot beneath his fingers. He broke off a bit of green-gray lichen that grew there, and it was just that—lichen and no more.

If he were dead, if this were the world that awaits the soul when the body perishes, why did he feel so uncommonly like his ordinary, everyday, physical self? How could he *feel* at all, in any common sense?

He was alive. His feet pressed the earth with the weight of a quite material body. Why, his very clothing denied any spirituality in this experience. There he stood, bareheaded, dressed in the same old blue serge suit he had bought five years ago in Cincinnati, and which now constituted his sole wardrobe. The sun was warm on his face; the air breathed clear and sweet. Surely he was no spirit, but a living man of flesh and blood.

Nowhere, however, was there hint or sign of other living humanity than himself. He was alone in a land so empty that only the greenness on hills and plain preserved it from utter desolation. The ruins spoke of man, but of man dead and gone so many ages since that their stones remembered his clean chisel strokes but vaguely.

What devilish nature had that Dust possessed, and where had it seen fit to deposit his fellow victims?

Drayton flung out his arms in a gesture of despair. For a long moment he stood so, a desolate figure in a vacant land. Then his hands dropped limp at

his sides, and he began an aimless, wandering walk between the ruins.

Here, he thought with a faint flicker of interest, there had once stood a fortress or castle. Centuries ago it had fallen. All that remained were broken columns, heaps of rugged granite and portions of the thick outer walls. Within the latter he could trace the shape of a courtyard, still paved in places with crumbling flagstones.

Presently he came upon the remains of a gateway. The arch had fallen in and upon one of its stones Drayton observed traces of letters. He examined them curiously. Time, however, had done its work too thoroughly, and all he could decipher were the first few letters of two lines:

ULITH—
MC—

There was no clew in that to his whereabouts.

In despair of learning more, he strayed on, vaguely wondering why he should walk at all, until in the matted grass of the courtyard, close to the inner side of the same wall by which he had first found himself kneeling, his foot struck against something.

He stared downward. The sun was very low, the shadow of the wall was dark, and he could see only that there was a long mound there, under the tangled grass. But that soft, heavy resilience of the thing he had stumbled on, coupled with the length and shape of the mound—there was that in the combination which struck him unpleasantly.

He turned to leave it, then came back as if fascinated. Finally he stooped, and with nervous, desperate fingers dragged and tore at the network of dry, tangled fibers that covered the mound. At last he uncovered something that looked and felt like a piece of cloth. But the color of it—the color of it! Out of the dim shadow it gleamed at

him, bright, clear, bluest and purest of blues—the hue of a bluebird's wing!

Frantically, with a growing sense of impending horror, Drayton persisted in his task until his worst fears were confirmed.

Beneath that grass lay the body of a woman, face down. Though the face was concealed, he knew her instantly. And she lay there, deathly quiet, face down—and *the grass had grown over her.*

How long—good God!—how long a time had passed since he had stood face to face with this girl in James Burford's library? It had been morning there. Here it was sunset. Sunset? How many suns had set since that grass was young and began its task of shroud weaving?

Conquering a sudden and violent impulse to flee, Drayton turned the body over—and laughed a little wildly. After all, the grass was a liar. Dead the girl might be—she lay still enough—but if dead she was most recently so. Her face was pale and sweet and perfect as a child's, sleeping there in the shadow. The lids just closed softly over her eyes, as if at any moment the curling lashes might quiver and lift.

Scarcely breathing himself, Drayton knelt and laid his ear above her heart. Surely that was a faint flutter he felt! Raising her head, he sought some other sign of returning consciousness. There was none. He laid a hand on her forehead. It was cool, but not with the chilling coldness he dreaded.

Questioning no longer, but with a great hope in his heart, Drayton sprang to his feet—and paused. Where in this empty, houseless land could he obtain any stimulant or even water to revive her? He must have it—he must save her before that faint trace of life should flicker out. Alone he had been nothing. With this small sister of Trenmore's at his side he could face all the mysteries of the universe with a cheerful careless-

ness. He loved her suddenly and joyously, not because she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, but simply because she was *human!* And therefore invaluable.

Yet should he leave her to seek water the girl might die in his absence. Better he had never found her than that! Despairing of other means, Drayton was about to try what resuscitation the chafing of wrists and forehead might effect when, glancing westward to judge how much of day might be left him, he beheld an odd, unlooked-for thing.

On the side of the ruins toward the plain stood the longest and highest fragment of the outer wall. On the left it rose in a jagged slant from the old foundations to a height of six or seven feet, extended level for a distance of four yards or so, then ended in an abrupt vertical line that exactly bisected the red sun, now touching the horizon. And from beyond its black silhouette, against the faint pink of the western sky, a thin puff of smoke was ascending!

It was dissipated by the slight breeze from the plain. Another puff and another followed it. Then the puffs ceased, to be succeeded by a slow, thin column of mysterious vapor.

Who or what was behind that wall?

Standing there alone and weaponless beside the unconscious girl, Drayton was swept by a terror deeper and more vivid than any dread he had ever before experienced. Smoke! The most familiar sight known to man. But in this strange, unhuman place? What vague demon might he not discover if he dared look behind that wall?

Yet his very fear drove him. Night was on its way to lend terror the cloak of invisibility. He must go while the sun befriended him.

Leaving the girl where she was, Drayton stumbled across the grass-hidden stones between him and the fragment of wall. He caught at its top with

his hands and cautiously pulled himself up.

Just before his head cleared the ragged stones a voice began speaking. It was a deep, vibrant voice, entirely harmonious with the surroundings.

"Well," it declared, and the tone was somewhat plaintive, "and that is the last of my last cigar. Sure, it's a fine sunset they have here, but 'tis not my idea of Purgatory at all! 'Tis too dull, so it is. I wish——"

"Terry Trenmore!" With joyful, scarce-believing eyes, Drayton was staring over the wall. Then his muscles suddenly gave way and he dropped back on his own side.

For an instant there was dead silence. When the voice was heard again it was with an intonation of profound resignation.

"There now, it's begun at last! Sure, I never should have wished for excitement! But the devils will find Terence Trenmore game. Invisible voices shouting my own name! I wonder now, is that the best they can do? I wonder had I better——"

"Trenmore, it's I—Bob Drayton!"

As Drayton appeared suddenly around the end of the wall, the Irishman faced him calmly without rising. "I'm resigned," he said. "You might take a worse shape than that. What is it you'd be about now?"

Laughing outright, Drayton walked over and shook his giant friend by the shoulder.

"You blessed old idiot! Don't you know me? Have you been sitting here all this time while I mooned about thinking myself—— By Heaven, Terry, do you know that Viola is here, too?"

"Viola, is it? Now I tell you straight, my lad, if you're what I suspect you of being you keep your tongue off my little sister or there'll be one devil the less in these parts!"

"Trenmore, have you gone stark

mad? I'm no devil! Here, take my hand. Doesn't that feel like flesh and blood? I tell you, Viola is here. She came to the house after—after you went. And before I could prevent her she had stirred up that infernal gray powder."

"She did? Well, tell me then how you reached here yourself, and perhaps I'll begin to believe you."

Drayton shrugged. "I followed, of course. The whole thing was my fault. I thought you were both dead, and I could hardly do less than follow."

Trenmore sprang up and wrung the other's hand with his customary enthusiasm. "And now I do believe you!" he cried. "You're Bobby Drayton and none other, for you've acted like the man I knew you to be. But poor little Viola! And where is she now? Sure, if *she's* in this place, I misdoubt it's the one I took it for, after all!"

"She is over among the ruins, and she seems to have fainted. I found her all buried in grass. She mustn't be left alone another instant. Have you any whisky or brandy about you?"

"I have not—bad luck to me!"

Disappointed, but still hopeful, Drayton led the way, eagerly followed by his friend. The sun had sunk till it glowed like the half of a great, round, red lantern above the horizon's rim. Drayton was wondering what they should do if they failed to revive Viola before night came on; but this anxiety was wasted.

As they crossed the grass-grown court a little figure in blue dashed suddenly from behind a shattered column and flung itself bodily into the arms of Trenmore.

"Terry—oh, Terry, my dear!"

"Little Viola! There, there now. Is it crying you are? And for what?"

"Just for joy, Terry, dear. Don't mind me. There, I'll not cry any more. I waked up—all alone—in the shadow

— And Terry, darling, I'd been dreaming that we both were dead!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WEAVER OF THE YEARS.

WHEN the marvelous oversteps the bounds of known possibility there are three ways of meeting it. Trenmore and his sister, after a grave discussion of certain contingencies connected with the Catholic religion and a dismissal of them on grounds too utterly Celtic and dogmatic for Drayton to follow, took the first way. From that time on they faced every wonder as a fact by itself, to be accepted as such and let go at that.

Drayton, though all his life he had unconsciously so viewed such accustomed marvels as electricity or the phenomenon of his own life, could not here follow his Irish friends. He compromised on the second way, and accepted with a mental reservation, as "I see you now, but I am not at all sure that you are there or that I really believe in you!"

Fortunately there was not one of the three so lacking in mental elasticity as to discover the third way, which is madness.

"And what we should be thinking of," declared Viola presently, "is not how did we come here, but how are we to find our way home?"

This was a truism too obvious for dispute. And yet, to Drayton at least, it seemed that no amount of thinking or action either was likely to be of great service. Without food or water they stood. Without weapons or compass. Without the faintest glimmering of knowledge as to their actual geographic position upon the earth.

Drayton strained his eyes toward the hills, already purpling to the sun's last rays. What hope was there among those desolate heights, more than was offered by the empty flatness of the

plain? How many miles could be traversed by this frail-looking little sister of Trenmore's before those dainty, high-heeled boots of hers were worn to rags? Before she dropped exhausted? How many more miles could he and Trenmore carry her if they found neither food nor water?

"We'll find food as we go," said Terence as if interpreting and answering the thought. "I never did see a green country like this and no sort of food in it. Viola, 'tis a plucky lass you've always been. I've often promised that some day you'd go wandering with me. Let's be starting. And, Bobby, lad, don't look so down-hearted. There's a way out of everything, and aren't we just the three ones to find it, wherever we are?"

Drayton realized that his gloomy countenance must be anything but encouraging to Viola. Determined that henceforth he would be a model adventurer at any cost, he smiled.

"I wasn't really worrying, old man. I was merely thinking——"

But what innocent fabrication he would have devised to account for his despondency they never discovered. His sentence ended abruptly, and the forced smile vanished.

The attention of all three had been caught by a strange, deep, moaning sound. Reaching for his sister, Trenmore drew her close to his side. They all stood very still and listening.

The moaning, which began at first faintly and in a low key, seemed to emanate from a source immediately beneath their feet. Swiftly, however, this source widened and spread outward, extending itself beneath the empty plain and under the hills toward the mountain peaks. As it spread the note rose in key and in volume until it was more than anything else like the sound which might be thrown out by an immense top, whirling with planetary speed.

The intense vibration became agonizing. The listeners clapped their hands over their ears in a vain effort to shut it out. Drayton, for his part, felt that in one more instant either his eardrums or his brain must give way.

Even as he thought it, however, the last segment of the sun's red periphery sank out of sight beneath the horizon. The terrible humming died away, melting into the universal silence in which it had found birth. With scarcely an intervening moment of twilight night swept down.

At first it seemed absolute as blindness, or the end of all created things. Then, as his pupils expanded, Drayton began dimly to perceive his companions, while, on looking upward, he beheld a sky powdered thick with clear, brilliant stars.

He drew a long breath, and heard it echoed by the others.

"They have a strange nightfall in this land," muttered Trenmore, "and they do make a great noise over it!"

"Yes," replied Drayton, the observant, "but those stars look familiar enough."

"Right as usual, Bobby. It's the same old stars they're using. Look, Viola! There's the old bear and her cub!"

"And the Milky Way," said Viola.

Somehow, in spite of all that had occurred, the sight of those familiar stars and constellations brought a feeling of almost security, of at-homeness and actuality.

"Your talk of Purgatory," laughed Drayton, "and that abominable noise just now sent a few unearthly shivers down my back. Those stars tell a different story. We are surely somewhere on earth. Different longitude, perhaps, but in our own latitude, or nearly, even though night did shut down with such tropical suddenness. If we were in the tropics we should see a sky different from this——"

His astronomical observations were cut short by a low cry from Viola. Dimly he glimpsed her arm, stiffly outstretched and pointing.

"And if this is our own earth," she cried, "is that our own moon? And if it is, what is the moon doing over there? Will you tell me that?"

There was pertinence in her question. From the exact point where the sun had descended five minutes earlier the silver rim of a great white moon was rising. Already the wide plain before it was invaded and dimly illuminated by the flood of its elfin radiance. It was as if, when the sun went down, the moon had been waiting there, and had now slipped past to take his place in the sky.

"Surely a very singular moon rise—in the west!" murmured the ex-lawyer. Inwardly he was more shocked by this apparent misplacement of the lunar orb than by anything which had yet occurred. If the stars had reassured him surely the moon had been prompt to undo their work.

"Is that thing a rock or—an animal?"

Again it was Viola who spoke, and again her companions stared where the girl was pointing. Fifteen feet to the right of them there was a large, dark object. It lay half in the black shadow of the ruined arch, half in the steadily increasing moonlight.

"That is only a part of the old gateway," began Drayton in a quiet, reassuring tone.

Even as he spoke, however, the dark thing seemed to rear itself slightly from the ground.

Trenmore made a quick movement; but Viola caught his arm.

"Don't go! Don't go near it, Terry! It may be some savage wild beast that's been hiding there!"

"And d'ye think I fear it then?" growled Trenmore.

"Don't be a fool, Trenmore!" Dray-

ton spoke with a brusqueness born of mingled horror and amazement. That uncanny, half-glimpsed thing now appeared to be stretching itself upward, higher and higher in the partial shadow where it stood. "Think of your sister," he cried; "and help me get her away from this unspeakable place before it's too late. Look—look there at that wall!"

The wall he referred to was the same behind which he had first come upon Trenmore. Before their incredulous eyes it seemed to come to life, to rise, and to grow upward.

"They're alive, these stones! They're alive!" cried Viola.

Trenmore held back no longer. Here was something with which even his great strength was not fit to contend. All about them the fallen rocks, the walls, the very flagstones beneath their feet were heaving, moving, and the motion seemed all the more sinister and terrible because of the silence which attended it.

Drayton reached desperately for Viola's arm or hand; but Terry simply plucked her from the ground as one gathers up a child and began running across the court in great leaps and bounds. In one spring he had cleared the nearest wall and run on down the hill. Drayton followed at a speed nearly as great, and only caught up with the Irishman at the foot of the hill, where they both paused as by one impulse to look back.

During his flight Drayton had been filled with a ghastly, unnatural terror. He had feared that the ruins were coming after him, lichenous, soil-incrusted, horribly animate! But now, looking back, that fear at least was banished. The bare hillside, almost white in the moonlight, was crowned still by its broken walls. But were they broken now?

"By heaven, it's like—like——"

"Like a mirage," supplied Viola, who

seemed suddenly to have achieved a curious composure. "Put me down, Terry. No, put me down, I say! I wish to see better. Yes, it's growing fast. In a few minutes we shall see the whole castle as it used to be."

Her calm assurance struck Drayton as odd, but only for a moment. After all, why shouldn't a castle grow up like a flower—like a flower with a magic scent? Down here on the plain the grass was filled with flowers and the air with their fragrance. There was something peculiarly soothing and reassuring in the very odor of them.

Drayton no longer felt the least alarm—hardly, even, wonder. Not though a miracle was occurring on the hilltop above.

Rising, ever rising in the white moonlight, the old fortress which they had deemed fallen forever, was rebuilding itself. Up, up shot the walls, battlemented now and perfect. Behind them, tower on tower, pinnacle upon pinnacle, lifted into the clear silvery radiance as the white foam of a rising wave might lift—lifted and froze into perfect form—till the vision or mirage or miracle—whatever this marvel might be named—was consummate and growth ceased. Here and there a pennant fluttered in the faint night breeze. From the highest tower of all a great standard drooped, too heavy for so small a wind to raise.

And now it could be seen that close to where they stood a narrow white road led upward from plain to castle, ending at a huge gateway immediately above them. Suddenly the heavy, iron-studded doors of this gateway opened inward and swung slowly back. Beyond them all was darkness. Then came the first sound from the ghost castle—a heavy stamping, a clash and jingle as of metal. Out of the inner darkness a great horse strode into the moonlight. Upon its back sat a gleaming, erect, armed figure. Five more

riders followed. Then the gates slowly, silently shut themselves. The company of six came riding down the pale road-way.

Drayton, for his part, felt arising within him a vast curiosity—a curiosity so great that he actually left his companions and walked over to the roadside.

He had advanced with the deliberate intention of questioning those mysterious riders. As they drew near, however, he turned and strode quickly back to Trenmore and his sister.

"What is the matter?" queried Viola. "Why didn't you ask them who they are and the name of the castle?"

Drayton's reply was voiced in a tense, fierce whisper.

"Look at them—only look at them, I tell you!"

His tone seemed to rouse his friends from the strange apathy into which they had all more or less fallen since setting foot on the plain.

They stood no more than eight or nine yards from the road, and could see very well what Drayton had already perceived. The horses were large, heavy brutes, of the type bred centuries ago for battle. They were spirited in a clumsy sort of way, and came curvetting and prancing down the road. But the men on their backs—why, those were not men, nor even the ghosts of men! They were mere empty shells of gleaming armor.

The visors of all six were raised, and the watchers could see how the moonlight shimmered inside the helmets.

The armor sat erect, six proud, plumed figures of chivalry, and the joints rattled with a hollow clashing. They were past, and the white moonlight of the plain had swallowed them up. They had melted into it as a ship melts into the sea fog.

Glancing upward, Drayton half expected to see the castle itself dissolve and fade as it had grown; but no such

phenomenon occurred. There it stood, massive, solid, dominating the hill.

With a slight shudder, Drayton turned to his companions.

"Somehow," he said, "I don't fancy the idea of asking hospitality at that gate."

"'Twould be madness!" ejaculated Trenmore. "It's fortunate we were to escape from that spook house before the walls grew too high!"

"Yes," conceded his friend simply.

"And what would we be doing now, do you think? Shall we stay here till the sunrise again, or shall we go on?"

It really made very little difference what they did, thought Drayton. Already that pleasant lassitude, from which sight of the riding armor had momentarily shocked him, was returning. By a volition which hardly seemed their own, however, the three of them presently found themselves advancing across the wire green plain.

On the hill the grass had been dry, dead stuff, parched as from long drought. The plain, however, was like a sweet, well-watered meadow. A scent came up from it that told of flowers crushed beneath their feet and growing everywhere in the midst of that lush greenness. They were pale, small flowers, and very fragrant. Viola plucked a few. So delicate were the blossoms that they withered instantly in her hands.

The three walked slowly, for the night had brought warmth rather than coolness. The sweet air breathed soft and languid. Now and then one of them would glance back over his shoulder. The phantom castle remained on the hilltop, as real in appearance as anything looks by moonlight, which casts a veil over all that is not very near.

Now every one knows that moonshine is at best of an uncertain and bewildering quality. Yet it seemed odd—or would have seemed so had they not been past surprise—that in the be-

ginning they had deemed the plain deserted and bare of any moving thing since the empty armor had ridden outward and vanished. For now, as they walked, they perceived that all about them were forms and groups of forms, moving over and through the sweet, flower-sprinkled grass in a weird and noiseless dance, without music or apparent rhythm.

Presently they had blundered fairly into the midst of a group of these shapes, which seemed indeed to form about them from the misty light itself or rise up from the ground.

They were queer, bulky, clumsy-shouldered figures, dressed in tight-fitting clothes and hoods and gloves of smooth fur. At least so appeared those directly ahead, black silhouettes against the moon. On looking around, however, the travelers were somewhat startled to find that what they had taken for hooded faces were not faces at all, but just smooth, featureless expanses of fur. The back and the front of the heads were exactly alike, save for one straight, black gash where the mouth might be.

Joining hands, the creatures began to circle with a clumsy, dancing motion. The wanderers, caught in the center of their ring, could proceed no further without using force to break it. Soon the swift, whirling dance began to make Drayton dizzy. Round and round and round. And now over the plain he perceived that there were many other circles like this. They all swung round and round—and round. Why had he thought the dance silent? There was music enough, and everywhere the beat, beat of uncounted feet in perfect rhythm with a melody that filled the world. It rose from the scented grass between the beating feet; it flowed from the moon with the sorcery of her light; it circled and circled in rhythmic rings. It caught his feet in a silver snare. He was swept into the net of a great and

passionate desire—to dance and dance forever—now!

Before him Drayton saw the circle break apart, and there was just the space for one to join them, to become a link in the mystic ring and satisfy the calling melody. Almost without his will Drayton's feet obeyed the call. His hand caught that of the monster nearest him. He remembered afterward that it felt neither cold nor warm, but rather like a fur glove stuffed with wool. Another hand caught him violently by the shoulder and wrenched him backward.

Drayton cried out and struggled to escape, but Trenmore had him fairly in the grip of his mighty arms. Even as the two strove together all that moonlight madness of sound jarred, broke, and from discord died to silence. The strength went out of Drayton's body. He leaned, weak and panting for breath, against the Irishman's shoulder.

"If you're so fond of dancing," said the latter grimly, "you might at least chose Viola or me for a partner. Are you mad, Bobby, to take hands with those?"

Before Drayton could reply the circle of dancers stopped short in their tracks. Each ungainly figure made a strange, wild gesture as of wrath or despair. Then they separated, scattered, and went dancing wildly away across the grass.

"Hss-ss-ss!"

It was a long-drawn, sibilant sound, and it seemed to come from a little pile of rocks close by. In its black shadow they saw two sparklike eyes gleam redly.

"Hss-ss-ss! Touch not the dancers—go not near them—speak not to them! Strange things be abroad and stranger things be done in the white moonlight of Ulithia! Hss-ss-ss! Go not near!"

"And who and what may you be?" demanded Trenmore, bending down; but the sparklike eyes had vanished.

An instant later they reappeared, gleaming dimly through a white cobweb between two tall tufts of grass.

"Hss-ss-ss!" Again that snakelike hissing. "Beware! You have escaped the everlasting dance—beware the Weaver and her song!"

"But who—*what are you?*" demanded Trenmore again rather wildly.

The red sparks flashed and faded from behind the silver web. Only a dim voice trailed back to them:

"I am the Voice of Warning in a land of Illusion—beware!"

Drayton, somewhat recovered from his own queer experience, moved as if to follow. Again Trenmore checked him.

"We'd best not traffic with that thing either," he recommended gruffly. "We've no place in this world we've got into—no place at all! And the very best we can do is keep our own company till we find a way out of it."

"What was it the thing said?" queried Drayton as he fell into step again beside the other two. "Ulithia? That sounds some way familiar——"

Trenmore shook his head. "Not to me. I've traveled many a land, and read not a few books, old and new; but nowhere have I heard that name before."

"Nor I," said Viola.

Drayton was silent a moment, searching his memory. Then his face fell. "I recall the association now," he observed discontentedly. "It's no help. There were some letters—the first letters of that name—carved on the ruins back there. I read them, while the ruins were still ruins."

For a while they walked on in silence. With the breaking of that one ring of dancing forms the plain seemed to have gradually cleared, so that they were again alone with the moonlight and each other. Alone until, long before they saw the White Weaver, they heard her singing.

That was a wondrous, murmurous, liquid song of hers, like shallow summer brooks and rustling fields. They were not surprised to come upon her at last, seated in the moon-frosted grass, tossing a weaver's shuttle between her outstretched hands. They could see neither loom nor thread nor web, however, save a thousand silver cobwebs on the grass. All the plain was agleam with them.

This is the song she was singing, or as much of it as any of them could afterward recall:

"The web lies broad in the weaving room.

(Fly, little shuttle, fly!)

The air is loud with the clashing loom.

(Fly, little shuttle, fly!)

"Year on year have I woven here,
Green earth, white earth, and autumn sere;
Sitting singing where the earth-props mold;
Weave I, singing, where the world grows old.
Time's a traitor, but the loom is leal—
Time's a liar, but the web is real!

"Hear my song and behold my web!

(Fly, little shuttle——"

"But, madam, 'tis no web you have there," broke in Trenmore. "'Tis naught but a little shuttle and no thread to it at all!"

At that the song ceased, and the woman raised her face. It was beautiful as the moon's self, though her hair was silver and her face without a trace of color. Her clear, pale eyes seemed to look through and far beyond them.

"You are strangers," she said in a voice that might have come from very far away, clear and sweet as a silver bell. "Yet your lives, too, are in my web. Aye! They are mine—bound up fast in my web that you see not. From here on go forward—go deeper! Heed not the mockings of the dancing Shadow People. Heed not the voice of mine enemy, who would keep you forever bound in the shallows of Uli-thia. Go forward—go deeper—go forward!"

With that she ceased speaking, and,

taking up her song where she had left it, she made the empty shuttle fly like a living thing from hand to hand.

Drayton eyed his companions doubtfully. "If the lady would make her advice a little clearer we might try to follow it. We have to go on somewhere, you know, Terry."

But Viola shook her head, staring at the Weaver with hostile, questioning glance. "Have you so soon forgotten?" she said. "'Beware the Weaver and her song!'"

At that the Weaver again ceased singing. Her thin lips were curled in a smile, but her eyes were like pale blue ice.

"Aye," she murmured, "beware of the Weaver—the White Weaver of the Years—beware! But your feet are set in her web. The door opens before you. There is no way out but on—and what is Uli-thia, phantom borderland of life, to such as you? Go forward—go deeper—go forward!"

Trenmore took one step toward her, with what intent he himself scarcely knew. But as he took it Drayton laughed with a touch of weariness.

"You have frightened the lady away, Terry."

It was true. As Trenmore had stepped toward the "White Weaver" that cold-eyed lady had vanished and taken her song and her shuttle with her. As the three again proceeded Viola waved her hand in a wide gesture, indicating the plain they traversed.

"Did either of you notice," she said, "that there were so many of these white spider webs about—before we saw that woman?"

Her brother and Drayton merely stared stupidly, heavy-eyed.

"Before we met the White Weaver," murmured the girl dreamily, "there was only a web here and there, woven between the grass stems. Now it is like—like walking through a silver sea.

And the moon—— What moon of earth was ever like this of Ulithia?"

"If it is a moon," said Trenmore with no great interest. "She's taking an uncommon long time for her rising."

Blank as a silver shield, the moon, or what they had believed a moon, still rested at the edge of the plain, its lower part bisected by the horizon. More like an enormous archway than a moon it seemed—a sort of celestial door, perhaps, in the edge of the sky.

They neared and neared, walking across a silver sea of web through which the invisible flowers sent up their perpetually increasing incense, almost too sweet now for pleasure. More and more like an arch the moon appeared—an immense, light-filled archway, of the nearly circular Moorish type. About it they began to perceive a certain dim outline of dark substance, behind which the moon itself was just a depth and blinding expanse of light. Almost unconsciously they hastened their steps. At last, heads swimming with the fragrance of the plain, they had actually reached the splendid thing.

High, high above them curved the perfect arch of stone, black as unpol-

ished ebony and set in what seemed a solid wall of similar rock stretching away to darkness on either hand. Through the opening they could not see, for it was filled with a brilliant mist of pure white light.

"Look!" said Drayton, leaning dizzily against the black stone to which he pointed. "Here on the architrave. There are silver characters—inlaid—aren't they? But they move and writhe like white flame——"

Closing his eyes against the glare, he wished that a great wind might arise—a great, clean wind that would sweep away cobwebs and flowers together.

"Go forward, go deeper, go forward!" murmured a sweet, clear voice. To Drayton it seemed to be Viola's, though with a distant sound, like a far-off silver bell. "Your feet are in the web!" cried the voice. "In the Web of the Weaver of Years. And why linger in the shallows of Ulithia? Go forward—go deeper!"

"Why linger?" echoed Drayton softly.

His feet were in the shallows of a wide, white sea that was carrying him outward—onward.

TO BE CONTINUED.



THEOPHANY

By Harry Kemp

WHY, when I pass through week-day faces,
Comes to me
Visions of beauty no man knows of,
None can see?

And, in the midst of the long day's traffic,
O'er and o'er,
Why must I dream of a surf a-thunder
On an alien shore?



The Seventh Birthday

Ernest
Pascal

AT five o'clock, Philip Creighton reached for his new, warm thick overcoat, placed his hat upon his head, and left the bank where he worked. He hurried through the wet, slush-covered streets on his way home. He was glad to go home. How different it was to go home to his pretty wife than to return after a long day of posting ledgers to the loneliness of his bachelor rooms!

Philip was intensely happy. He did not know before that life could hold so much happiness. He was delighted with his three weeks of married life. And Violet was so pretty! It was so nice to kiss her soft mouth as he came into his own little house every evening. That kiss was worth waiting for. Every day and all day Philip thought of Violet's kiss that would be awaiting him.

Yes, Philip was happy. He was glad that he had—well, that he had arranged matters so that Violet had broken her engagement to Richard Bleake to marry him, Philip. All is fair in love and war. That was a comforting old saying. He kept on repeating it to himself over and over again as he

walked from the bank: all is fair in love and war.

Violet could never find out. In vain had Richard Bleake pleaded with her at the time that she broke her engagement. Bleake had insisted, in his heavy way, that his visit to Lucy Wood had been entirely innocent. Richard had said again and again that he had only wanted to help Lucy because Lucy's mother had been good to him. But Violet had refused to listen. All the little town of Fownes had known that Lucy was "in trouble." Fownes, with all its gossip, had been unable to find the man. Enough for Fownes that Lucy Wood was "in trouble."

No, Violet could never find out. And Philip was glad that he had done it. Philip knew that Richard Bleake cared nothing for Lucy—that he never had cared anything for her. And Philip had lied to Violet because he loved her. Philip had chanced on the information that Richard was helping Lucy—that he was going at a certain hour at night to visit Lucy—to see if he could help her. And then, Philip had told the one big lie of his life—and Violet had believed him! Doubtingly,

at first, but when Philip had led her to the street on which Lucy lived and Violet had seen Richard Bleake leave Lucy's house late at night, then Violet had believed whole-heartedly. In vain had Richard—in his clumsy, slow way—pleaded and argued. Philip Creighton had easily persuaded Violet that Richard had been lying to cover up his infidelity.

So it had been natural that Violet had broken her engagement to marry Richard Bleake, and had very shortly afterward become the wife of Philip Creighton.

And Violet could never find out. Bleake had vowed vengeance—and Philip had laughed at him. All was fair in love and war.

So gayly Philip walked through the wet streets on his way home from the bank. And after all, Richard was not good enough for Violet. Richard was a clerk in the post office—and Philip's prospects were infinitely better. Then, Philip prided himself on his fine manners: Philip was a perfect gentleman. Philip knew this. Philip knew, too, that he was a classy dresser and a classy dresser will always appeal to a girl like Violet. He even smiled a little pityingly as he turned out of Maple Avenue into Fairview Hill, on which stood the little house that Philip was buying on the installment plan.

Just before Philip's house a gas lamp flickered in the wet evening. Standing under the lamp was Richard Bleake.

Philip glanced at him sharply. He looked white-faced, did Bleake. Philip had heard that day that Bleake had given up his position at the post office. Philip hoped that Bleake would not speak to him.

And Philip's hope was fulfilled. Richard Bleake contented himself with one long, surly glance at his successful rival. Then Bleake's hand went to the pocket of his coat. For an instant, Philip feared violence. Bleake evi-

dently thought better of it, for suddenly he turned and splashed away down the slushy pavement.

Philip let himself into his own house. Violet came running to meet him. She looked very pretty with her big blue eyes and masses of gold hair. She had on a big cooking apron over a tightly fitting silk dress. Violet liked silk dresses that were tightly fitting. She had a very good figure, but soon it would grow too fat. She held up her mouth to be kissed. Philip kissed her several times.

"How pretty you are! How pretty you are!" thought Philip. He did not say it aloud. One did not say that sort of thing aloud even to one's own wife. It would be embarrassing to say a thing like that aloud. All the same, one thought them, just the same as one thought that a tightly fitting silk dress was very nice.

"I saw him outside," said Philip, when he had finished kissing Violet. "I thought he was going to shoot me for a moment. Not that I'm afraid of him."

"Who?" asked Violet, but she knew very well.

"Him—Mister Richard Bleake," sneered Philip. "And I've got some news, too. He has left the post office. I hope he leaves town. Good riddance if he does."

Violet sighed. Her bosom rose and fell again with a comfortable little feeling that it was all her fault.

"Poor Richard Bleake! I'm sorry."

"Violet!"

For answer, she held up her face to be kissed again.

Soon they were at supper. Philip found himself talking. He liked to talk, and Violet proved an excellent listener. Philip was explaining exactly how it was that a bank made money. Then he touched on his own ambitions. Philip was not one to waste money. Look after the nickels and the dollars would look after themselves.

"That's what I've always said," nodded Violet.

Philip was going to save. He wasn't always going to be a bank clerk. You couldn't keep a good man down, not if you tried.

Then Philip went on eating his supper. He liked Violet's cooking and he was very fond of frankfurters.

"It's turning much colder," Philip offered for Violet's entertainment. "They say we are in for a big frost. The lake will be frozen over."

And the next day the lake started to freeze. It was very cold, and all Fownes shivered in the thrall of that December weather.

Before, however, the lake was completely frozen over, Richard Bleake, finding life without joy, took advantage of that black water, so that his drowned body was later recovered by the Fownes police. The jury brought in a noncommittal verdict of "found drowned," although the Fownes gossips did not let it go at that.

Of course Richard Bleake had drowned himself because he could not live without Violet. How they talked!

It upset Violet a good deal, though secretly Philip felt rather glad. Richard Bleake had always been queer. He might have killed Philip. It was just as well that Richard was dead. Violet would soon forget all about it. It added somewhat to Violet's social prestige, for Fownes had considered her action proper and right when she had discarded Bleake on catching him out with an affair with Lucy Wood. Still, it does lend an interest to a girl when a man prefers death to life without her. All the unmarried girls looked at Violet with interest. How Richard Bleake must have loved her!

Violet shed a few tears. She felt that she owed them to the memory of Richard Bleake. She would have liked to have sent a few flowers to the funeral. Some violets would have been

appropriate. Still, one could not always do what one liked. People would talk.

And soon Richard Bleake was forgotten. The dead was forgotten for the coming of another life. Violet was going to have a baby.

It was a little girl. Philip suffered agonies. It was dreadful to see Violet in pain. Yet woman was born to pain. Philip knew that quite well.

The coming of a daughter gave Philip an added sense of responsibility. He must work harder than ever—and save. The bank directors made this easy for Philip by raising his salary just then. There was some discussion as to naming the child. Philip wanted to call it "Martha Violet"—Martha, after his own mother. Violet preferred "Ivy Violet," because her mother had been called "Ivy."

Philip gave way. Philip knew that a perfect gentleman always gives way. Besides, there would be other children.

In three years, there were three children—Ivy, Dorothy, and Leonore. Ivy was three, and Dorothy two, when Leonore was born.

As Philip had had his salary raised twice, and was then assistant cashier, he had enough money to meet all these expenses. He had even paid off the remaining sum owing on his little house. Philip was doing well. He began at this time to become a trifle portly, despite his height. Philip was tall, with sandy hair. He had a long, straight nose and a wide, thin-lipped mouth. Philip was thirty-five when Leonore was born. Violet was ten years younger.

"I don't know what quite to make of Ivy," Violet said one night to Philip, about three years after Leonore was born.

"What is the matter with her?" asked Philip a little anxiously. He had grown very fond of his children. Somehow or other the children were

beginning to take the place in his heart that Violet had once occupied. He did not know it, but Philip loved the children more than he did Violet. Philip had grown tired of kissing Violet. No longer did Philip think all day of the kiss that awaited him at home. Instead, Philip thought of his work. When he was not thinking of his work he was thinking of the three children. They would all grow up to be very beautiful. They would all marry very well. "What is the matter with her?" Philip repeated.

"I don't know, she's funny. She is always imagining things." Violet leaned her elbows on the table and looked across at Philip. "To-night she did it again. Came to me, she did, crying. She said she had seen a face outside the window—a dreadful face, she said."

"But where did she see it—or think she saw it? It's all nonsense," Philip went on, raising his voice. "It's nonsense—just sheer imagination. Probably it is her liver."

"Well, that's what I thought. Still, it isn't the first time—not by any means. And she couldn't have seen anything because I made her show me the window—and it was the children's room upstairs."

Still, as time went on, Ivy kept on imagining that she saw a face. Once, when visiting her grandmother in New York with Philip, her father took Ivy to the Zoölogical Gardens at Bronx Park. There, Ivy saw an ape. Terrified, she clung to her father's hand. She shrieked with terror.

"The face, the face!" was all he could get out of her.

Philip told Violet of it on his return to Fownes. All this was in Ivy's seventh year, between her sixth and seventh birthdays. Violet questioned the little girl, but not for long, as Ivy showed signs of hysteria. All the now worried Violet could learn was that

Ivy had gone somewhere with Daddy and had seen the dre'ful thing that made faces at her out of the window, only the dre'ful thing hadn't the teeth he had out of the window. It was far from clear, but that was all Violet could get. The local doctor, on being consulted, ordered first castor oil, and, after that cold horror, a tonic that would invigorate the system.

But persistently, and at intervals, Ivy would scream with terror, so that Violet's heart was troubled. Was it possible that their little one was developing signs of insanity? Impossible—for in all else, Ivy was a bright and cheerful little thing.

Philip, after consultation with the doctor, was inclined to make light of the whole affair. The child would outgrow this nervous fancy. Philip was not to worry. She would outgrow it.

On the evening before Ivy's seventh birthday, Philip stopped at a toy shop on his way home from the bank. He purchased a large doll. Both he and Violet had been extremely careful of the toys they had given the child. Ivy was never allowed to see anything that might remind her of that imaginary face outside the window. Indeed, the sight of a Teddy bear—a toy monkey—was enough to bring on a fit of terror. The doll would be just right—placid in its doll-like beauty.

Philip let himself into the house and carefully hid the doll away in the closet under the stairs. He would produce it in the morning for Ivy's seventh birthday. Violet came out from the kitchen, so Philip took the parcel out of the closet and carried it into the kitchen to show Violet.

"Oh, she will just love it," Violet told him. "I've got her a doll's carriage."

Violet exhibited the doll's carriage that she would give Ivy on her seventh birthday.

But Ivy never had a seventh birthday.

When Violet went into the children's room, where the two elder ones slept, she saw that Ivy was dead. Dorothy was still asleep beside her sister.

Violet's impulse was almost primeval in its mother love. How she did it, she did not know, but instinctively, when this horror had penetrated to her brain, Violet caught up the sleeping Dorothy, hid Dorothy's face against her breast and ran with Dorothy out of the room.

Together with Philip they returned to the children's room.

Ivy lay in bed. Her arms were outside the covers. The child's eyes were wide open and on the little face was an expression of horror.

Philip crumpled up. He knelt down by the cot and began to wail. Words passed from his lips but they had no meaning. Violet stood like a woman carved out of stone. She stared down at the child's face. Suddenly Violet caught Philip and shook him by the shoulder.

"Look!" she said. "Look!"

Her hand pointed to the throat of the dead child. Rising from his knees, Philip stared at the throat of his child.

"Oh, my God!" he said again and again. "Oh, my God!"

On the ivory whiteness of Ivy's throat were two angry, red marks. They were marks as though some beast had gripped the little throat—as though the child had been strangled.

Nor was this all. More horrible still were her eyes. Peering into them, Philip saw—reflected in the iris of the eyes—a fast-dimming image. And this image—this dim reflection, was still clear enough for the parents of the dead child to see a miniature of some apelike monster. The arms hung long by the hairy sides, and the face—although so small—was frightful.

But distinctly both Violet and Philip saw this reflection.

"That's the face the child saw outside the window all the time," whispered Violet hoarsely.

Philip nodded. He could not speak. He could not reason. The thing was not of this world.

They stood, these two, looking at each other. How long they stood they did not know, but presently Philip peered once more into the mysterious depths of those horror-laden eyes.

The image had gone. Almost roughly, Philip closed those eyes.

"Come," he said to Violet. He took her hand and led her from the room.

After a while Philip said:

"Listen, Violet. It's no good saying anything to the doctor when he comes about—about the eyes. I saw it—and you saw it—but no living man would believe it. Keep quiet about it. They will think that we are—mad."

Violet seemed to understand.

And presently Philip said, after he had telephoned for the doctor:

"Those marks—those marks on her poor little throat?"

He broke down and sobbed.

"What about those marks? How will the doctor explain them?" he asked when he had recovered a little.

Although his grief was poignant and bitter beyond conception, there entered into Philip's heart a great fear. Those marks! How could he explain those marks? Could suspicion rest upon him—that he had destroyed that which he loved so well? His face grew gaunt and pallid as he sat down to wait beside the benumbed Violet.

It seemed as though the doctor would never come. Philip telephoned again to learn that the doctor had left his house.

More waiting, and then they heard the doctor's car. What about those marks?

But when the doctor bent over the cot, no mark was visible. Those angry red marks had completely disappeared.

"Seems—seems as though the child had had a shock," the doctor murmured half aloud.

Frankly he was puzzled. But as the little girl had been under his care ever since she had first been troubled with hallucinations, the doctor felt that he must profess some understanding of the case. It was with a sense of bewilderment that he wrote out the death certificate.

He certified—heart failure.

There followed the usual hopelessness of a dreary funeral. Violet did not go to the graveside. But Philip stood there bareheaded in the chill wind. Afterward, people said of him that Philip Creighton had been dazed by grief.

The return to normal life, to the daily routine at the bank, at first was irksome. Soon it became a relief. Philip plunged himself into work. He was absorbed by it. Not so with Violet. She hid her grief in her heart, but she began to age rapidly. Violet looked ten years older than she really was.

Gradually, as time passed—although it was not so very long as weeks are actually counted—the horror sunk into the background. Both Violet and Philip continued to grieve, but the horror, the dread terror, surrounding the circumstances of the little Ivy's death, became fainter and fainter. It seemed as though it had all been some ghastly dream. The parents lavished their affection on the two remaining children.

Then one evening when Philip returned from the bank, he let himself into the hall. From upstairs, came the screams of Dorothy. What was the matter? Philip dashed up the little staircase.

Dorothy, now six, was hiding her face in her mother's skirts. Dorothy had stopped screaming, but she was sobbing hysterically.

"It frightened me! It frightened me!"

Philip's face was drawn and white. He knelt by his little girl and drew her close to him.

"Tell me about it, Dorothy. Tell daddy then."

He tried to deceive himself while Dorothy hesitated. She had been frightened by something else. Presently, Dorothy would say so, and Philip's heart would be at rest. He looked over the head of the child at Violet's face. It was in Violet's expression that his fears were first confirmed.

Then Dorothy was telling him in short little sentences—in disconnected words. Outside the window was a "dre'ful" face. Dorothy pronounced the word "dreadful" in the same way as Ivy had, but Dorothy was more explicit than had been her sister. Dorothy gave details. The face was white—like an ape's. Above the white face was black hair. Then there were teeth—"dre'ful" teeth. Two teeth that hung down. Like a tiger's they were, said Dorothy.

Reassured that nothing could harm her while her mother and father were there, Dorothy later consented to be put to bed. Before long she was asleep.

But that night Violet moved a couch into the children's room—for since Ivy's death, Leonore had slept with Dorothy—and slept there herself.

The first time that Dorothy saw the face outside the window, Philip did not sleep at all. He lay awake for hours. At times he would get up and peer into the children's room where Violet, worn out, was asleep on the couch.

The next morning, Violet came into Philip's room and closed the door. They talked for a long time. As if by mutual consent both of them from then on referred to the horrible face as "IT." And when they mentioned "IT," they spoke in capitals.

"You must see it, Philip," Violet said after some time. "There is only one

thing to be done. We must move away from Fownes. Just to leave the house is not enough. Let us go up to New York. In the big city—IT could not find us. Let us go at once—to-day.”

Violet and the two children left the same day. They would put up at a hotel in New York until Philip could join them.

Within two months Philip, through the kindly offices of his employers, had obtained a similar position in a New York bank to the one which he had held in Fownes. Philip managed to sell his house, albeit at a sacrifice. He sold the furniture, too, because he did not wish to be reminded of the home he had made.

The Creightons established themselves in an apartment on One Hundred and Sixteenth Street on the West Side. Philip went downtown every morning to the bank.

For six weeks—for six happy weeks—the Creightons lived without fear. They almost laughed. They had fooled IT. They had been wise to move up to the big city. IT could never find them there. They did not try to explain IT, for IT was unexplainable. Probably, it was something to do with the house at Fownes. It had been a melancholy little house perched on a hill, overlooking the dreary lake. IT would not follow to the bright lights of a city.

Then, when Violet and Philip had begun to forget fear, IT sought out its victim among the millions of Manhattan.

IT came outside the window when Dorothy was going to bed. The window looked out at the back, but there was no fire escape on that side of the apartment house. And the Creightons' apartment was on the sixth floor. Dorothy went running to the window as Violet was undressing Leonore. With a shriek of terror, Dorothy came back toward the bed and flung herself against Violet's skirts.

“That dre'ful face again—the face—the face!” she screamed.

Philip, who was reading the evening papers in the living room, hurried into the bedroom.

He dashed to the window and peered out. The lights from the house opposite seemed to mock him. There was nothing there.

So it went on. The Creightons moved again—this time to an apartment on West Seventeenth Street. The apartment was small and inconvenient. Still, it possessed two bedrooms—a small one in which Leonore slept alone, for Leonore was never troubled by IT—and a large one. In the big bedroom, Violet and Philip slept in twin beds. Between the twin beds they placed Dorothy's little cot. Then they felt safe, or as safe as they could feel, for, at irregular intervals, Dorothy would terrify them by her screams when IT peered in at the window.

Violet aged rapidly. To look at her, one would have thought that she was in late middle age. Philip aged, too. His hair had become a sandy gray, and he no longer took any pleasure in dress. Only he worked at the bank, to return to talk—for the most part in a whisper—to Violet about IT.

“Do you think we can ever avoid IT?” one would ask the other, after IT had found them out in the Seventeenth Street apartment.

They had no friends. Once Philip became on friendly terms with one Jordan, a fellow employee at the bank. Creighton, who had become strangely shy, timidly proffered an invitation to dinner at a restaurant. Jordan accepted. Philip ordered lavishly, and Jordan chatted of pleasant things. Jordan talked of the vacation he had spent the summer before at Nantucket. Jordan was unmarried and there had been a girl. Philip fidgeted, feeling out of it all. Had there ever been a time

when Philip had been unmarried—when Philip had had a girl?

Presently, Philip found himself asking Jordan questions. Did Jordan believe in weird things? Did Jordan think there were things ordinary people could not understand?

“What are you getting at?” asked Jordan. Then, slangily: “Spill it, Creighton. Get it off your chest.”

Philip began to talk. He would not own that IT had occurred in his own family. He told the story badly. He stopped now and then and looked appealingly at Jordan. Philip made out that IT had happened to some friends of his—the Smiths.

Jordan was frankly bored. He did not know anything about that kind of thing. Besides, he did not know the Smiths and he wanted to talk about himself.

Philip found no consolation in Jordan, who, somewhat ungratefully, circulated the report in the office that Creighton “was queer.”

So the Creightons had no friends. Instead, they watched and waited—waited for the night of Dorothy’s seventh birthday.

“You watch it and see, Philip,” Violet would whisper. “IT will come again on the seventh birthday. There is something awful about a seventh birthday.”

At which Philip would nod slowly.

Came the evening before Dorothy’s seventh birthday. Leonore had been sent away on a visit to her grandmother, for Philip’s mother had left New York and was living just across the Hudson in New Jersey. Violet and Philip realized that it would be useless to send little Dorothy away. They must fight the danger with her. They had said nothing to Dorothy about her birthday, and Dorothy had forgotten the exact day.

Violet put Dorothy to bed later than usual. Dorothy had the treat of sitting

up to supper, and her childish voice was agony to her parents. After supper, Violet made a quantity of strong black coffee. This she carried into the bedroom.

Violet put Dorothy to bed, and soon the child was asleep. She looked very pretty with her gold curls, with one dimpled arm outside the coverlet.

Philip and Violet sat up in two arm-chairs, which they had brought into the bedroom. They sat sipping the black coffee. Neither of them must sleep that night. At least, it was a good sign that Dorothy had not seen IT outside the window. Dorothy had not seen IT for nearly a month.

Philip and Violet sat in silence. Occasionally, one would speak the name of the other just to see that they were both awake. Once in a while, Philip would go to the window and peer out. He would see nothing. Philip sat there thinking—thinking of how happy he had been before Ivy had seen IT. Then he had been full of ambition. He had been prospering. Now he was getting old and he had saved no money. It was much more expensive living in New York, and the moving about had cost money. Again, he had suffered from an unsuccessful investment so that now he only had a few hundred dollars as a nest egg. Not that money mattered. Nothing mattered very much—except IT.

The night crept on.

Violet sat in dull apathy. A cheap clock on the dresser ticked aggressively. It was half past two.

Drowsiness. Drowsiness overwhelmed both of them. Each fought it, but it was irresistible. Each slept.

The early morning sun was shining through the window when Violet awoke with a start. Philip slept heavily in the chair opposite to her. Dorothy lay cold and dead in her cot.

IT had done ITS horrible deed in exactly the same manner as in the case

of Ivy. As before, the eyes mirrored that dreadful form. As before, the little throat showed the angry red marks. As before, these signs disappeared.

It was with a sense of bewilderment that the doctor wrote out the death certificate.

He certified—heart failure!

Three days later Violet was taken to the hospital, delirious with brain fever. Curiously enough, Philip experienced a sense of relief when Violet died. Now, all his affection—his everything—was wrapped up in Leonore.

And before Leonore showed any signs of having seen IT, Philip made up his mind that he would flee. To his almost demented mind, it seemed conclusive that the only escape from IT lay in flight. When they had first moved up from Fownes, Dorothy had escaped IT for a period of several weeks. Obviously then, the only safety lay in running from one place to another. Also, Philip argued, if he could only pass in safety that seventh birthday of Leonore, then all would be well. Beyond that, Philip could make no plans. Let him only save Leonore—and then it would be time to think of the future. But he must keep all this to himself. Were he to tell the story, they would lock him up as a madman. To save Leonore, he must keep the awful thing to himself. Still he would wait until Leonore first saw IT.

He had to wait some time, for Leonore was halfway between her sixth and seventh birthdays before she saw IT outside the window. Fortunately it happened when Philip was home from the bank. He had engaged a woman to look after the little girl, but Philip always hurried back from the bank—ever fearful.

Philip acted the next day. For flight, Philip must have money. It was quite easy to do. When Philip returned from the bank, he had several thousand

dollars in bills of small denomination with him. Of course, his theft meant an added danger, but Philip decided that it was the only way to escape that which he feared more, and by a lucky chance the next day was a public holiday. This would give him an extra twenty-four hours start before the bank officials would even suspect him.

With his own hands Philip tenderly dressed Leonore for her journey. He took with him only a couple of suit cases, and the same evening he left New York from the Grand Central depot. He made his way into Maine. He stayed there for a few weeks anxiously scanning the newspapers, but he could find no mention in them of the theft at the bank.

Gradually, Philip, by short stages, reached the Canadian border. Once safely across, he went back east to Montreal. It was in Montreal that Leonore again saw IT.

But Philip would not give in. He took Leonore on a small coasting steamer and made his way north. There, he doubled on his tracks and turned west again. Always he traveled. They would take the train, those two, and travel for a day and a night. Then Philip would drop off at some small town and seek the woods or the prairies. By this time he had grown a beard and, as he heard nothing of the robbery, Philip felt fairly safe on that score. As for the little Leonore, she was quiet and very timid. She was a more temperamental child than either of her dead sisters, and one glimpse of IT was enough to subdue her child spirits for many days afterward. In the suffering of his little daughter, Philip suffered even more. At times Philip would despair. It was no good fighting this thing. It would be better to sit down and wait for it. And then the next day Philip and Leonore would journey on.

So passed the months toward the

dreaded seventh birthday. A few days before, Philip established himself in a log cabin in the woods of northern British Columbia. He had pretended that he would buy the place with the few acres that went with it. His nearest neighbors were three miles away, so that Philip and Leonore were entirely alone in the bleak cold of that January weather.

The log cabin consisted of two rooms—a kitchen-living room and a bedroom—roughly furnished. The cabin stood in a little clearing above a small lake. Around them was the stillness—the eternal silence of the forest winter.

Philip realized that again he might become drowsy—overpowered by sleep. That was part of IT. He would provide against sleep. As had happened in the case of Dorothy, so it was with Leonore: she had not seen IT for some little time. But this did not deceive Philip. He would be waiting—ready.

Late on the evening before Leonore's seventh birthday, Philip put the little girl to bed. Then, fully dressed, Philip sat down beside her. The stove had been heaped with wood. A lamp was lighted on the table. With leather thongs, Philip attached a revolver to each wrist. Philip would see if powder and lead bullets could protect Leonore from IT.

The night dragged on. About one o'clock Philip began to feel drowsy. He fought this drowsiness as he had fought it before. He got up and walked to the window. Outside, a brilliant moonlight played on the frozen snow and cast black shadows from the pine trees.

The drowsiness became intolerable and Philip had the sense to realize that sooner or later he must succumb to it.

He picked the sleeping child from her bed, tenderly wrapping the bed-clothes about her slight form. He laid Leonore in his arms and sat in a low arm-chair facing the window.

Philip continued to fight that drowsiness, but it was as though he had been drugged. Soon came sleep.

When he awoke, a scream of terror died on his lips. A cold, damp wind seemed to envelop him.

Standing above him, with its long, taloned hands just reaching out for Leonore, who still slept, stood a beast. It was more ape than man—and yet more man than ape. Its face was long and, although covered with dark red hair, an unholy white gleamed behind this growth. In size, IT was not quite as tall as the average man, but, above all, most horrible was his expression.

Philip conquered his terror in time to fire three shots in rapid succession directly into ITS face.

The beast sprang back with a snarl. Philip fired again. Then a scream re-echoed through the shack as, turning, IT leaped through the window.

The child had awakened, but Philip had managed to keep Leonore's face buried in the covers. He placed her on the bed.

"Lie there—it's all right—lie there!" he said to her.

Then, Philip, revolver in each hand, flung himself through the shattered window.

Outside, in the ghastly moonlight, Philip saw IT fleeing over the frozen snow—down the slight hill toward the lake.

Philip followed. Now he would stop to take deliberate aim, but the distance was too great for Philip to see if his shots took effect.

Philip hurled himself down the hill after IT. The snow cracked under his footsteps.

Then he was at the edge of the lake, not far from IT, and Philip noticed that ITS progress was painful as IT made ITS way over the frosted ice.

It was when IT reached the middle of the little lake, that Philip fired his

last shot at a distance of less than thirty feet.

Again a horrible shriek rent the stillness of that desolate place. It echoed and reëchoed through the pine-clad hills.

And as IT screamed, IT flung up dreadful arms. Then it had disappeared.

Philip rushed over the ice. A large hole with jagged edges showed black against the white of the frozen lake.

Philip knelt and peered down into the black water, but there was nothing there.

Philip returned at a run to the cabin. Leonore had fallen asleep again. Philip arranged the covers around her, and now, fully awake, sat through the remaining watches of the night.

A wild joy surged through his veins. The dreaded seventh birthday had arrived and Leonore was safe. Philip felt, rather than knew, that IT would never come again. He laughed aloud, and his laughter was horrible in its frenzy of triumph.

With the first streak of dawn, Philip left the cabin. He searched for foot-

prints. But on the hard frozen snow, he found only his own. The soft padded feet of the Beast had left no trace.

For an hour or more Philip searched in the snow. Then, he went down to the lake. He walked across the frozen surface until he came to where the hole in the ice had been a few hours before.

But there was no hole. Already it had frozen over, but the ice was clear—transparent as heavy glass.

Kneeling beside this window in the frozen lake, Philip peered down—down.

Looking up at him, under the clear ice, was the face of IT. Involuntarily Philip drew back. And then he realized that IT was dead, and so he could look without fear.

Philip looked down again, and then a cry of horror broke from him, for he recognized in the face of IT, beneath the dark red hair, the features of the man he had wronged—the features of Richard Bleake.

And it was there on the lake that the detectives, sent by the bank, found Philip Creighton—a gibbering madman.



AN AUGUST PATHWAY

By Freeman Harrison

THE yellow stars come out in dull parade,
And fireflies make their glowing way e'er soon;
The seething stretches of the summer sea
Are painted by a dull-red August moon.

And in that magic track of darkling red,
That pathway by the crimson moon unfurled,
As in the smoke of a mystic pipe I see
The spray-tossed faces of the Grecian world.

Three thousand years! And yet so near they seem;
'Give me your hand!' "Smile with those eyes so
brown!"

"Oh, turn to me, girl of the jet-black hair;
I hope we shall meet when you come to town!"



The Man From Thebes

William
Wallace Cook

BOOK I.—THE ROUSING OF NIT-RA.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOMENTOUS DECISION OF WILLIAM BINGS.

ME to the wall," murmured William Bings dejectedly, laying his last two-bit piece on his knee and staring at it with the hostile eye of one who had never before been reduced to such extremity, "me to the wall, and all on account of a petrified man, an educated hog, a frizzle-topped albiner who thinks she can warble, a fake Injun, and a long-haired quack!

"If the sentiments of this two-by-four town are a fair sample of the country's intelligence, I'm blessed if we haven't been going down grade all the way from Bunker Hill to Kettle Hill. It's demoralizin' the way the public passes up me and the real thing for that bunch of torchlight grafters with the bottled dope."

Bings sighed, pocketed the coin solicitously, then cast up his liabilities while he chewed at an unlighted cigar.

"Hotel bill, two dollars; bar bill, three-fifty; rent of storeroom for two

profitless days, five dollars; total, ten-fifty. And I've got," he murmured, harking back to his resources, "one grip containing a secondhand dress suit, one spiel on Ancient Egypt, the Ra-Ra boy—and twenty-five cents in silver! I don't know, but I guess, if I can manage it, I'd better duck. If I can get to the next town ahead of this medicine gang mebbly I can do business."

Lighting the cigar, William Bings spent ten fruitless minutes trying to frame up some plan for vanishing, with all his goods and chattels, from the place where he was to the place where he'd like to be. Nit-Ra presented a difficulty that was insurmountable, and, inasmuch as Nit-Ra was Bings' stock in trade, to leave him behind was out of the question.

"Old Johnny Hardluck has got me flagged for fair," ruminated Bings. "The landlord'll gather in my effects and I'll have to do a stunt in some hay field if I want to replevy. I'm It, all right. This one-horse burg has landed on me too numerous to mention."

Yet, in that dark hour when all

seemed lost, and the alfalfa of the distant meadows grew into a canebrake and ominously beckoned, an idea shot like the ray of a bull's-eye through the gloomy mind of William Bings. This idea expanded and ultimately became a Momentous Decision.

That was the age of consolidation. In union there was strength, absence of competition, and a strangle hold on the public throat, so that "amalgamate" had become the slogan in every line of human endeavor.

"By jinks, I've got it!" exclaimed Bings, jumping from his chair as though touched with a live wire. "If I can pull the thing off it will be a winner."

With William Bings to think was to act. There were two hotels in the town, and forthwith he started for the other one.

"Is Doctor Gingel about the premises?" he asked of the clerk in the office.

At that precise moment the ceiling of the office was echoing with the heavy tread of some one on the floor above. A mumble of rapid speech could also be heard. The clerk raised his eyes to a festoon of red, white, and blue tissue paper from whose center depended a bracket with two oil lamps.

"The doctor's here, all right," he grinned. "Want to see him?"

"I want to get close enough to his august presence to corral him in conversation," replied Bings; "but if he's busy——"

"Go right up," said the clerk; "them's the orders he left if any customers asked for him in the office. He keeps all the medicine in his room."

Bings wasn't after medicine, but he let it go at that.

"Second-floor front?" he called back as he started for the stairs.

"That's it; you can't miss it," and the clerk lighted another cigarette and continued his reflections.

Near the head of the stairs was a

door bearing a placard with this inscription:

Office of
THE PIUTE PANACEA CO.,
Anzi Gingel, M. D.,
Proprietor.

**A Guaranteed Cure for All the Ills That
Flesh Is Heir to.**

Walk In and Be Convinced!

Bings walked in. The room was small, contained a table and three chairs, and had a much-battered anatomical chart suspended from one of the walls.

Doctor Gingel, however, was not to be seen. Evidently he was in an adjoining room whose door stood partly open. Through the opening came hot words, punctuated by the stertorous breathing of a stout man in deep anger. The heavy footfalls also were more pronounced at close range than they had been in the office.

"Ungrateful scoundrel!" wheezed the voice that was doing most of the heavy work. "Didn't I haul you out of the gutter and set you on your feet? Didn't I make a man out of you, and didn't——"

"You made a petrified man out of me," interrupted a second voice; "that's what you done. You know blame' well, Gingel, it's wuth more'n three dollars a week to let yourself be whitewashed an' play dead for four hours every evenin'. You wouldn't do it for no sech money."

"Imbecile! Am I, with my vast store of learning, to be classed with an ignoramus who never did a stroke of honest work in his life until he met me? You was a drunken sot, and the Panacea killed the appetite; you was doubled up with rheumatiz, and the Panacea straightened you out; you was naked and starving, and the Panacea put clothes on your back and food in your stomach.

"Now, in the face of all this, you

have the brazen effrontery to come to me and kick about the wages I pay you. Shame! Hang your head, sir—hang it, I say!—and prove that you have one last lingering spark of manhood somewhere in the depths of your base nature.

“Sam Jackson, do you realize that, as a reward for my liberality and fostering care, you are emulating the serpent and striking at the hand that feeds you? But enough, more than enough! Tell me, once and for all, will you continue to do the petrified man at three per week and keep?”

“Make it five, doc, and——”

“Never!” roared the doctor.

“Then you can git another petrified man; I’m done.”

“So am I. But just one word, Sam Jackson: Dare to breathe even so much as a whisper about your double rôle with the Panacea Company and that will be my cue to act—to *act*, do you understand? In other words, I shall proceed against you by due process of law on a charge of fraud. That will do. I hope, I sincerely hope, we have seen each other for the last time.”

The door of the inner room was flung wide, and a tall, loosely hung man with a bleached complexion came hurtling through and collided with the opposite wall. Recovering his breath with a gasp, he grabbed at the knob of the hall door and let himself out in a hurry.

This departing individual was watched, from the threshold of the second chamber, by a short, broad man in a black frock coat, a yellow silk vest, plaid trousers, buff spats, and patent-leather shoes. Bings, having gazed at the doctor from the outskirts of a crowd the night before, recognized him instantly.

“You are next, I believe,” said the doctor, brushing his long hair back from his bulging brow in order that he might, with his right sleeve, take up an excess of moisture that had gathered. “Come in, sir,” the doctor added,

“and I will diagnose your case and prescribe.”

Seldom, indeed, has opportunity fallen into the lap of misfortune so felicitously. Bings saw his chance, and was ready to make the most of it.

“It’s this way, doc,” said he, after he had followed the stout gentleman into the other room, “my name’s Bings, William Bings, and I’m conductin’ a little amusement enterprise of my own, see? I didn’t know but we might consolidate.”

“What’s your speciality, Mr. Bings?” inquired Doctor Gingel, looking his little, red-haired caller over with a critical eye.

“It’s a nice, genteel dip,” confided Bings, “and if you’ll come with me and give me about ten minutes of your valuable time I’ll put you next.”

“I just fired one of my attractions,” remarked the doctor, still keeping his keen glance on the little man, “so it happens that you have approached me at the psychological moment.” He got up and reached for his top hat. “My intuition, which is rarely at fault, assures me that you have something up your sleeve that may be worth while. Inasmuch as the mountain will not come to Hannibal Augustus,” he finished with a rare smile, “Hannibal Augustus will go to the mountain.”

This last allusion was over the head of William Bings, and while he screened his ignorance with a knowing look, his inner consciousness was assuring him that Doctor Gingel was a bright, particular star in the heavens of quackery. Plainly there was more to Doctor Gingel than Bings had heretofore supposed.

Bings conducted his companion to the storeroom, admitted him, and led him to a pair of yellow portières.

“You are now,” said Bings in the language of his “spiel,” “about to feast your eyes on one of the greatest curiosities which the Ancient World has

handed down to the Modern. Napoleon, you remember, when he stood within the shadow of the Pyramids, called out to his soldiers: 'Forty centuries are lookin' down upon you!' Now we have it the other way around, for you, doctor, are lookin' down upon forty centuries."

With that, Bings pulled a string and the yellow curtains parted. A human form was revealed, resting upon a board which, in turn, rested on the backs of two chairs. The board, covered with oilcloth, strove feebly to imitate a marble slab.

"Although the gent you are now piping off," proceeded Bings, "is four thousand years old, more or less, and shows a few signs of wear and tear, yet it is admitted that he is the longest, as well as the best, preserved inhabitant of ancient Egypt which has ever been handed down to us. Observe the yellowness of the exposed skin; a touch will reveal its firmness and remarkable pliability. This proves that the gent under discussion was embalmed by the Thebans, in the best style of the art. Note, too, how every feature is retained—the lips, the nose, the ears, the lashes of the closed eyes, even the hair of the head.

"That long box leanin' against the wall is the original cedarwood sarcophagus which our friend has inhabited for these thousands of years, and from which he has been taken in order that you may get a better focus on him with your lamps. Step close to it. Get next to those dinky little marks carved on the cover. Pictures? Not on your tintype! Language, that's what they are—hieroglyphs.

"Some of the hieroglyphs are framed in an oblong ring. The ring's a cartouche, and a mark of royalty. The name in the cartouche is Nit-Ra, and the meanin' is that the sarcophagus contains all that's left of the powerful potentate, King Nit-Ra, of the 'steenth

dynasty. That there hawk's head is a sign of——"

"Your remarks are mighty interesting, Mr. Bings," broke in Doctor Gingel, "but, if I listen much longer, I'll overstay my ten minutes. The petrified-man box on our wagon will just about take in the sarcophagus. What are your terms?"

"Ten per," replied Bings promptly, "includin' my three squares and a place to pound my ear—you to advance ten and a half so't I can get clear of this one-night stand without complications."

The doctor reflected. Nit-Ra was a drawing card beside which the petrified man, as enacted by Sam Jackson, paled to insignificance.

"By the way," said the doctor, "where did you get—this?" and he waved a hand toward Nit-Ra.

"I had an uncle, my sole remaining relative," explained Bings; "he had lots of dough, and his game was collectin' antiquities. When uncle quit I expected to be remembered with enough to keep me, but—would you believe it?—he left his wad to the Karnak Exploration Society and cut me off with a mummy. That's how I connected with Nit-Ra."

"We need some one to look after our team and wagon," proceeded the doctor, "and to intrduce Pinkey, the Porcine Wonder. If you'll attend to those duties, and make yourself useful during our evening demonstrations, I'll accept your terms."

"Done!" said William Bings.

In slang parlance, by this momentous decision on the part of Bings, the entire Piute Panacea Company was "done"—and to the king's taste.

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

NEAR the center of our beloved country any good map will disclose an oblong patch of yellow. Toward the eastern side of this gamboge-

ous parallelogram the searching eye will light upon a minute circle with lines radiating from its circumference.

This golden patch in the network of States is Kansas; the fringed circle is Ottawa, county seat of Franklin. And there in Ottawa, Franklin County, Kansas, the tremendous thing which makes this chronicle possible was brought to pass.

Fate was responsible, of course; fate, aided and abetted by the consolidation of Bings and Nit-Ra with the Piute Panacea Company.

The Piute Panacea Company—Doctor Gingel, president, general manager, secretary *and* treasurer—traveled from town to town in its own wagon, with its own team, paid its own expenses—usually—and pocketed its own profits.

The Panacea was being introduced to a suffering public by night, with guitar and song by Mademoiselle Helene, with high-class specialties by the Porcine Wonder—now introduced by Bings—with a corroborative view of Hatch-á-Kaw, ex-chief of the Piutes, who had wrested the secret formula from the head medicine man of the tribe for the benefit of the palefaces; with an instructive glimpse of Nit-Ra, the Egyptian mummy—one glimpse with each dollar bottle, or six for five—and lastly with learned remarks on Egyptology, educated pigs, Piute folklore, and the physical ills of mankind by Doctor Gingel.

In private life Mademoiselle Helene was Sallie Gingel, daughter of the learned gentleman who was doing so much to exploit the Panacea. Peroxide and a judicious use of curl papers had transformed Miss Gingel into an albino—for demonstration purposes.

She had studied the voice under Professor Ham Billings, in her native town of Crimp's Corners, Illinois, and the guitar under Madame Vere, of Blossburg. As a result her performance was both Billingsonian and Veresque,

and sufficiently moving for a Panacea audience.

Pinkey, the Porcine Wonder, had a cage on the left side of the wagon, opposite the long box wherein the petrified man had been exposed to view and which was now preempted by Nit-Ra hedged around by a reserve stock of bottled Panacea.

As exhibited by Bings on an elevated platform, Pinkey showed his almost human intelligence by answering certain questions of the doctor's, as: "Now, Pinkey, tell the ladies and gentlemen what medicine is the most wonderful in the world?" And thereupon Pinkey would root over lettered blocks until he had spelled out the words, "Piute Panacea."

Such startling demonstrations of brute reason in the realm of applied medicine never failed of a hand.

Hatch-á-Kaw, when clear of the public eye and minus his red paint, blankets, and feathers, was Jim Simpson. In off hours he wooed the entrancing Mademoiselle Helene, but without appreciable effect.

As already set down, his was the formula that had made that business venture of the doctor's a possibility. The formula was in three parts, each part on a separate sheet. The medicine man from whom it was wrested must have been tolerably well grounded in chemistry, for each part was full of Latin and symbols—which Jim Simpson did not pretend to understand. It was good business to place the responsibility on the Piutes, so that Doctor Gingel did not delve very deep into the Panacea's true origin.

This three-part formula Jim Simpson guarded as the apple of his eye; not even the doctor could ever get so much as a fleeting glimpse of any one of the papers.

When the supply of Panacea ran low the first part was filled in one town, the second in another, and the third in

yet another, Simpson standing over each druggist the while to prevent the making of a copy for the prescription file.

The three parts were then mixed, diluted with four barrels of water, and lo! for the sum of one dollar and sixty-three cents there resulted many, many bottles to be disposed of at a dollar per. Profit? Well, the bottles cost something, and so did the corks and the labels. Then, too, there was all this talent to be reimbursed.

The stars had engineered it so that Simpson and Gingel first crossed each other's orbit in Texas. It was there these two bright lights had decided to merge into one Lone Star.

Gingel, at that time, was selling a combination can opener, screw driver, tweezers, corkscrew, hoof cleaner, and ear spoon. Simpson was just back from the Philippines, honorably discharged from the ninety-second squad of Imperial Negrito Chasers. He had used up his travel pay and all that was left of his thirteen dollars a month, but he still had his khaki clothes, his formula, and an overwhelming desire for real work. He met Gingel on a Houston corner, and the same yearning that had afflicted William Bings at a later date took hold of Simpson: Why not consolidate with this verbose gentleman of that multum-in-parvo contrivance?

Simpson mentioned his Panacea. Gingel was charmed with the idea. Forthwith they entered into an agreement.

In consideration of the sum of fifty thousand dollars, to be paid in monthly installments of twenty dollars, Simpson was to supply the Panacea and Gingel the bottles, corks, labels, and other machinery of distribution; and, until the fifty thousand dollars was paid, Simpson was to keep his formula. After that it was to become common property.

On receiving the first batch of Panacea, Gingel privately sent samples to

noted chemists. Their reports were to the effect that the compound defied analysis; so the astute Gingel settled down to reap what profits he could over and above the necessary expenses.

The proprietors of the Panacea began humbly, walking from place to place and hauling their stock in trade on a hand cart. Presently they were able to purchase a horse and wagon; and then, by a lucky stroke in the fever-and-ague district of Arkansas they traded a dozen bottles of Panacea for the educated razorback. Ultimately they expanded into the specially constructed wagon drawn by a team, the doctor's daughter left one of the minor vaudeville circuits to join them, Simpson developed the petrified-man idea, and Fortune's pleasant look became a broad smile.

Here we come to the parting of the ways, when, in that little town—the first stop beyond Kansas City, Kansas—the petrified man went on strike and Bings stepped into the breach with Nit-Ra.

To an intelligent mind the steps by which an infant industry sheds its swaddling clothes and attains its adult stature ought to be sufficiently interesting to excuse the digression.

A week was consumed by the medicine people in working their way to Olathe. It was a week of adjustment for Bings, but he proved readily adaptable and came to fit his new berth as a round peg fits a circular hole.

His painstaking efforts won the hearty commendation of Doctor Gingel. The bogus ex-chief of the Piutes, however, was frankly hostile. He had caught Mademoiselle Helene, on two separate occasions, giving the new recruit a languishing eye.

The doctor took note of this widening breach, but, so far from attempting to heal it, he assumed an attitude of studied indifference. Now and again a keen observer might have detected a gleam of satisfaction in the doctor's

murky eyes on their beholding some flagrant manifestation of the bad blood between these two members of the Panacea's aggregation.

Whenever the itinerant dispensary trundled into a town the doctor, Mademoiselle Helene, and Jim Simpson straightway took up their lodgings in the best hotel; but William Bings slept under the canopy top of the wagon, with Nit-Ra on one side of him and Pinkey on the other.

That first night in Olathe, while the doctor was smoking a post-prandial cigar in his room, William Bings burst in on him with a face the color of old cheese, and red hair fairly standing on end.

"Some one run off with Pinkey?" demanded the doctor, whose intuition appeared to have taken a lay-off. "Anything happened to Nit-Ra?" By then he was on his feet and had caught Bings by the arm. "Out with it, Bings!" he admonished. "Tell me the worst at once."

"It—it——" Bings' faded blue eyes stared into vacancy with slowly growing horror. With a hollow groan he dropped into a chair and covered his face. "Is it the padded cell for mine?" he babbled. "Have I—oh, have I—gone off the jump? Say, doc, you noticed anything wrong about me lately?"

"Not a thing, William," answered Gingel, "so help me. But you've got a bad attack of the nerves just now. What's gone wrong?"

Bings lifted his hueless face and stared stonily at the doctor as he gasped:

"The mummy—it—it opened and shut one eye as—as I looked into the—the box. Brrr! My skin gets up and walks all over me with cold feet when I think of it."

The doctor turned to a table and poured out two fingers of the Panacea in a glass.

"Drink this," said he, "and you'll feel
4BThrill

better." It was a pretty stiff dose, and Bings tossed it off at a gulp. "It's been a hot day," the doctor added, "and you've had a touch of the sun."

"Forget it, doc! Either I'm dotty or Nit-Ra tipped me a wink when I flashed the lantern into his box no more'n five minutes ago. Remember when we jolted over that railroad track at the edge o' town? Well, say, I thought I heard some of the glassware in the box with the Ra-Ra boy go to smash, and after I put up the horses I saw the wagon was leakin' Panacea.

"I got out the lantern, unlocked the door of the box, and, sure enough, Nit-Ra was all afloat in the sarcophagus. I set down the light to lift him up, and—and he opened that old lamp o' his and drew down the lid again just as natural!

"Look here, doc! You needn't wag your coco like that and get such a horrible sorry on. I'm giving it to you straight. If that mummy didn't wink at me I've gone dippy, one or t'other."

The doctor ran his fingers through his long hair and picked up his hat.

"My poor, deluded friend," said he, "weary as I am with this day's journey, I'll go back with you to the wagon and set your troubled mind at rest."

They left the hotel together, Bings clinging to the doctor's arm. When they reached the wagon the lantern was still burning, and the door of Nit-Ra's box was swinging open, just as Bings had left it.

"Look!" William Bings whispered hoarsely, hauling back on the doctor's arm.

"What's to pay now?" queried Gingel.

"The lantern," mumbled Bings. "I left it in the box! And now it's on the—the ground."

William Bings was no coward. And yet his teeth were chattering.

Shaking the trembling hand from his arm, Doctor Gingel strode forward,

seized the lantern, and flashed it into the interior of the box. Another instant and he fell back as though stricken. Bings started to run.

"Wait!" shouted the doctor.

Bings halted breathlessly and turned around.

"Did it wink at you?" he asked.

"Wink? What nonsense! No, it didn't wink. Bings, Nit-Ra isn't there; the sarcophagus is empty. The mummy has been stolen. You accommodately left the door open when you fled and some rascal took advantage of it. See if the hog is safe. I'm off to find the police."

Thereupon Doctor Gingel vanished into the night, leaving Bings in a cold sweat and hovering about in the gloom at a respectable distance from the Panacea wagon.

This Olathe incident, startling though it appears at first sight, must not be confounded with the later event scheduled to take place in Ottawa. It was a straw in the wind, nothing more.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECOND MANIFESTATION.

WHEN Doctor Gingel, in the course of an hour, returned to the wagon with one of the Olathe police force William Bings was not in evidence. He was loudly called, and presently appeared from around the corner of a neighboring barn in which the horses were being kept.

"Where have you been, Bings?" queried the doctor.

"Er—I went around to the lee side of the barn. You see, I wanted to get out of the wind so's I could light my pipe."

There wasn't any wind, and Bings hadn't any pipe. But the doctor was too much excited to be critical.

"The mummy," Gingel explained to the officer, picking up the lantern, and stepping toward the open door of the

long box, "was kept in there. While my man here thoughtlessly left the door open and went into the town some miscreant happened along and annexed the priceless ancient relic."

"What in Sam Hill would a thief want of a mummy?" asked the matter-of-fact officer.

"We are face to face with a fact," said the doctor with dignity, "and it is not necessary to inquire into the motive. If you will give your attention to the interior of the box——"

With the last words the doctor had given the box's interior his own further attention. And again, as before, he jumped back with a startled exclamation, gazing wildly from the officer to Bings, and then back to the officer.

"Found somethin' you overlooked before?" queried the officer.

"It's—it's back again," said Gingel blankly.

"What's back again? The mummy?"

"Yes. The thief, experiencing an attack of conscience, has returned Nit-Ra to the place from whence he was taken."

"Funny move for a thief to make!" exclaimed the officer. And then he became jeeringly offensive. "You fellers must have had a drop too much," he added. "This now-you-see-it-and-now-you-don't business is pretty thin. Got a license to work this town with your patent dope?"

"I'll have the license, sir," answered the doctor importantly, "when I begin to work."

"See't you do," growled the officer, turning away, "or I'll pull your whole outfit, mummy and all."

With temper on edge because he had been needlessly disturbed, the guardian of the peace went his way. Emboldened by the doctor's presence, Bings drew close and looked with him through the open door.

Nit-Ra, as usual, was stretched out in his cedarwood case. There was not a particle of change in his appearance.

He was as calm and immovable as he had been at any time for the last four thousand years.

"You watched the wagon carefully, Bings?" asked the perplexed doctor.

"Sure, except when I went around the end of the barn."

"How long were you there?"

"It might 'a' been five minutes, and it might 'a' been longer."

"It was long enough, at all events, so that the thief had ample time to return Nit-Ra to his original place without being seen by you. We will remove the broken bottles, Bings, and drain the sarcophagus."

The doctor did most of the work, Bings concentrating the heft of his attention on Nit-Ra's shrunken eyelids. Not once did either lid so much as flicker. When the door was closed and securely locked Bings heaved a sigh of relief.

"Get into the wagon and go to sleep, Bings," said Gingel as he handed over the padlock key.

"Say, doc," fluttered Bings, "you're shy a few if you think I'm going to stick out the rest of the night here alone. Not me. This hocus pocus has given me a jolt that it's hard to get over."

In his present mood Bings would not have hesitated a moment to abandon the wagon and everything in it. Self-interest compelled Gingel to ignore his own comfort and convenience and defer to his employee's unhappy state of mind. For some time the two sat on the wagon seat, in close and earnest conversation. During that talk the doctor's reason for not seeking to reconcile Bings and Simpson was brought out into the limelight.

Before Gingel and Bings crept under the blankets behind the seat, they had entered into a conspiracy aimed at the three-part formula. For the sum of fifty dollars Bings had been persuaded to attempt a light-fingered performance on the person of Jim Simpson. The

very first opportunity was to be Bings' cue to act.

A single night of refreshing slumber enabled Bings to recover his nerve, and during the remainder of the company's three days' stay in Olathe Nit-Ra remained placid, and his owner's confidence was fully restored.

There was no gainsaying the fact that the mummy had made a bigger hit with the public than the petrified man ever had done. People bought the Panacea, in some instances, merely to get a look at Nit-Ra.

The peculiar vicissitudes of the mummy on that first night in Olathe were written up for the local daily. This free advertising aroused curiosity; and while people generally were crying "Fake!" and charging up the theft of the mummy to the amiable doctor's imagination they flocked in crowds to buy the Panacea and get a glimpse of Nit-Ra.

From Olathe the Panacea people continued to work downward into the Sunflower State, finally wheeling across the suspension bridge that spanned the Marais des Cynges River and rounding to in the fateful spot that was to witness the company's demoralization.

The worst ruin is the kind that falls like a thunderclap, trailing along at the heels of seeming good fortune. That is precisely the brand of destruction that overtook the Panacea Company.

As usual, when it was possible to do so, the wagon was moored in a vacant lot contiguous to a livery stable. The day was hot, and the ride from Le Loup had been blisteringly uncomfortable.

As soon as the wagon had come to a halt, Mademoiselle Helene, Doctor Gingel, and Jim Simpson disappeared, leaving Bings to take care of the team and look after the rest of the company's belongings. Bings supposed that Simpson, as was his custom, had accompanied Mademoiselle Helene and the doc-

tor to a hotel; therefore Bings' surprise was great when, on leaving the barn after looking to the horses, he found Simpson stretched out on a heap of straw in the rear.

Overweary, the bogus ex-chief had yielded to a desire for sleep, and was catching his forty winks in the most convenient place. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. There would be no demonstration that night, for the town had first to be properly billed.

Bings stood for a space looking down upon the sleeping form in the straw. Next he stole a cautious glance at his surroundings. There, behind the barn, all was serene and not another soul in sight.

The trick was turned very neatly; so neatly, indeed, that one might have argued previous experience in that line on the part of Bings. However, that point does not, at the present moment, concern us.

When William Bings arose from the sleeping form of Simpson he held in his deft fingers the three slips which bore the formula. And the overweary Simpson slept blissfully on.

As Bings turned toward the wagon he saw, or thought he saw, a flash of white. The door of the mummy box was gaping wide, having in some inconceivable manner been left unlocked by the last person who had drawn upon the reserve supply of Panacea. This person might have been Bings himself, or any one of the others connected with the company. It would have been a comparatively easy matter for the door to jar open if the hasp of the padlock had not been pushed through the staple.

But what caused Bings to catch his breath and come to a stand was this: *He had seen the flash of white against the black background of the box's interior.*

If a person does not believe in the supernatural he is never afraid of it. Bings believed, and he began to palpi-

tate and hold on to himself. Had it been night, instead of broad day, he would certainly have run for Gingel.

While he stood there, battling with his fears, a man came out into a neighboring yard and went to splitting wood; two small boys drew near the wagon and began a running fire of juvenile comment; in the stable a whistling hostler could be heard moving around and doling out oats to the live stock.

Bings took heart, smothered his terror, and flew to the open door of the mummy box. The gruesome Nit-Ra was stretched at his ease in the sarcophagus.

There was no broken glassware in the box, but on the floor, close to the cedarwood receptacle, stood an uncorked and empty Panacea bottle. No doubt the bottle had been drained by the same person who had neglected to snap the padlock.

Bings removed the bottle and slammed and locked the door. Then he dropped weakly down and caught his head in his hands.

There was no use talking, his brain felt queer. Was the sun really getting in its work on him, as the doctor had suggested?

Now that Bings had the formula there was a good chance to squeeze the Panacea people, make a "raise" in three figures, at least, and then go off somewhere and give his head a rest. Why not? he asked himself.

Bings decided to sleep over it before finally making up his mind. After visiting a restaurant and fortifying himself with a meal, he returned to the wagon, smoked a couple of pipes, drew a measure of comfort from a flask of "Dutch courage," and crept between his blankets.

How long he slept he did not know; but he was aroused by a clammy hand gripping his throat. His wild eyes beheld a figure bending over him and his nostrils inhaled the peculiar, musty odor

which had long been associated with Nit-Ra.

A slow horror pulsed through Bings' nerves. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and his limbs were paralyzed.

Meanwhile that bony, freezing hand continued to restrict his breathing. The last thing he realized was that another hand was darting from pocket to pocket in a deft and exhaustive search.

Then William Bings straightened out, and from a state of terror passed into one of coma. To all intents and purposes he was as thoroughly lifeless as Nit-Ra had ever been.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CULMINATING EVENT.

BINGS awoke next morning with a vague notion that he had been through a particularly trying nightmare. His throat felt sore and uncomfortable, and he looked at it in a small mirror belonging to Mademoiselle Helene.

The skin had a red and chafed appearance. Putting away the mirror, he leaned back against the mummy box and tried to remember the details of his dream. During the mental effort his eyes alighted on an empty flask that lay in the bottom of the wagon.

Could that empty flask explain anything? Were his symptoms entirely those which wait upon a *bon vivant* in the cold light of the morning after?

His intellect was not in good working order, his pulse was sluggish, and a feeling of lassitude oppressed him. Climbing down from the wagon, he moved slowly to the barn trough and deluged his face with cold water.

Then his thoughts began to flow with tolerable swiftness and precision. He remembered the choking grip and the searching hand. A shiver of dread convulsed him and he went through his clothes.

It was gone! That formula, on which he had been building his hopes of gain had vanished from the pocket in which it had been so carefully placed.

He rushed back to the wagon and investigated the door of the mummy box. The door was closed and the padlock securely snapped and in the staple.

His imagination had again got the better of him. He had been robbed, but not by Nit-Ra. The clammy hand, the musty odor had been merely the figments of a disordered brain.

Perhaps Jim Simpson, discovering his loss and divining the cause of it, had retaliated in kind. That must be the explanation. As for the vagaries surrounding that nocturnal proceeding, the empty flask might be supposed to speak with considerable eloquence.

"I'm landed and strung, all right," murmured William Bings. "I've been jonahe'd ever since I flew my kite out of K. C."

While he was berating his hard luck, Doctor Gingel puffed his way into the vacant lot, moved up behind his melancholy employee, and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"All things come to the man with a pull," smiled the doctor radiantly. "Pass it over, William. Here's your fifty."

In the doctor's right hand was a crisp new bill of the half-hundred variety.

"Go on," said Bings blankly. "Pass what over?"

"The formula. Come, come!"

Bings, prescient of mysterious things to be revealed and with a fluttering heart, dissembled as well as he could.

"Say, doc, you've got me half-Nelsoned," remarked Bings. "What makes you think I've lifted the formula?"

"Why, Simpson began getting into his war paint and feathers this morning, and when he does that it has always been his habit to transfer the formula from his inside vest pocket to the Piute medicine bag. Half an hour ago he

rushed into my room like a hurricane. The formula had disappeared. Of course," the doctor added, "I was sure you had it."

"Well, I haven't got it, see?" returned Bings. "Simpson must be playing off on you."

"But why should he do that?" cried the doctor, greatly disturbed. "William," he went on darkly, suspicion leading him to take another tack, "I befriended you in the hour of your extremity, I gave you my confidence, I intrusted to you the manipulation of my dearest desire, and now, if you are to prove a traitor——"

"Cut it out!" growled Bings, lifting his hands above his head. "I'm no petrified man to have you come at me in that way. Get into my pockets, doc; see for yourself."

Doctor Gingel looked at him sharply.

"I can't believe you guilty of such duplicity," said he, shaking his head. "But if that formula has really got out of our hands the Piute Panacea Company has been stranded high and dry. Simpson would never allow a copy of it to be made, you know, and he couldn't tell you a single one of the ingredients."

"Supposing," said Bings tentatively, "just supposing, doc, that Simpson made you believe he had lost the prescription, supposing the present company went broke and that he went off by himself and started another?"

A glitter crept into the doctor's murky eyes.

"Well," said he ominously, "we have enough Panacea on hand to work this town. When we have done that I'll have the truth out of Simpson or I'll——I'll——"

Doctor Gingel finished his threat with a black scowl. That scowl expressed his determination better than mere words could have done. Without speaking further he whirled and started away.

"Just a minute, doc!" called Bings. "Do you know whether there was any one prowling around the wagon last night?"

The doctor had halted and faced about.

"I was here about ten o'clock," said he. "I was talking Panacea to a man at the hotel. He wanted a bottle and I came to get it."

"I was poundin' my ear, was I?" The doctor nodded. "Everything about the wagon looked as usual?" The doctor nodded again.

"After taking a bottle out of the mummy box—I had my own key with me and it was not necessary to disturb you—I went away. I had nearly reached the hotel when it struck me I might have neglected to relock the box. Thereupon I hastened to return, and discovered that my intuition had again given me timely warning. The door of the box was open."

Bings went pale and reeled slightly. The doctor, considerably exercised over the supposedly lost formula, failed to observe his employee's trepidation.

"You were restless and muttering in your sleep," the doctor resumed. "After making the door secure I gazed at you for a few moments and then returned to the hotel. Did you think you heard some one prowling around?"

"Must 'a' been dreamin', I guess," mumbled Bings.

The doctor departed, leaving William Bings' mind in a state of chaos. In Olathe, Nit-Ra had certainly opened and closed one eye; and, owing to the doctor's thoughtlessness the previous evening, it would have been possible for the mummy to emerge from the box, take him—Bings—by the throat, secure the formula, and then get back into the sarcophagus again, all in the space of time required by the doctor in walking to his hotel and back.

Possible? Aye, possible for a man in whom the life principle had not

flickered out—possible for a man endowed with the intelligence to plan and the strength to execute; but hardly possible for a king who had “cashed in” four thousand years before.

Then Bings was jarred by a terrific thought. These manifestations had not commenced until several broken bottles had spilled Panacea into the cedarwood case!

Bings recalled the flash of white against the gloomy interior of the mummy box, witnessed by him immediately after he had despoiled Simpson of the formula. Investigation, then, had shown him an empty Panacea bottle lying conveniently to Nit-Ra's withered hand.

The inference was obvious. Even Bings, in his hazy condition, was able to draw it. It was a cinch the Panacea had virtues undreamed of even by the imaginative Gingel!

Bings, unless he had gone stark, staring mad, was on the trail of a thing that was well-nigh incredible. If that night's experience was not a dream, if the Panacea had done for Nit-Ra all that Bings supposed it had, then Nit-Ra had witnessed the taking of the formula from Simpson and had, in his turn, taken it from Bings!

When we grasp the supposedly impossible and find that it disintegrates under our touch like a rope of sand, we are plunged at once into an abyss of extravagant probability. That is the way recent events had affected Bings.

Those old Egyptians had known a lot of things that time had effaced from the world's memory. That spiel about mummies and the Land of the Nile, written for Bings by a one-time college professor who had gone down to poverty on a Red Eye Special, asserted this in unmistakable terms.

Bings fell to speculating as to how much Nit-Ra knew concerning things that had happened to him during the last few weeks. There was food for

reflection here, and Bings winced and looked unhappy.

He had denied having secured the formula, when approached by Gingel, on general principles. Now, when it appeared certain that Nit-Ra had it, he was glad he had kept quiet about the night's experiences.

If Bings had had the courage of his convictions, he would have opened the mummy box and made sure whether Nit-Ra had the missing papers. But such a course did not appeal to Bings; he shivered to think of it.

As the day progressed every once in a while Bings would seem to wake up. At these moments he would stare around him like one who has pushed his head through the veil of the occult only to be blinded by the glare of the commonplace. Then he would draw back into the mysterious void and get busy with phantoms that had every appearance of being the real thing.

Evening came on. Bings hitched up, hung the gasoline torch to its post, lighted it, mounted to the driver's seat, and waited for the rest of the company.

They came at last—Mademoiselle Helene with her beribboned guitar and her coquettish air, Hatch-á-Kaw with his blankets and beadwork and worried look, and the learned doctor, carefully shaved and brushed and pomaded.

“A local prophet has worked the town ahead of us,” growled the doctor as he climbed into the wagon by the rear steps.

“How so?” asked Hatch-á-Kaw. His manner was spiritless, but the look he shot at Bings was full of venom.

“He has prophesied a cyclone for half past three to-morrow. Who's going to think of his aches and pains when he's liable to be wiped off the map so soon?”

Mademoiselle Helene giggled and tuned up the G string. Hatch-á-Kaw grunted and shook out his feathers.

The doctor composed himself doggedly in his armchair and lit a cigar.

"All ready, mademoiselle?" queried the doctor.

"Sure," said the mademoiselle.

"Corner of Second and Main, William," called the doctor. "I'll tell you when we get there."

A trail of music and song followed the wagon as it left the lot. The usual small-boy contingent was in evidence before they had gone very far, and presently the doctor gave Bings the cue and they drew up at the curb.

Three coon songs, executed—if it is possible to execute a coon song—by Mademoiselle Helene, sufficed to draw together a good-sized crowd. When the mademoiselle, at a nod from the doctor, began to put away her guitar, the crowd started to thin at the edges.

"Ladies and gentlemen," shouted the doctor, who knew the habits of such assemblages as he knew his two hands, "ladies and gentlemen, our great, free, open-air entertainment has only just begun! Stay for Pinkey, the Porcine Wonder! Stay and make the acquaintance of Hatch-á-Kaw, ex-chief of the Piute Indians, the noblest benefactor of the human race this world has ever known! Last, but not least, remain with us for a glimpse of the most marvelous curiosity before the American people to-day.

"Remember, there is not one cent to pay! We do not want your money——" The word "money" was Bings' cue to drop a hod of bricks on Pinkey's platform. The professor, who had mounted to the top of the mummy box, gave a startled jump; Mademoiselle Helene screamed; and Hatch-á-Kaw gave a war whoop and half drew his tomahawk. "Ah," smiled the doctor indulgently, "I thought something would drop when I said that!"

This business usually brought a good hand, but the Ottawa audience preserved a glum and forbidding silence.

"They're slow," commented Mademoiselle Helene through the side of her mouth.

"The cyclone prophet has got 'em scared," muttered Hatch-á-Kaw.

"A frost until three-thirty to-morrow," whispered the doctor as he bent down for a glass of water. "I guess we'll set the hog on 'em. William," he added, lifting his voice, "bring out Pinkey, the Porcine Wonder."

Bings hoisted up the platform whereon Pinkey was to disport himself, and it was put in place by Hatch-á-Kaw. Then, climbing to the top of Pinkey's traveling compartment, Bings opened a trapdoor and brought out the educated razorback and the lettered blocks.

Pinkey was small and angular. He knew his part thoroughly, and braced himself, with legs wide apart, and kept his twinkling eyes on the doctor. Bings proceeded to arrange the lettered blocks in a circle.

All this time the doctor had been filling in the stage wait with remarks on swine in general, and on Pinkey in particular. There was a brass collar around Pinkey's neck, placed there for the sole purpose of the following:

"Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast," cried the doctor, "and that's why we put a brass band around the razorback's neck."

Some one groaned; then the groan was taken up in a derisive chorus, interspersed with grunts, catcalls, and cries of "Poo-ee! Poo-ee!"

"We're all in for to-night," murmured Mademoiselle Helene with another twist of her ripe red lips.

"The worst ever!" ground out Hatch-á-Kaw. "First time that gag has failed in over a thousand times."

Doctor Gingel began to grow red and discouraged. But he was not the man to give up.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "I claim that Pinkey knows more than

some humans. Now watch, watch closely, and I'll prove it." He faced the Porcine Wonder. "Pinkey," he demanded, "if you had the cholera, or the lumbago, or any of the other thousand and one ills which flesh is heir to, what would you take in order to be cured?"

Pinkey rooted over the blocks until he had spelled out "Piute Panacea."

"Ha!" cried the doctor triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you? Pinkey is three years old, and small for his size—a regular pigmy——"

Just then some one hit Pinkey with a potato. Unused to such treatment, he leaped from the platform, full into Hatch-á-Kaw. The ex-chief, under the impact of the blow, fell over against Mademoiselle Helene, very much to that lady's discomfiture. Hatch-á-Kaw's war bonnet was pulled from his head, together with his long-haired wig, thereby revealing his spurious character. And at last the Panacea people got a laugh.

"You're a swell bunch—I don't think!" said Mademoiselle Helene tartly as she brushed out her frizzled hair.

The doctor's double chin crawled up over the top of his collar, the purple surged into his flabby face, and the ominous glimmer appeared in his eyes.

"We're trying to pull off a refined and artistic performance," he shouted, "and we aim to please refined and appreciative people. I can't believe—I won't believe—that the hoodlum element predominates in this beautiful little city. But, if it does, we will fold our tents like the Piutes and as silently steal away."

By then Bings had recovered the razorback and had returned him to his compartment. The doctor's vociferous words, having won a certain amount of silence and attention, he prepared to cut the "demonstration" short.

It was useless now to introduce

Hatch-á-Kaw as the noble red man who had wrested Nature's mightiest secret from a monopolistic shaman; it was useless, too, to dwell upon the subject of Piute folklore, or to speak of Hatch-á-Kaw as the outcast warrior—ostracized by his people because the Great Spirit had commanded him to go forth among the palefaces, selling the Panacea at a dollar a bottle. Eliminating all this, the doctor got right down to business.

With a bottle of the Panacea in his hand, he sounded its praises all in the superlative degree; there was nothing under heaven that six bottles of it could not cure; the blind could be made to see, the deaf to hear, and the mute to talk. It would lift up the bedridden and enable the cripple to cast aside his crutches.

"We are selling this priceless specific, my friends," he went on, "at one dollar per bottle, and each and every bottle is sold under a positive guarantee. We shall be three days in your little city, and if, before we leave, any purchaser will come to me and say that he has not been cured, or at least experienced a decided benefit, the money he has paid will be refunded and no questions asked.

"And now, listen: With each and every dollar bottle we sell we will throw in one look at a man four thousand years old. Think of it—four—thousand—years—old! This priceless relic from the Land of the Nile, bequeathed by ancient Pharaohs to the modern world and secured at enormous cost by the Piute Panacea Company, is yours to behold. And the price of a dollar bottle affords you the opportunity of your life!

"See Nit-Ra, the mummied king dug out of a hidden chamber in the big pyramid! And after you have seen him, return with hushed voices to your happy homes and tell your children, and your children's children how Doctor Amzi Gingel placed it in your power

to feast your eyes on the royal remains of a king who has been dead for forty centuries!

"The long box on which I am standing holds the cedarwood sarcophagus with its mummied denizen. Over the sarcophagus a lantern is suspended. The door in the side of the box is unlocked.

"Buy your bottle of Panacea, open the door, gaze with wonder, then——"

Bings yelled; Hatch-á-Kaw dropped incontinently over the side of the wagon into the thick of the crowd; Mademoiselle Helene screamed and cried for help; and the doctor—ah, the doctor!—looked down and saw Nit-Ra half through the door, clinging to the edge of the box with two bony hands and peering upward into his face with wide and inscrutable eyes.

The doctor gurgled and clutched at his throat; from his throat his hands went to his head and gripped his Socratic brow. For one awful moment reason tottered on its throne.

Then, slowly and silently, Nit-Ra faded back into the box. With a wild yell, the doctor dropped to his knees, slammed the door of the box, and snapped the padlock.

"Fake! Fake!" whooped the crowd. "Fake Injun, fake mummy, fake medicine! Drive the quacks out of town!"

Fists were brandished, missiles began to fly, and the crowd rolled like a tidal wave toward the wagon.

"Hel—Hel—Helene!" wailed the doctor, falling into the cockpit of the van.

"Here, pop!" sobbed Mademoiselle Helene, casting herself into her father's arms.

"Drive, Bings!" roared the doctor, collecting his senses with a fierce effort. "Drive, man! Drive like the devil or we are lost!"

Had Bings dared trust himself in the crowd he would not then have been on the driver's seat.

"Where—where to?" he asked tremulously, lines in one hand and whip in the other.

"Anywhere!" thundered the doctor.

And away they went, the horses on the keen jump, bottles smashing razor-back squealing, and Mademoiselle Helene in a dead faint in the doctor's arms.

CHAPTER V.

THE MORNING AFTER.

MORNING dawned on the miserable wreck of the once prosperous Pite Panacea Company. A farmer on the other side of Rock Creek, three miles from the scene of disturbance, had taken the fugitives in.

Rising after a sleepless night, the wretched Gingel and the equally wretched Bings went mournfully out into the yard, where the wagon had been left.

"Bings," said the doctor reproachfully, "I have been under the heel of fortune so many times that I feel there is no blow from which I cannot recover, but—but you might have told me."

"Told you?" gasped Bings. "Told you what?"

"Why, that Nit-Ra was a side partner of yours, faked up for the part."

"You've got another guess coming, doc," answered Bings. "That Ra-Ra boy was the real thing in mummies. Honest, now. I won't say I was as surprised as you was at what happened, because I've been expecting Nit-Ra to break out for quite a spell. I told you in Olathe that he winked at me. That wink meant something, and I knew it."

"Don't attempt to cover your duplicity with a falsehood, Bings!" said the doctor sternly.

Bings was annoyed at the doctor's perversity.

"Look here," he cried roughly; "do you think, for a minute, I'd have been scared like I was back there in Olathe

if I had known Nit-Ra was a counterfeit? Come off, doc, and get sensible."

"Do you mean to tell me that a bona-fide mummy—four thousand years old, I believe you said—has come to life and—and—— Oh, preposterous, preposterous!"

"Why not?" returned Bings.

"Why not!" and the doctor flung his hands disgustedly. "You're as mad as a hatter, Bings."

"Tell me this," said Bings calmly: "Do you think that Panacea is any good?"

"If I did not," was the dignified response, "I should not be acting as distributing agent."

"Well, that's what did the business for Nit-Ra."

The doctor started. "Explain!" said he curtly.

"Well," went on Bings, "ever since we consolidated we've had Nit-Ra cooped up in that box with the reserve supply of Panacea. Am I right?"

"You are."

"That's fact number one. Now for fact number two: Didn't we smash some bottles crossing the railroad track going into Olathe?"

"We did."

"And the cedarwood case was full of Panacea?"

"Half full," qualified the doctor. "Proceed."

"And that night there was a distinct sign of life, wasn't there?"

"At the time, Bings, I laid it to your imagination. From your remarks I gather that you believe the Panacea is responsible for this—er—most astounding phenomenon?"

"I'd bet money on it!" declared Bings with supreme conviction.

The doctor began to shiver. With a convulsive movement he clasped his hands and looked skyward.

"And the formula is lost!" he groaned. "This remedy, the most po-

tent that has so far been developed by finite intelligence, is gone forever!"

His hands fell, his head drooped on his breast, and he lurched over upon the whiffletrees. Another moment and he was weeping into his large, silk handkerchief.

A strong man's grief is an unpleasant thing to witness. Bings turned away and walked off toward the house. Before he had gone far he whirled around and came back.

"Chirk up, doc," said he huskily, laying a trembling hand on Gingel's shoulder. "Mebby the fat ain't all in the fire even yet."

"Leave me, William," returned the doctor plaintively. "I watched Simpson all day yesterday, and I'll take my oath he hasn't got the formula. Human nature is an open book to me, and I read page after page of desperation and despair in Simpson's looks, his actions, the very tones of his voice. He's not shamming, William."

"I can't stand for this!" groaned Bings. "Say, doc, I *did* lift that formula night before last——"

The doctor dropped the handkerchief and leaped up, his face a study in anger, indignation, and rebuke. He lifted a clenched hand.

"You—you——" His fierce words trailed off into silence; his hand unclenched and fell to his waistline, extended palm upward. "Give it to me, William Bings," he went on in a tense voice, "and I will overlook your deception. I will even give you the fifty dollars. Here—wait!"

The doctor withdrew his hand and plunged his fingers into the pocket of his yellow vest.

"Steady!" implored Bings. "I haven't got the formula."

"But you just said——"

"I said that I took it from Simpson. That same night, doc, it was taken from me."

"You—were—robbed?" The words

dropped like lead, and the doctor stooped to recover his handkerchief.

"I was," answered Bings, "and you were to blame for it."

"I? Bings, if you are quibbling——"

"This is on the level, what I'm telling you. I was robbed, but I know who did it."

"Who?"

Three distinct raps were heard at that moment. They came from inside the mummy box. Gingel and Bings leaped away, caught hold of each other, and looked toward the wagon with fearful eyes.

"It was Nit-Ra!" whispered Bings. "Give me the fifty, doc, and let me go. Allow me two hours to get away, and then——then open the door and make Nit-Ra give up."

"N-no," murmured the doctor thoughtfully. "You earn the fifty, Bings, only when you turn the three sheets containing the formula over to me. It is your business to open the door, secure the papers, and give them into my hand."

"Then the deal is off," said Bings decidedly. "I wouldn't open that door for a million. It won't do, doc. Things have happened between Nit-Ra and me that——that—— Well," Bings finished, "if that fellow from Ancient Egypt has come to life, and is able to remember what's happened he's scratched off my visiting list. I'll spend the rest of my days keeping clear of him."

"But he belongs to you! Your uncle cut you off with——"

"Stow it!" interrupted Bings sharply. "A dead mummy might belong to me, but a live one, in this country, belongs to himself."

"If he's kept in that box very long he'll perish," observed the doctor. "That would be homicide pure and simple, and homicide means the gallows."

"It's your wagon," retorted Bings, "and if it proves a case of homicide

you're an accessory before the fact. We're both in this boat, doc."

Bings showed a surprising knowledge of the law. Before the doctor's lucubrations could develop an answer a shout reached their ears from the road.

"Jim Simpson!" cried the doctor.

It was, indeed, the counterfeit ex-chief of the Piutes, and an exceedingly forlorn ex-chief at that. He was tramping along the country road, bareheaded, minus a moccasin, draped in a tattered blanket and with the white showing in patches through the bronze paint that covered his face.

It will be recalled that Jim Simpson fell from the wagon just before the flight began. The doctor and Bings had forgotten to wait and pick him up.

"There's our man!" exclaimed the doctor with a significant look at Bings. "He's the one to get the formula."

"If he gets it again," answered Bings, "he'll keep it."

"No, he won't," said the doctor confidently. "We'll draw up an agreement and make him promise to share the formula with us before we tell him where it is. That's business, Bings, and he won't be able to get around his own signature."

They walked over to the fence, against which Jim Simpson was wearily leaning.

"How's Mademoiselle Helene?" were Simpson's first words.

Bings met the inquiry with a scowl.

"Safe!" returned Gingel buoyantly. "And I'm glad, Simpson, that you are also safe."

"No thanks to you if I am," growled Simpson. "Safe!" he repeated with a fierce look at Bings. "That's more than Bings can say."

"Puzzle," said Bings flippantly. "What's the answer?"

"They're after you," proceeded Simpson; "there are two of them and they've got a warrant."

Bings swayed, and caught at the stake-and-rider fence for support.

"One of 'em sandy-complected?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"And the other bird about your size, dark, and walks with a limp?"

"You've called the turn," said Simpson, his face aglow with gratification.

"Then the jig's up," said Bings wearily; "but," he added with an undertone of savage joy throbbing in his voice, "it'll be the prettiest complication a pair of sleuths ever went up against!"

CHAPTER VI.

BINGS EXPLAINS.

DOCTOR GINGEL was surprised by all this talk of a "warrant" and a "pair of sleuths," no less than by William Bings' calm resignation when he admitted that the "jig was up."

"What are you two fellows getting at?" demanded the doctor.

"I was rescued by the sheriff last night," said Simpson. "If he hadn't taken me to the jail I'd have been mobbed. This morning early I was routed out. The sheriff had news of your whereabouts, and he set me on the right road, told me the way to go and advised me to hustle for the open country before the town woke up.

"Just as I was on the point of starting the sandy-complected individual and the bird about my size who walks with a limp blew into the sheriff's office. I happened to be on the steps in front when the two callers began to talk, and their first words—which I was near enough to overhear—held me to the spot.

"'We're detectives,' says one; 'I'm a professional and my friend's an amateur. We have a warrant for an undersized, red-headed crook called William Bings, alias Bricktop, alias James Ready. He is wanted for the larceny of an Egyptian mummy.'"

A shadow of a grin played about Bings' lips as he listened. This ill-timed levity revealed a hardened nature which struck a pang to the good doctor's heart.

"William, William," he murmured, "I'd never have thought it of you! Go on, Simpson," he added to the ex-chief.

"Of course," admitted Simpson with gratuitous vindictiveness, "I had heard just enough about your favorite's character, doc, to want to hear more. So I slipped back through the hall and got into closer range.

"'This mummy,' went on the detective who had already spoken, 'is part of the loot of an old Egyptian tomb. In defiance of Egyptian law it was smuggled down the Nile to Cairo, placed aboard a steamer, conveyed to New York, declared at the customhouse as a mummy, and so admitted.

"'It was consigned to Professor McFinn, a collector of antiquities in Chicago; but McFinn, receiving advance information that the Egyptian authorities were next to the whole proceeding, hired this con man, Bings, to take the priceless relic and secrete it somewhere until the skies cleared and the incident was forgotten.

"'Bings, however, knew a good thing when he saw it, and, instead of hiding out with the remains of the Pharaoh, he took it into the rural districts for exhibition purposes.

"The case had become one of international importance, and the British ambassador, representing the Egyptian government, is actively interested. This gentleman who accompanies me is Mr. Scrymgeour, under secretary. He has made an exhaustive study of the works of Lecocq and Gaboriau, and, under my direction, is seeking to apply Gallic theories to the unraveling of an American tangle.

"'So far the work, and what little success we have had, has been mine. Whenever the thing gets too knotty for

me Mr. Scrymgeour is prepared to step in and work out the equation with all the inductive and deductive methods known to criminal science.

"We have traced Bings and the mummy to Olathe. Coming thence to this town, posthaste, we are very disagreeably surprised to learn that our birds have flown. Can you, Mr. Sheriff, offer us any information?"

Jim Simpson had a good memory, and seemed to take extraordinary delight in repeating the words of the criminal hunter. Imagining that every word was a stab at the peace and complacency of William Bings, he drew out the account to some length.

As the recital went on the doctor edged farther and farther away from his one-time employee. The grin deepened on Bings' face. He emphasized his calmness by filling and lighting his pipe.

"Is there—can there—be anything more?" murmured the doctor.

"Just this," answered Simpson with all the savagery of his assumed Piute character. "As soon as the detective had finished speaking I stepped into the sheriff's office and volunteered to find Bings, lay hands on him, and keep him safely until the officers should arrive. Mr. Scrymgeour, being very much fatigued by the arduous labors of the chase, finds it necessary to lay over in Ottawa for a few hours. But he and Twombly Peters, the professional detective, will be along some time this afternoon. Meanwhile I shall see to it that both Bings and the mummy remain here pending their arrival."

"Spell able," said Bings curtly.

Simpson started to throw off his blanket, but the doctor interposed.

"There must be no violence, no bloodshed," said he sternly. "Bings will not resist the officers, I am sure."

"Don't have to," answered Bings, looking pleasantly into a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"You're a brazen scoundrel, sir!" flared Simpson. "I suspected as much when the doctor took you on."

"Now, Simpson," proceeded Bings in a gentle tone that was most galling to the bogus ex-chief, "you ought to look at a thing from all sides before you butt in. If Peters and old Scrym make a pass at me I'll side-step and leave 'em fanning. I haven't done a thing they can jug me for."

"Didn't you hike out with McFinn's mummy?"

"It wasn't McFinn's any more'n it was mine. Those Arab body snatchers started the ball, and I've merely been juggling it."

"You've juggled yourself into the pen, all right."

"Not this trip. Tell me: Didn't you see Nit-Ra hoist himself through the door of the box and take a look at the doctor?"

Simpson was forgetting that. He rubbed one hand over his painted face, and then left a smear of red on the top fence rail.

"How—how did that happen?" he asked with a blank look at Gingel.

"I'll explain," continued Bings, "if you'll give me time. I could be juggled, all right, for being found with a dead mummy answering Nit-Ra's specifications; but Nit-Ra is a live mummy and I can't even be sent up for kidnaping. I've forgotten more about the law than either of you two coves ever knew."

"The mummy is really alive?" asked Simpson, paling.

Several vigorous thumps broke the silence, coming from the direction of the mummy box.

"That's him," said the doctor, mopping his brow. "Really, it is most astounding."

"The Panacea did it!" declared Bings. And he explained how.

"Alas!" groaned Simpson. "If we only had that formula now what a field would be open to us. We could go

through every museum in the Old and the New World, revive those old Egyptian relics, and let them shed light on a dim epoch of history!"

This idea was a new one on the doctor. It looked both feasible and enormously profitable. He smiled affably.

"We know where the formula is, Simpson," said he. "Would you believe it? Bings knows who the thief is!"

"Was it Bings?" demanded Simpson aggressively. "I had a notion it was, and thought some of getting out a warrant and having him pinched."

Bings began to bristle. The doctor naturally did not care to have the details connected with the theft of the formula come to light. He frowned at Bings and undertook further explanations himself.

"Let us not deal in hard terms, Jim," said he, "before we are fairly sure of our ground. You have already been somewhat premature in offering to apprehend Bings and the mummy and hold them against the coming of the detectives.

"Bings was working around the wagon that first afternoon in Ottawa while you were asleep on the straw at the rear of the livery barn. He saw a—a person hovering in your vicinity, and acting in a very suspicious manner. That person undoubtedly was the thief. We know where the thief is, and have only to lay hands on him to obtain the lost formula."

While he listened Simpson worked himself into a state of vast excitement. But Doctor Gingel suavely restrained him, led up by degrees to the tripartite agreement and ultimately secured Simpson's consent to it.

Then the agreement was drawn up by the doctor. Sitting on the beam of a plow, he unlimbered his fountain pen and scratched off the substance of their understanding on the blank page of a memorandum book.

Barely had the three signatures been affixed to the hastily written document when the watchful Bings raised an alarm that caused considerable consternation.

"Here they come!" he called. "Peters and old Scrym are shacking this way on a couple of horses. You're the limit, Simpson! I'm safe, but if you can't side-track that pair it's an easy guess that they'll hook the formula along with Nit-Ra."

"I—I don't understand!" exclaimed Simpson.

"Listen!" cried Gingel, catching his arm. "Nit-Ra was the thief! He has your paper talk in the mummy box with him. If the detectives arrest him and take him away they'll think the formula has some bearing on the case and take it with them. Can't you see? Can't you understand? Think, man! Everything depends on you now."

"Where's the farmer?" queried Simpson. "Can he be depended on?"

"He's over on the back forty, somewhere, and won't cut any figure in what takes place here."

"I've got it!" said Simpson. "See that haystack, Bings?" he added, pointing.

"Sure!" replied Bings.

"Then see how quick you can get inside of it. Not a word from you, understand, and don't show yourself until I whistle. Keep mum and we'll keep the mummy."

"I'm off!" said Bings, rushing for the stack.

"They doubted you, Simpson," remarked Gingel as he and the ex-chief ranged up alongside the fence and waited. "When they said they were going to lay over in Ottawa it was only a blind."

"Watch me get even with them," answered Simpson grimly. "If we could only hang onto Nit-Ra and let them corral Bings——"

"You're mad to think of it! The

way things are turning out the three of us must stand or fall together."

"Hist!" cautioned Simpson. "They're pretty close now. Remember, I'm to do the talking."

CHAPTER VII.

SIDE-TRACKING THE SLEUTHS.

THE "sandy-complected" man was Mr. Scrymgeour. As he rode leisurely at the side of Twombly Peters he had his nose in a treatise entitled, "Shadowing; or, The Art of Surveillance, by An Ex-Captain of Police."

Had the amateur not been giving such assiduous attention to his book, or had the professional not been laboring to roll a cigarette, it was within the range of possibility that either of them might have witnessed the flight of Bings in the direction of the haystack. Yet even the best talent will now and then be caught at a disadvantage.

"Ha!" exclaimed Twombly Peters, catching sight of the two by the fence as he was about to make use of his cigarette. "Mr. Scrymgeour, the trail is getting hot."

"'Pon my soul!" gasped Mr. Scrymgeour. "Really, Peters, it's that disguised person we encountered at the sheriff's. Fancy!"

"It may not have been a case of double-dealing on his part, after all," went on Peters, knitting his brows. "Have you your memorandum book?"

"To be sure."

"Then have the kindness to read to me the description of Amzi Gingel, which we obtained from that Olathe night policeman."

The treatise went into one of Mr. Scrymgeour's pockets and the memorandum book came out of another.

"How droll!" simpered Mr. Scrymgeour, recalling the text as his eye took in the first words. "The description, Peters, is most picturesque. I have it verbatim:

"'Gingel looks like a cross between an ordinary tinhorn and one of them get-rich-quick grafters with a bundle of private wires and a suite of offices in Wall Street. Big for his size and old for his age; smooth; needs a hair cut; and he might be quick to pull if cornered—but I doubt it.'"

Peters grunted. He wished in his soul that people would take Scrymgeour seriously, at least while he—Peters—was traveling with him.

"That's Gingel our man in the blanket is talking with," said Peters.

A moment later they turned from the road and drew rein at the fence.

"You're ahead of schedule, gentlemen," said Simpson; "but, although you have arrived early, I regret to say that you haven't arrived early enough."

"How's that?" asked Peters darkly.

"Bings was here," asserted Simpson unblushingly, "but he got news that you were coming, and went on, taking the mummy in a wheelbarrow."

"By Jove!" fluttered Scrymgeour. "Which way did he travel? How far does he lead us?"

Near the farmhouse was a cross-roads. Simpson indicated the highway leading north.

"My friend, the doctor, tells me he left about half an hour before I got here, which was an hour ago. So he has an hour and a half the start of you."

Peters and Scrymgeour withdrew for consultation.

"What shall we do in this case?" asked Peters, rubbing his chin perplexedly.

Scrymgeour brought out the treatise and turned the pages rapidly.

"Ah, here it is!" he murmured. Then he read:

"'Information concerning the criminal pursued, when given voluntarily by a companion of said criminal, should be taken cum grano salis. Still, if it can be discovered that the informer has

a pique at the criminal, or is likely to profit by the criminal's capture, what he says may be accepted with discretion.' ”

“That covers the case, it seems to me,” remarked Peters. “If I remember rightly, the Olathe hotel keeper told us that Simpson would not eat at the same table with Bings.”

“Excellent! Excellent!” cooed Scrymgeour. “Let us be riding, Peters. He is pushing a wheelbarrow, remember, so we ought to overtake him easily.”

A hollow thumping, at that moment, reached the ears of the detectives from the direction of the farmer's barn. Facing about in his saddle, Peters turned his gaze to southward and beheld the Panacea wagon.

“What's that I hear?” he muttered. “Does it require investigation?”

“Let us look it up,” answered Scrymgeour. “Ah, here it is!

“‘When the mind is once made up concerning the course taken by the criminal in his flight care must be exercised so that a vigorous pursuit may not be hampered, or turned aside, by considerations of a minor character.’ ”

“That's a great book, Mr. Scrymgeour!” exclaimed Peters. “It's a fortunate thing for men of my profession that it is not circulated more widely.”

“You surprise me, Peters!” returned Scrymgeour, lifting his brows.

“What I mean is, that if every man were to read that book then every man would be his own detective and I'd be out of a job.”

“Deucedly clever, by Jove!” chuckled the under secretary. “Now for our quarry. 'Twill read well in the papers at home: ‘Mr. Scrymgeour, accompanied by the faithful Peters, galloped at a headlong pace along the turnpike and finally overtook the thief, pushing the stolen mummy before him on a wheelbarrow!’ Only fancy!”

Doctor Gingel, leaning over the rail

5BThrill

fence, watched the dust kicked up by the horsemen until it had faded from the sky line.

“Easy marks,” he commented as Simpson whistled for Bings. “All clear, William,” the doctor added as Bings presented himself. “If you will open the mummy box, Jim, and take the formula away from Nit-Ra——”

“I think,” answered Simpson nervously, “that we had better postpone that until after we have cleared out along the west road. When our friends fail to find Bings and the wheelbarrow they will probably infer that they have been fooled.

“True enough!” said the doctor. “Hitch up, Bings. I will go to the house, settle our bill, and get Mademoiselle Helene.”

In spite of the advisability of a hurried departure, Bings discovered, at the last moment, that the harness was broken, and there was a delay of two hours while it was being mended. Gingel strode back and forth in front of the house, feverishly anxious and keeping a vigilant eye on the north road.

Simultaneously with Bings' announcement that all was ready, a billow of dust appeared in the direction from which danger was to be expected, and rolled rapidly southward.

“They're coming back!” cried the doctor as he and Mademoiselle Helene scrambled into the wagon beside Simpson. “Drive westward, Bings—and go as fast as you can consistent with safety. By the great horn spoon, if we ever get out of this scrape we'll know how to fight shy of another!”

“I'll match wits with any book detective that walks or rides,” said Simpson, “so long as he sticks to his Sleuth's Compendium. Real danger is to be apprehended only when he puts the book in his pocket.”

As they careened along the road the doctor braced himself on the swaying wagon bed and took observations over

the end gate. From time to time he announced the result of his survey for the benefit of his companions.

"That pillar of dust has reached the house and come to a stop. It is whipped away by the wind—by the way, the wind is rising, isn't it?—and I can see the two detectives just as plain as though they weren't more than a dozen rods off.

"The farmer's wife stands there, talking with them—telling how we lit out, I'll bet a copper! Confound that harness! If it had only held together last night we'd have been out of sight by now. The detectives have turned and headed this way, and—and Scrymgeour hasn't got the book out."

Suddenly a hair-raising yell broke from Bings. Almost at the same moment he threw himself back on the lines and brought the horses down on their haunches.

The three in the rear of the wagon were thrown forward, and there came a squeal of distress from Pinkey and a sodden thud from the mummy box.

"What's the rip ahead there!" roared Simpson. "What you stopping for?"

"Cyclone!" whooped Bings. "Want me to have a head-on collision with a Kansas twister?"

Far away in the murky distance sky and earth seemed to bulge toward each other, uniting slenderly with a sort of hourglass formation.

"It can't be the cyclone!" cried the doctor, consulting his watch. "It isn't due till half past three, and now it's hardly one."

CHAPTER VIII.

MINUTES THAT SEEMED LIKE HOURS.

WHETHER or not "Shadowing; or, The Art of Surveillance," contained any advice on the subject of evading a cyclone when encountered during a criminal pursuit is unknown to the present chronicler. In that

dreadful hour mere details faded into generalities. The doctor and Mademoiselle Helene and Jim Simpson observed vaguely that the detectives were still coming on—and that was all.

By way of diversion, Mademoiselle Helene grew hysterical. "Save me!" she screamed, tossing her arms wildly. "Oh, is there no one to save me?"

"Quiet, my love! Quiet, my daughter!" adjured Gingel. His face was like chalk, and his every nerve was in a tremor, but he put his shaking arms about the young woman and restrained her by main force from leaping out of the wagon. "Remember, dearest, that your father is at your side."

The doctor's silk hat was in the bottom of the wagon, and his long locks were snapping about his head. Perhaps, on the whole, it was an excellent thing that his daughter claimed so much of his attention; it kept him from looking at Death, which was twisting and jumping and turning back somersaults in that funnel-shaped cloud.

Bings saw it all, and so did Jim Simpson. They sat with jaws agape and with staring eyes, fascinated for a space and unable to speak or move. Simpson, if not the first to recover, was nevertheless the first to express himself.

"We're between the devil and the deep sea," he remarked.

The air in the vicinity of the cyclone was fanned into a tremendous wind, whose velocity was momentarily increasing. And it would continue to increase until the wagon and its devoted passengers were sucked up into the vortex of that hopping, skipping and jumping cloud.

"I wouldn't care a rap for the two imps behind," shouted Bings, "if that twister would only jump us and leave us on the checkerboard."

"I wonder if there isn't a cyclone cellar around here somewhere?" chattered Simpson.

"We wouldn't have time to dive into

a cellar, even if there was one in sight," answered Bings through his set teeth.

"Oh, let me go, let me go!" wailed Mademoiselle Helene, seeking to break from her father's embrace.

She must have been under the impression that they were aboard a sinking ship, and that her only hope was to spring overboard and take to the water.

"See, my love!" implored the doctor. "There is Jim Simpson, right close by, and William is on the seat in front. They are both here to protect you, and neither they nor I will let anything happen to my little girl."

It may be that the doctor did not realize what he was saying, or that he thought the circumstances warranted a misstatement. At any rate, he succeeded in getting his daughter's head on his shoulder, and there he held her until she gave over her struggles and subsided in a burst of frantic weeping. And after that they clung to each other in their despair, miserably tempting fate to come along and do its worst.

The road the wagon had been following ran due east and west along the section lines, crossing a treeless country as flat as a floor. During all its acrobatic specialties the cyclone remained in plain view.

It had first appeared in the northwest, and seemed to have struck a bee line for the southeast, with the Panacea Company in its mind's eye. Suddenly, however, it swerved and shot due east. Hope thrilled in Simpson's heart.

"Mebby it'll miss us, after all!" he cried.

"Not us," grunted Bings; "we're too good a mark. When'll a cyclone ever get another chance at an educated razorback, a reanimated mummy, and four coves like us? I tell you, Simp, it wasn't on the cards that we're to be allowed to keep the formula."

"If you'd whip up, Bings, we might be able to dodge the thing. Cyclones

follow one general direction, if all I've heard about 'em is true. While this one's traveling east mebbly we'd have time to race out of the danger zone.

"Besides," Simpson went on, "don't forget that Peters and Scrymgeour are pounding along behind us. We've been at a standstill for as much as a minute, but they've hung right to their text and haven't slackened pace for a second. Even if we can't dodge the cyclone," Simpson urged, "it may be we could dodge the detectives."

"We might just as well be traveling as standing here, I suppose," said Bings.

At a word from him the frightened horses bounded ahead, and the doctor and Mademoiselle Helene were overturned and thrown dangerously close to the brink of the wagon box. That started the mademoiselle again.

"I wish she'd stop," said Simpson gloomily. "The case is bad enough without any extra frills in the shape of hysterics. What's the cyclone doing now, Bings?"

"Just turned a handspring," answered Bings, leaning out over the tearing team. "It's getting close enough now so we can begin to see what it has picked up. There's a house, ain't it? And a yoke of oxen and a windmill and a hencoop and a—— By jinks, is that a man? I believe it is! How's that for a merry-go-round?"

"I wish it would pick off Peters and Scrymgeour!" exclaimed Simpson.

"No such luck for us! A feller would naturally think they'd get a panic and turn back."

"It's a safe bet they're looking out for number one, just like we are. They've got sense enough to know that their only hope lies in a break to the west, and they're hanging on like a couple of nailers."

"Whoo!" yelled Bings. "Did you see that dive, Simp? The twister has shifted the helm two points to the south!"

"And now it's off, east by north!" cried the excited Simpson. "If it sticks to that course it'll never touch us."

"Blamedest cyclone I ever saw!" breathed Bings. "It's off on another tack—turning cartwheels due south."

"It'll take Peters and Scrymgeour!" bellowed Simpson exultantly. "It will, sure!"

By that time the huge whirligig was well to the northeast of the Panacea wagon, and luck for the space of one labored breath, appeared to be on the side of the medicine outfit.

"That fool prophet didn't make much of a guess, after all," observed Simpson. "He's more than two hours behind the schedule."

"If that cyclone spends much more time playing tag with us," returned Bings, "it'll reach Ottawa pretty close to correct time. I never saw anything act so! Looks for all the world as though it hung there, hesitatin' between us and the sleuths."

At that precise moment the cyclone made up its mind. Veering to the southwest, it swept majestically along, laying a straight course for the wagon.

"It's us for it, Simp," said Bings. "You and I have had our differences in the past, but what's the use of hanging out about them now?"

"No use," answered Simpson. "Here's my hand, William."

"And here's mine, Jim."

Bings dropped the lines and flung away the gad. What could avail further attempts to fight the inevitable? In that supreme moment Bings and Simpson buried the hatchet, then turned, gripped the nearest support, and crouched down and waited.

The roar of the cyclone grew by swift degrees into a deafening volume of sound; a thick pall of dust blotted horses, wagon, and passengers from sight. With a ripping tear the canopy top sailed off and upward; then team, vehicle, and all were lifted bodily, sep-

arated into constituent parts and flung madly into the Unknown.

The dust settled, and the cyclone, galloping into the horizon, jumped it like a hurdle and disappeared. Peters got down from his horse and picked up the limp form of Scrymgeour.

"By Jove!" whimpered the under secretary. "Don't tell me that we've gone through that and are still alive. Impossible, don't you know. Peters! Is this you, Peters?"

"Of course," answered the professional irritably. "Who'd you think it was?"

"Candidly, Peters, I'm not able to do much thinking as yet. Did we really go through that cyclone?"

"Hardly. We only got tangled up in the fringe, Scrymgeour. How did you come to get separated from your horse?"

"Don't ask me. Why, from the very moment the cyclone appeared, up to the present, do you know I can't recall one single thing that happened?"

"Scared out of your wits, eh?"

"Really, now! Well, perhaps that was it. How perfectly absurd that our pursuit of Bings should have been interrupted in such a spectacular manner!"

"Absurd? That's a pretty mild term, it strikes me. Do you realize what that cyclone has cost us?"

"I realize, Peters, that it did not cost us our lives. We have cause, I think, for congratulation."

"It has cost us the capture of William Bings," pursued Peters, his voice sounding the depths of profound disappointment, "and it has cost us the recovery of the mummy."

Scrymgeour gave a start, clung to his saddle horn, and gazed over the cantle at Peters.

"Yes?" he queried weakly. "You do not mean to tell me that the capture of

Bings and the recovery of the mummy have been anything more than postponed? I was thinking that we were about to continue our headlong ride and presently overtake the man we are after."

There are some phases of human nature, as evidenced by an alien like Scrymgeour, that will arouse a tired feeling in even a professional. Peters was beginning to understand this.

He was also beginning to understand why the British ambassador had been so perfectly willing to spare his under secretary—to set him adrift with his treatise on "Shadowing," his theories filched from Lecocq and Gaboriau, and with the professional's wing for a hover.

"So far as our mission is concerned," said Peters patiently, "we have suddenly run head first into a stone wall. We are up in the air, as the saying is, and the Egyptian government can whistle for Nit-Ra; that is all the good it will do. The mummy is gone beyond recovery. And with the mummy went Bings and Gingel and the man who sent us on a wild-goose chase after a mythical grafter pushing a wheelbarrow and the young woman who played the guitar and sang coon songs.

"No," said Peters hastily, with a gesture of sudden restraint, "don't try to look it up in the treatise. I assure you that there is nothing in the book that can, by any stretch of the imagination, cover this point."

"Gone!" murmured Scrymgeour with

a morbid look to southward along the swath mowed by the cyclone. "By Jove, Peters, this is awful!"

"It is awful," went on Peters. "Nit-Ra was exceedingly valuable, and so was Bings in his feeble way. If what the farmer's wife told us can be relied on—and I am fairly sure she gave us the facts, for the driver of the wagon was certainly Bings—they had the mummy in that medicine van all the while we were interrogating Simpson at the farmhouse."

"And the wagon and every soul aboard were caught up by the cyclone and whisked into eternity?"

"They certainly will be whisked into Oklahoma. For all I know they are there now. The only thing left for you to do is to return to Washington, while I travel back to New York. At one fell swoop the cyclone has wiped out the Piute Panacea Company."

"Fancy!" murmured the dejected Scrymgeour as he climbed back into his saddle and rode off toward the farmhouse with Peters.

And it was fancy, pure and simple, this deplorable fate which Peters had picked out for the Piute Panacea people, and for Bings and Nit-Ra. The professional's mind had traveled along the line of least resistance and arrived at what appeared to be a very natural conclusion. But the fact remained that, unknown to Peters, some account had to be taken of the supernatural in everything with which Nit-Ra was concerned.

BOOK II.—THE SAPPHIRE AMULET

CHAPTER IX.

A HUMAN DERELICT.

THE Wild Man of Toy Creek pushed his shaggy head out of his cyclone cellar and searched the heavens with an anxious eye. A cloudless vault was overhead, and the afternoon sun pen-

etrated the surrounding woods and spread a golden carpet shot through with shadows; it also struck the Wild Man of Toy Creek squarely in the eyes.

"Yellow!" he growled, gnashing his teeth and covering his face. "Why can't it be always night?"

By degrees his eyes grew accustomed

to the glare; then he drew his hairy length out of the hole, pulled his club after him, and stood up. He was a goodly sized person, with locks and beard that fell to his waist and wearing a single abbreviated garment of coon-skins.

"That blow was a ripper," he muttered, combing out his beard with his fingers. "If I could be as miserable in any other part of the country as I am right here, blamed if I wouldn't emigrate! Ha! What's that?"

A crashing could be heard in the underbrush. Moistening his palms, the Outcast took a firmer grip on the handle of his club and waited in hostile attitude.

"More curiosity seekers, like as not," he said to himself. "Strange how hard it is for me to escape renown! Even from a solitude like this my fame spreads. I reckon I'll have to quit prognosticating. The chances are about even that the noise is made by a farmer. Probably he wants to trade a side of bacon for the date of the next cyclone. Well, the bacon would come in handy, although I——" The Outcast went straight up into the air and came down with a gasp. "Shade of Burton! What's this?"

A phantom had glided out of the brush. At least its outré appearance suggested that it might be a phantom.

It was extraordinarily tall and gaunt, and it was swathed from neck to heel in dingy yellow bandages. Over its shoulder was a long, narrow box, open down the length of one side and curiously carved and painted.

For a full minute the Outcast and the newcomer stood staring at each other. Then the newcomer removed the box from his shoulder, placed it on the ground, and sat down on it.

"Well, well!" muttered the Outcast. "I've had all sorts of callers since I went into retirement in this place, but never another one that answered this

fellow's description. Hello, friend!" called the Outcast.

Something akin to a smile cracked the newcomer's parchmentlike face.

"Aur-Aa," said he.

"Wonder if he's from the Sac-and-Fox tribe?" murmured the Outcast. "It may be that he has separated himself from his red brothers just as I have from my own kind."

This reflection worked on the Outcast's sympathy. He took a step toward the newcomer guardedly and with club convenient for use if needed.

"How?" said the Outcast, extending his hand. "My name's Mahoney. What's yours?"

"Aur-Aa," responded the other, looking at the offered hand with a certain amount of surprise.

"Don't want to be friends, eh?" snapped the Outcast. "Well, if you've got business any place else don't let me detain you a minute. This is my busy day."

"Aur-Aa," persisted the caller, still smiling.

Mahoney was bewildered. "Seems friendly enough," he thought, "even if he does refuse to express his amicable feelings by a handshake. First Injun I ever saw that wouldn't take my hand—or anything else I had if he could get it. I'll try again.

"Mebbyso Injun hungry, eh?" Mahoney inquired. "Like um something to eat?"

"Aur-Aa."

The frequency of that word's repetition inspired the Outcast with an idea.

"Oh, ho!" he cried. "That's your name, is it? Aur-Aa. Sounds like it might be Injun, all right. Well, Aur-Aa, here's where I live. Make yourself at home. When I'm thirsty I go down to the creek; when I'm hungry I raid a hen house or a pork barrel. It's the simple life from the ground up.

"Try to be miserable; that's my motto. The harder you try the happier

you'll be. My favorite author is Burton; my favorite book his 'Anatomy of Melancholy.' Ever read it?"

"Aur-Aa."

"There, there, of course not. It's a little heavy, but it's great. Taken in small doses it's an eye-opener, but a little too much of it will put you to sleep. Come from the reservation?"

"Aur-Aa."

"Say, I wish you'd say something else," said the Outcast petulantly. "Your vocabulary is so limited it gets monotonous. Now, look at me. I'm a college graduate—Podunk, Class of '90. There's more real talent and ability wrapped up in this coonskin kimono than you could find in a month's travel through the highways of commerce. I hate to speak in this way about myself, but there's no dodging the bald fact.

"When I left college I had my eye on a particularly fine mansion on the shady side of easy street. In two years I had amassed a million dollars, and Fortune handed me a deed to the property on the thoroughfare I have just mentioned. But would you believe it? Realization curdled my early desire. I put the deed in escrow, gave a million of tainted money to the Home for Indigent Umbrella Menders, and took to the woods.

"Here, with my coonskin overcoat, my club, and my long-handled dirk, I contrive to eke out a precarious livelihood by foraging and by bartering weather reports for the few simple things I cannot secure otherwise. I had thought," he added pensively, "that I was done with mankind, but it is wonderful the way I have warmed up to you.

"If you wish, you may join me here. I will make it my business to instruct you in the written and spoken language developed by the Anglo-Saxon. Hand in hand, Aur-Aa, we will travel through the primer and onward and upward to

those sublime heights where cultured commercialism multiplies graft by finesse and gives a product of gold stamped with double eagles.

"And then, *then*," cried the Outcast, "perhaps you will be able to read and understand Burton. At least," he added, "you will appreciate the sentiment that prompted me to cut loose from things as they are in order to ruminate on things as they might be here in the solitude of the forest.

"Just carry your box into my combination cave and cyclone cellar, make yourself as comfortable as you can, and I'll hike out and scare up something for supper."

The newcomer had listened with a dejected air that steadily deepened. In the silence that followed Mahoney's last word he got up, shouldered his long box, and, with a repetition of the two syllables which seemed to limit his ability in the language line, started for the brush.

His intention to depart, however, was abruptly changed. Once more there came a sound of crackling twigs directly in front of Aur-Aa and apparently heading him off.

He whirled about with the look of a hunted wolf. The yawning mouth of the cave met his eye, and forthwith he plunged for it, wriggled through, and dragged the box after him.

Hardly was he out of sight when an under-sized, red-headed man pushed clear of the undergrowth. This second visitor was hatless and shoeless, while his clothes were torn and much the worse for an experience that seemed to have happened quite recently.

In this red-headed man the Outcast saw only an enemy of Aur-Aa—a pursuer, it might be. With one jump he had the intruder by the collar; another moment and he had thrown him down and was standing over him with the club.

CHAPTER X.

MAHONEY IS ENLIGHTENED.

EASY there with that stick!" clamored the red-headed man. "If you're working for Peters and Scrymgeour, I'll give in and let it go at that. But don't hit me. After what I've been through I don't think I could stand it."

"Who are you?" snarled the Outcast.

"Bings, William Bings."

"How did you come here?"

"That twister picked me up and landed me in a tree. I'm the sole survivor of a party of four—five, if you count the mummy. Put up the club, please do! Sit down, can't you, and let me feel easy? I think I deserve it."

Observing that he had Bings properly quelled, and suspecting that he might have made a mistake, Mahoney laid aside his weapon, and the other sat up and felt of his bruises.

"My, my," mourned Bings, "but I must be a picture!" His sad eyes wandered over the man before him. "Where was you when it struck us?" he asked.

"Safe," was the curt response.

"You knew it was coming in time to get out of the way?"

"I should hope so! I knew it was coming a week ago."

"Then you're the weather prophet?" asked the amazed Bings.

"So they call me. By the way, you spoke of a mummy."

"Have you seen him?" returned Bings eagerly. "He's a live mummy—or, rather, he was. It's a safe guess that cyclone has backcapped the effects of the Panacea."

"You talk of a live mummy," said the Outcast derisively. "Do you wish to insult my intelligence?"

"No, no," panted Bings as Mahoney reached for his club. "Be reasonable, can't you?"

"I'm trying to be."

"Well, I'll give you the details, and

then you can size up the thing for yourself," went on Bings.

Then he went into matters connected with the Panacea, deftly shielding his culpability wherever it would have given a bad impression, saying nothing about the formula, as such, and utterly ignoring Peters and Scrymgeour. The point which Bings sought to cover was the marvelous effect of the Panacea on Nit-Ra.

"So, you see," he finished, "Nit-Ra was very much alive just previous to the cyclone, but it's a safe-money break that he never weathered *that*. Although I've trotted a heat with the Ra-Ra boy, I'm not so well posted on mummies as I wish I was. Four thousand years, I should think, is an endurance test that would leave an extra tough mummy pretty brittle. And what would happen to a fragile relic like that in a blow like we just had?"

Mahoney did not answer. There was a thoughtful look on his face, and he was running his clawlike fingers through his whiskers.

"If you happen to run across any of the remains," continued Bings, getting painfully to his feet, "I'll be obliged to you if you drop me a line. Address your letter to Jerome Sykes, General Delivery, Kansas City. Mr. Sykes," he added, "is my uncle."

William Bings never had had an uncle. He simply knew it would be safer for him to inquire for mail under the name of Jerome Sykes, so he laid his wires accordingly.

"And another thing," Bings went on. "You see, I'm subject to attacks of dizziness; I get light-headed and all that sort of——"

"I see you do," cut in Mahoney with disturbing emphasis.

"Well," pursued Bings, a bit miffed, "there's only one thing that helps me when I go off the jump, and that's a prescription an old doctor made out for

me years ago. I used to keep it in the mummy's sarcophagus, and it was there when the cyclone picked us up. The old doctor's passed out, there's no other copy of the prescription in existence, and I'm up against it proper if the original can't be found. It's on three small sheets of paper. If you happen to run onto the scraps I'll make it worth your while to put 'em in an envelope and mail 'em to Mr. Sykes."

"If that prescription was filled and you had a dose of it just about now, I think it would do you good." Mr. Mahoney moistened his palms and laid hold of the bludgeon. "Those three pieces of paper may be anywhere between here and the Gulf, so that the supposition that I may find them is too far-fetched for serious consideration.

"I'm an odd genius, William Bings, but not odd enough, thank Heaven, to take any stock in your four-thousand-year-old mummy miraculously revived by an accidental deluge of this so-called Panacea. The next town," he added, "is eight miles; the road is off there to the left."

Bings was dismissed. He felt that he must be going, and that the quicker he started the better it would be for him.

"Well, so long," he said, and limped for the brush. As soon as he was out of Mahoney's sight he began to run. "A human gorilla!" he muttered. "He's about the swiftest specimen of a weather prophet I ever laid eyes on."

After making sure that Bings had departed, the Outcast took his club under his arm and strode to the entrance of his retreat. There he paused and peered around him like a man who has suddenly found a purpose in life.

"Fate," he murmured, "has done this thing! Fate has reached back into the Dim Past, snatched this derelict from the Land of the Nile, quickened him with life, and passed him along to the Present and to me. Ah, my prophetic

soul! Now let us see what I make of this most exceptional opportunity."

CHAPTER XI.

A FALL FROM GRACE.

LET us glance hastily at the record of two studious months, dwelling more at length on Mahoney's fall from grace through gazing too much upon a certain magnificent star sapphire.

Nit-Ra's intellect was as high above the average as his own stature topped the race of ordinary and modern men. That is to say, he was head and shoulders in the lead, mentally as well as physically.

When he was told a thing once, he never forgot it, and the leaps and jumps by which he mastered the English language, raced through the arithmetic, and ran the gamut of the rest of Mahoney's knowledge kept his instructor in a constant state of wonder and awe.

At the end of six weeks Nit-Ra was explaining obscure passages in Burton and bringing to light hidden beauties which Mahoney had never dreamed the "Anatomy" possessed.

Along with his mental development, too, Nit-Ra waxed plump and strong. His black hair was renewed luxuriantly, and he blossomed out with a regal air and an authoritative manner which proved embarrassing to his companion.

He was particularly reticent about his past. Mahoney learned that he had lived in Thebes; that he had died there at the age of thirty; and that he had been transmigrating ever since, up to the time the Panacea wagon jolted over the railroad tracks into the town of Olathe.

Along at the first he was but half revived. He remembered getting out of the mummy box twice, once in Olathe to try and locate himself, and again in Ottawa to secure a papyrus which he believed to be his and which he had seen a red-headed man take

from another who was asleep on a straw pile.

Every Ancient Egyptian who amounted to anything was put away with a papyrus, extolling his virtues and his good deeds, so that the Adjusters in the Hereafter could arrive at a shade's proper value and reward accordingly. The first thing Nit-Ra did when he began to wake up was to miss his papyrus, and this caused him a vast amount of concern. He had cut a pretty wide swath in Thebes, and he wanted the Adjusters to be sure and make a note of it.

He remembered opening and drinking a bottle of the Panacea—ignorant, of course, of the nature of the bottle's contents and desiring only to assuage his growing thirst, and he had a very vivid recollection of a tremendous something that had laid hold of the mummy box, given it a mighty shove, and then set it to spinning and whirling as though it had been launched into some mighty whirlpool.

The sensation had ended in a splintering crash, and when Nit-Ra regained his senses he found himself and the sarcophagus lying amid the ruins of the mummy box. He had then shouldered the box and started on a still hunt for the River Nile, Aur-Aa in the Old Egyptian.

This was the extent of the information he vouchsafed to Mahoney. Whenever the latter proffered inquiries bearing upon the past, Nit-Ra shut up like a steel trap, freezing his interlocutor with the regal air already referred to.

There was a vein of humor in Nit-Ra, however, which made him at times most companionable. It was the fifth week before the star sapphire dropped into their placid life and threw its baneful influence over Mahoney.

As Ancient Egyptians were put away with a papyrus, so were they also equipped with a potent amulet by the

solicitous ones they had left behind. The star sapphire was an amulet.

Nit-Ra sprung it on the Outcast one afternoon. Strolling over to where his companion was skinning a rabbit, the Egyptian borrowed the makings of a cigarette—tobacco being one of the things the Outcast had carried into the wilds to help make him miserable.

"What do you think of that?" queried Nit-Ra, seating himself on a log and balancing the sapphire on his bare, brown knee.

Mahoney dropped the rabbit, looked at the great, glittering gem, then rubbed his eyes and looked again. At an early stage of his career he had been head salesman in a jewelry store, so he knew a thing or two about precious stones.

"If you found that anywhere around here," he cried, grabbing the sapphire from Nit-Ra's knee, "it's mine!"

Nit-Ra's beady eyes peered at the Outcast through a cloud of smoke. There was surprise in his look as he continued to observe his companion.

Mahoney was gloating over the sapphire as he held it in the palm of his hand. In color it was a soft velvet blue; ancient cutters had ground it *en cabochon*, so that it displayed an opalescent star of six rays.

"An asteria!" he murmured. "Where did you find it, Nit-Ra?"

"I didn't find it," answered the man from Thebes; "I brought it with me."

"Brought it with you?" repeated Mahoney.

"Yes. My thoughtful friends bound it upon my breast to insure me a safe and prosperous passage to the underworld."

Mahoney's disappointment and chagrin were intense.

"It's no use to you now, is it?" he queried. "I've been putting in several weeks at hard labor teaching you the alphabet and the multiplication table and other things, and, while I haven't made any charge, still I think it would

be a gracious condescension on your part to present me with this—er—bauble.”

“What do you want with it?” asked Nit-Ra in a hard voice.

“It will be a memento of the pleasant hours we have passed together, Nit-Ra,” said Mahoney, beaming.

“I guess you had better give it back,” answered Nit-Ra, stretching out his hand. “It is sacred to Osiris and Thoth, the supernal ones who preside over Truth and Wisdom. If left in your possession the stone would be out of its element.”

“Out of its element?” scowled Mahoney. “What do you mean?”

“It’s this way,” said the Egyptian amiably. “The high priests of my native Thebes have crooned over that stone and carried it through the sacred Mysteries. To look upon the amulet overmuch brings out a man’s true nature. Frankly,” and here his bearing became that of the potentate and his voice grew sharp with authority, “it wouldn’t be healthy for you to tote the sapphire around. I want it!”

Mahoney flung the amulet at him, kicked the half-skinned rabbit into the bushes, and pulled savagely at his whiskers.

“You’re the worst case of ingratitude I ever saw in my life!” he snarled. “I had a million before I came here, and I turned it over to the Chicago Board of Trade——”

“I thought the Indigent Umbrella Menders——”

“Oh, you thought! What right have you got to think, anyway? If I had that stone I could sell it for enough to go back and take a fall out of the market.”

Grabbing up his club, the Outcast sulked away into the undergrowth. Nit-Ra wrapped the stone up in the formula and put both into the inside pocket of his coonskin coat. Then he made a fire and cooked the rabbit. Ma-

honey drifted back in time to eat half of it.

“Forgive me, old chap,” said Mahoney, brushing away a repentant tear with the back of his hand. “I thought I had sufficiently brutalized myself so that wealth ceased to have any allurements. But the old spirit dies hard.”

Nit-Ra forgave him cheerfully, but from then on until the last night of the Egyptian’s eight weeks’ course there was noticeable constraint in the bearing of each toward the other.

On that last night Nit-Ra, returning from the creek, where he had been for a drink, stumbled over a bundle among the bushes. Carrying the bundle to an open space, he examined it under the pale, cold gleam of the moon.

It contained, he found, a club of second-growth hickory carved with signs of the zodiac—always carried by the Outcast on those rare occasions when he went visiting—a Sunday coat of extra-quality coonskins, four muskrat hides, a dozen woodchuck scalps, and half a cold roast chicken.

The fact that these belongings were done up into a bundle indicated that the Outcast was about to break camp; and the other fact that the bundle had been secreted indicated that he was to take the step covertly.

Nit-Ra gave vent to a cackling laugh, tied up the bundle as he had found it, and returned it to the place where it had been left; then he went back to the hang-out, shook up a pile of dry leaves under an overhanging ledge of rock, and laid down—but not to sleep.

The Outcast was sprawled out on his own bed, and was breathing heavily, as though in deep slumber. Nit-Ra made it his business to watch him.

And well was it for the man from Thebes that he took the precaution. When three or four hours had passed Mahoney gave over his heavy breathing, rose to his hands and knees, crept pantherlike upon Nit-Ra, and groped

lightly into his breast pocket. His hand shook as it came forth with the papers and the sapphire.

"Back to the world again!" he whispered exultantly, holding his plunder aloft. "Back to the only life worth living, and with the wherewithal to carve out a career that——"

Just at that instant the hillside tipped over and dropped on Mahoney; at least his last ray of reason fostered that impression. He came to himself with a headache, with the quiet stars mocking him from their serene depths, and with a slowly growing conviction that he had been baffled.

Both the formula and the star sapphire were gone. A brief investigation showed him that Nit-Ra had also vanished, and had taken his cedarwood case along.

Securing two dry sticks, the Outcast rubbed them together and made a blaze. As soon as the fire was going well he brought out the "Anatomy of Melancholy," ripped it apart, and fed it piece-meal to the flames.

"I have been nursing a viper in my bosom," he muttered; "I'm stung. But no animated mummy is going to get the better of me!"

Next morning he put on his best jacket, armed himself with the zodiacal club, and descended upon the nearest farmhouse. There he traded a weather report for a postage stamp, an envelope, and a sheet of paper.

Later on he flagged the rural carrier as he was jogging along the highway and gave him a letter addressed to "Jerome Sykes, Esquire, General Delivery, Kansas City, Missouri."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRANGER IS TAKEN IN.

GOODNESS me, Silas! Who's that a-comin' into our front yard?"

Mrs. Mings was getting breakfast. Mr. Mings was sitting on the steps at

the kitchen door, whittling out a bung for an old cider barrel.

Mrs. Mings, when the new "L" was built on the house so that the old summer kitchen could be done away with, had insisted that her new culinary quarters should contain a window facing the road. It was "company" for her, while engaged in the kitchen, where nine-tenths of her waking hours were passed, to watch the farmers going and coming.

Silas balked at the extra outlay of two dollars that would be required, and Mrs. Mings picked blackberries along the highway and earned the money herself. So the window was put in.

Now, through this very window, Mrs. Mings saw a wondrously tall man of a brown complexion walking through the gate. He wore a skin gown that came to his knees and was belted about the waist with a piece of rope, and over his shoulder he carried a long, narrow box.

"By Jiminy!" murmured Silas, starting to his feet. "He's got up some like that weather prophet that lives in a cave over to Skinner's woods, near Ottawa. Seen that feller once; but this ain't him. My! He's taller'n our Seth."

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Mings, turning from the window with modest indignation. "Shoo him off, Silas Mings. I wonder at you, standin' there like you are and lettin' that shameless critter approach this house."

"Don't go into a fit, Samantha," answered Silas. "For a leadin' light of the Methodist persuasion you're a good deal of a backslider. He's a stranger, and don't Scriptor say something about takin' a stranger in?"

"You've been eternally takin' some one in all your life, Silas," flung back Samantha as she started for the dining room with a plate of fried potatoes. "I hope to goodness you'll get come up with one of these days. Call Seth. Everythin's on the table."

In a loud voice Silas made the hired man acquainted with the delectable news that breakfast was ready; then he went around the end of the "L" to head off the tramp. The farmer came back just as Seth had finished his morning ablutions and was preparing to sit down at the table.

"He seems like a real nice kind of a feller, Samantha," remarked Silas. "Talks like a school-teacher; says his name is Nate Rah, and that he's lookin' for work. Put somethin' on a plate, and we'll let him eat in the woodshed."

"I swan, if you ain't the most aggravatin' man! You're just that set on goin' against me you'd let him eat here if you died for it. Watch him when he leaves and see't he don't take nothin' belongin' to us."

"He ain't goin' away," said Silas dryly as he took the plate of food; "anyhow, not for a spell. He's goin' to stay an' do the chores, all but the milkin' while Seth an' me are busy with the castor beans."

"Silas Mings," screamed Samantha, "if that coffee-colored tramp sets foot in this house I'll leave. That's flat."

"He's goin' to sleep in the barn an' eat in the woodshed," returned Silas. Samantha talked, but Silas was the one that had his way. "Besides," said Silas with a wink and in an explosive whisper, "he's offered to work for five dollars a month an' found."

Seth Biddle was getting twenty. He looked uncomfortable—as though he fancied he might become the victim of cheap labor.

"You don't need another hired man any more'n a dog needs two tails," was the accompaniment to which Samantha's wrath and antagonism subsided, "but if you can get anythin' cheap you'll have it in spite o' fate."

Silas left with the food for Nate Rah. When he came back and sat down to give attention to his own belated breakfast he declared that Nate

Rah "et like he hadn't had a square meal for a month."

And thus it was that Nit-Ra, duly posted in the language and with a theoretical smattering of some of the arts and sciences, had set out to acquire a practical knowledge of American manners and customs.

Out of deference to Mrs. Mings' fastidious notions, the first move was to put the ancient king into overalls and wamus, borrowed for the purpose from Seth. Although Seth stood six feet two in his stockings, the borrowed clothes still left uncovered a distressing length of arm and leg. A pair of Seth's boots, however, proved fully a size too large.

On that first day of the Egyptian's work for Farmer Mings, Seth was told off to show him the ropes. The milking had been accomplished before breakfast, and three fifteen-gallon tin cans were standing on the platform by the pump.

Lighting his cob pipe, Seth leaned against the garden fence, his hands in his pockets, and bossed the new hand.

"Take the cover off'n that first can," said Seth; "push it under the spout an' pump it full."

The can was two-thirds full of milk. When water enough had been added to bring the contents to the brim the cover was put on and the can lifted to one side.

"Now do the same with that next can," said Seth.

The process was repeated, and Nit-Ra reached for the third can.

"Leave that un alone!" ordered Seth. "It's full up with our best milk now."

"Pardon me," said Nit-Ra respectfully, "but may I inquire why you mix water with two cans of milk and yet keep it out of the third can?"

"Them first two cans," explained Seth, "are sold to a man that peddles milk in Williamsburg, and we've fixed 'em up to go farther so'st none of his

customers'll be disapp'inted. That other can goes to the creamery, an' Mings gets paid accordin' to what it tests. Now we'll go out an' hitch up to the democrat wagon."

On their way to the barn they passed Mr. Mings hitching a horse to the castor-bean sled. Mrs. Mings, who insisted on taking care of the chickens herself, was just coming from the poultry house in a state of visible agitation.

"Sakes alive, Silas!" she cried. "That speckled hen *did* steal her nest, just as I said all along. She's over there under the edge of the strawstack with eighteen eggs. I've missed her for goin' on two weeks, an' she must have been settin' on 'em all the time. I've locked her up in the hen house, 'cause I don't want any chickens comin' off this time o' year. Seth," she added, turning to the hired man, "you take them eggs down back o' the pigpen an' break 'em."

"What d'you want to waste 'em like that for?" spoke up Mr. Mings. "Eggs is sixteen cents in trade. We ain't so darn rich, Samantha, that we can take twenty-four cents out back o' the pigpen an' throw it away."

"Bring 'em in, Seth, when you come from the barn," said Samantha. "If they ain't too shiny I reckon they'll pass."

"May I inquire," said the ex-king, while they were putting the horse to the democrat wagon, "what eggs are good for after a hen has set on them for two weeks?"

"Good for chickens if she sets another week," chuckled Seth.

"But are they worth sixteen cents a dozen at the store?"

"They're wuth whatever you can get for 'em. My," Seth added, "but you're dumb! Where you lived all your life, huh?"

"In a great city."

"Don't know nothin' 'bout farmin' at all?"

"No; but I'm eager to learn."

"You'll learn, all right, if you stay here long. Mings is the greatest feller to get somethin' for nothin' you ever saw in your life."

They drove up to the house and took in the milk cans. When they had finished loading, Mrs. Mings came out with her basket of eggs.

"They's twelve dozen of 'em here, Seth," she said, "and you take 'em to Killum's an' get their worth in sugar. And tell Killum I want real sugar, too, as we got plenty of sand right here on the farm. If we get any more sugar like the last we'll do our tradin' at Snyder's."

"You seem to be well informed, Mr. Biddle," observed Nit-Ra as they rode along, "and I wish you would kindly explain why sand is mixed with sugar?"

"For the same reason, Nate, that water's mixed with milk—goes farther. Say, you're funnier 'n a circus."

"One thing more, please," said Nit-Ra humbly. "If we trade one dollar and ninety-two cents' worth of eggs, with eighteen bad ones in the basket, to Mr. Killum for one dollar and ninety-two cents' worth of sugar that is mixed with sand, which loses most, Mr. Killum or Mrs. Mings?"

"Mrs. Mings."

"How is that?"

"Well, Killum has got the advantage; he can sell short weight. Then, too, Killum'll candle the eggs, sell the good uns in Williamsburg and ship the rest to Kansas City."

After they had turned over the milk to the milkman and the creamery, and had taken on the empty cans, they proceeded to Killum's. Nit-Ra's extreme length and ill-fitting apparel had aroused considerable levity whenever he had got out of the wagon to stretch his limbs and walk around. This fretted his kingly spirit to such an extent that he remained on the wagon seat while

Seth was exchanging the eggs for the sugar.

A Fairbanks scales was near the place where he was waiting, and he saw a man drive on the platform with a hayrack, then jump down and stand to one side.

"Say, Pete," called the man who was doing the weighing, "you was on the rack when I weighed the load, wasn't you?"

"You bet!" replied Pete.

"Then you better get back on. You weigh clost to two hundred."

"Say, Gus," replied Pete, "that hay was for ole Ketchum, an'——"

"That so?" said Gus. "Then stay right where you are. Ketchum bought a couple of baskets of coal here last winter an' paid for 'em with a plugged dollar."

Pretty soon Seth came out, smoking a cigar.

"Ever indulge, Nate?" he asked.

"Sometimes," answered Nit-Ra.

"Well, then, you burn this un." He handed over a second cigar to his companion.

"Two-fers," commented Seth, picking up the lines, "an' cabbage leaf at that. But I paid a nickel apiece." He chuckled. "But they was lead nickels I give Killum," he added. "I had 'em in my pocket for the last two months every time I went in the store, waitin' till he didn't have his glasses on."

"Does your conscience trouble you at all, Mr. Biddle?" asked Nit-Ra blandly.

"Conscience?" returned Seth with a blank look. "What's that? If you mean am I sore on account of the cabbage-leaf cigars, or is Killum sore on account of the nickels, I shake my head. He changed a quarter for me two months ago, an' that's where the nickels come from first. Mebby some un else'll want a quarter changed."

"Why does a man, when he sells a load of hay, stay on the load when it's

weighed and then get off the wagon when he weighs that?"

"You're a corker, honest!" grinned Seth. "Got to have a diagram for everythin', ain't y'u? When a man stays on the load it weighs more; when he weighs the wagon back, an' stays off, it weighs less. The diff'rence is the man's weight in graft. See? An' good hay's wuth nine dollars a ton!"

"What's a plugged dollar worth?"

"A hundred cents, if you can get it. If you can't it's a keepsake."

They continued to smoke as they jogged along. Seth, beginning to warm up to his innocent friend, became reminiscent.

"Last week," said he with a gleeful snicker, "Mings was pretty nigh sick abed. Had a roan with the heaves, an' wanted to make a trade with old Ketchum, that lives in town, for a bay.

"Ketchum sent word by me that he'd be out with the bay at ten in the mornin'. 'Bout nine I seen Mings pourin' some stuff out of a bottle an' puttin' it in a pail o' water. When Ketchum come, an' Mings led the roan out, blamed if it wasn't breathin' perfectly natural.

"Ketchum run the roan twicet around the barn an' listened with his ear clost up to the roan's nose. Nary a heave. So they traded, even up. A tickleder man than Mings you never seen.

"Next mornin' Mings came in, white as a sheet, and asked for hot drops. Bay was dead in the stall. Glanders, epizootic, er somethin' Samantha give Silas fits, then put him to bed with a mustard plaster and a hot flat. Say, but he was sore!"

When they got back to the farm, Seth jumped out of the wagon, unloaded the cans, and carried the sugar into the house; Nit-Ra drove on to the barn.

While he was unhitching he caught a glimpse of a rig coming into the Mings' yard. He vouchsafed it only passing attention until he saw a short,

thickset, dilapidated-looking man get out of the buggy, hitch the horse, remove some bulky object from the rear of the vehicle, and carry it around to the front door of the house.

Nit-Ra leaned against the wagon wheel and rubbed his forehead. As in a dream he remembered pulling himself half out of a long, dark box and looking upward to where this short, thickset, dilapidated person had stood in the light of a torch.

At that time there were others he had seen as well; notably a woman with alabaster skin and kinky hair that stood out from her head like the quills on a fretful porcupine; the red-headed man at whom he had opened his right eye on one occasion had been manipulating the supposed papyrus on another, and on yet another had choked in order to recover the papers; and lastly he had seen the individual in feathers and blankets as he rolled off the wagon into the gathered crowd.

Nit-Ra breathed hard, brushed his hand across his eyes, and then slowly and reflectively led the horse into the barn and to his stall. While the harness was being removed Seth Biddle came out, finally bringing up at the place where Nit-Ra was at work.

"Better go into the house, Nate," said he. "The's a smooth feller in there with a patent churn. Either him or Mings'll get skinned out o' his eyeteeth afore the two break away. I'm goin' back; jest thought I'd come out an' give you a tip if you wanted to see some fun."

"Mrs. Mings isn't very friendly toward me," answered Nit-Ra, "so I guess I won't get any closer to her than I have to. What's become of that long, cedarwood box of mine?"

"Mrs. Mings had me carry it into the settin' room; says she's goin' to make a bookcase out of it or a plate rack or somethin'. Well, take it easy, Nate, till I come back. You'll need all the

breathin' spells you can get while you're workin' for Mings."

Seth went one way, and Nit-Ra—after he had used his pencil on a scrap of paper which he found in the barn—went another.

CHAPTER XIII.

GINGEL PICKS UP A CLEW.

GOOD morning, madam! Have I the pleasure of addressing——"

Doctor Gingel doffed his hat and smiled affably as Mrs. Mings came to the door in answer to his knock.

"If you're sellin' anything," interrupted Mrs. Mings, getting a look at the churn behind the doctor, "you might just as well save your breath and go on some's else. We don't patternize agents here."

"Very sensible, madam," averred the doctor; "agents are not always reliable. I can see," he said, peering beyond Mrs. Mings into the room behind her, "that you are a lady of discrimination. The neatness of your house, what little I am able to see of it, convinces me that——"

"I don't want any of your soft soap, either," cut in Mrs. Mings. "I've got a world of work to do and I can't stand here wasting my time."

She would have closed the door, but the persistent doctor interposed his foot.

"Madam," said he, "ten minutes wasted now will save you ten hours in the course of a month, and one hundred and twenty hours—or five whole days!—in the course of a year. I have a little machine here which will——"

"You said you wasn't an agent!"

"Nor am I, madam. I am the sole owner and proprietor of Gingel's patent dasherless churn, guaranteed to hring super-excellent butter from any kind of cream in three minutes by the watch; and more butter from the same amount of cream than any other churn

on the market; not only that, but it is so easy to run that a child——”

“We sell all our milk in Williamsburg,” said Mrs. Mings with pointed finality.

From the place where he was working at the castor beans Mr. Mings had seen the strange rig turn into his front yard. Fearing an opportunity of some kind might escape him if he remained away from the house, the farmer made haste to return.

“What is it, Samantha?” he asked, entering the room just as his wife was persuading herself she had put up an unanswerable argument against the patent churn.

“Allow me, sir,” cried Gingel, “to place the matter before you. You look like a man of penetration and business sagacity, and I know you would not be two minutes in seeing the revolution my churn is about to cause in the butter-making industry.”

“Come in,” called Mings, taking the knob out of his wife’s hand and pulling the door open.

With a glare of shrewish disapproval Mrs. Mings flounced out into the kitchen, but took care to post herself in such a position that she could see and hear all that took place.

“I haven’t got any money to squander,” went on Mings as Gingel lugged his churn into the room, “but I’ll trade you somethin’.”

“Churns are money,” answered the doctor, “especially churns that are snapped up as quickly as these are. You will observe, sir, that we do away with the dasher entirely. An oscillating motion, communicated to the cream receptacle by this crank, enables a person to—to——”

The doctor’s words died on his lips. He had seen a long, narrow box on the opposite side of the room, curiously carved and painted. He straightened up, stared, then leaped to the box with

a wild cry and dropped down on his knees beside it.

“Can it be possible?” he whispered hoarsely. “Can I believe my eyes? It seems incredible, and yet—and yet——”

Seth had joined Mrs. Mings in the kitchen, and both stood in the open doorway, gazing at the man with the patent churn in startled wonder. Mr. Mings himself was no less astonished than his wife and the hired man.

“Where did this come from?” cried Gingel, starting up and facing the farmer. “Was it dropped in your vicinity by the cyclone of two months ago?”

“Well, no,” replied Mings, “the cyclone didn’t have anything to do with that box gettin’ here. It belongs to the man I hired to work on the place this morning.”

“The man your hired! Was he a very tall man, brown almost as an Indian, with black hair and eyes?”

“That’s the feller!” declared Mings. “Nate Rah, he calls himself. Do you know him?”

The doctor had again fallen into a skeptical reverie, asking himself many times and half aloud if it could be possible.

“Know him?” cried the doctor, apparently convincing himself that it was not only possible, but probable, and that now, if ever, was his chance to secure the formula. “I should say I did know him! Where is he? Show him to me at once.”

“What’s your business with him?” demanded Mings. “He’s working for me now, you know, and if you have any notion of taking him away——”

“I haven’t,” cut in the doctor. “All I wish to do is to take something away from him that belongs to me.”

“I told you so, Silas Mings!” exclaimed Samantha. “I had a feeling all along that you hadn’t ought to have anything to do with that tramp.”

“Where is Nate, Seth?” asked Mings, silencing his wife with a look.

"I left him at the barn a minute ago," replied Seth.

The three men hurried out of the house, and when they reached the barn they found this bit of writing, fastened by a sliver to one of the doors:

MR. MINGS. The employment you offer is not compatible with a conscience evolved out of the civilization of Old Thebes. A short two hours in your service has convinced me of this. I am leaving somewhat hurriedly, or it would be my pleasure to wait upon you personally and ease myself of a few remarks that are lying very close to my heart at this writing. My cedar-wood case I am leaving with Mr. Biddle, in lieu of his garments, which I am wearing, and of which I have not the necessary time to divest myself. With kindest regards for the gentlemen of the patent churn, I remain, your disappointed employe,
NIT-RA.

CHAPTER XIV.

REMARKS BY NIT-RA—PERTINENT AND IMPERTINENT.

ONLY a very few writings, in Nit-Ra's own hand, remain to us. It appears that he kept a journal, setting down his adventures and reflections sometimes in the English character, and sometimes in the hieroglyphic and hieratic.

A fragment of this journal, consisting of three small closely written leaves, is now at my hand through the courtesy of Mr. Scrymgeour. The manner in which he secured the leaves will appear later.

"In the afternoon of the day that witnessed my flight from the Mings farm I fell in with a disreputable-looking person named Hank, who belonged to a recognized caste called 'Hobo.' This caste abjures toil, lives by the wits entirely, wanders from point to point, and has evolved a system of hieroglyphs for its own particular use.

"With Hank I became quite companionable, and, under his expert guidance, covered a great stretch of country, reached this magnificent modern city,

and have entered into the profitable engagement which I am to begin to-morrow.

"Life with Hank was one of charming simplicity, and came near to overturning the unfavorable opinion I had conceived of existence in the rural districts. Money he despised as unworthy of virtuous consideration, and we slept, ate, and traveled many hundred miles without a stiver between us.

"Whenever a meal hour approached, Hank would skirmish up to a prosperous-looking house and inspect the gatepost for hieroglyphics. If he turned away from the gatepost it would be to remark, 'There's a dog here,' or 'They're too close-fisted for a hand-out,' or something of like import, according to the signs he had read. But when the signs were favorable he went in and invariably returned with a supply of food.

"Wherever night overtook us we slept. Sometimes this was in the open, sometimes in a stack of straw, and once a kindly disposed villager offered us a bed, but it was too short for my unusual stature, and I had perforce to take to the floor.

"So far from indulging in coarse jokes at the expense of my height, as so many were in the habit of doing, Hank regarded it with admiration, and declared that he knew of a way whereby my extreme length could be made the measure of my good fortune.

"Before many days I became acquainted with the cars, and Hank and I crawled into one of them, and were jerked and slammed about in the darkness for several hours. When we crawled out again we were in a place called Kansas City.

"Here we remained barely long enough to get aboard another freight train, from which we were incontinently ejected before we had gone fifty miles. The train was proceeding at a good rate of speed at the time, and I

was spilled all over the right of way, sustaining several bruises.

"After that we walked and foraged our way to the next town. Here Hank instructed me how to ride on a brake beam, and when night fell and a passenger train came along we crawled behind the wheels and took up our precarious positions.

"By Hekt, never in my life have I undergone such a frightful experience!

"As usual, my stature interfered with my convenience, and even subjected me to unwonted peril.

"The world into which I had awakened had been constructed with especial reference to the comfort and welfare of men measuring five feet eleven or twelve. Any one over that size has to put up with cramped accommodations or do without.

"Many times, as I clung to that brake beam, terror would cause the hairs of my head to stand on end; but, inasmuch as I am come of a royal line, I could not consistently relinquish my post or give audible expression to my fears. So I stuck it out, but was heartily glad when we got off the limited and went back to a freight.

"In this manner we came at last to the mighty city wherein I am writing this brief account. Here the people are thick as locusts during the Great Plague, and the buzzing of the market place has brought me near to distraction. Yet I am anticipating that many favorable impressions await me in this magnificent home of wealth and industry—impressions that will utterly wipe out those received in that obscure corner of the country where I was first brought to light.

"So far Hank has been the one bright pearl of my discoveries. I have not trusted him with a look at my amulet, for the vague fear of disturbing our pleasant relations has restrained me.

"On our first reaching the city he left me for several hours. When he

returned he brought with him a short, thin gentleman, gayly clad and wearing much jewelry and many diamonds.

"As this gentleman stood in front of me, and looked up into my face he rubbed his hands and indulged in expressions of surprise, delight, and congratulation.

"The gentleman's name was Klymer, and he is at the head of an amusement enterprise. He made me a proposition to appear before his patrons in an educational capacity, and I accepted of it forthwith.

"Likewise, Mr. Klymer made Hank an offer to appear with me jointly, introduce me from the stage, and act in the capacity of manager for myself. But he declined. For his free and languid nature the toil was too arduous.

"We parted, Hank and I, with many expressions of our distinguished regard and undying friendship. So here am I, at the last, in a well-furnished apartment whose ceiling is high enough to clear my head, and with a chair and a bed of suitable size for my requirements.

"To-morrow I begin my educational campaign, and I expect to receive as much or more instruction than I give. My soul has been harrowed by that Kansas experience, but, trusting in Thoth and Osiris, and facing the future with a kingly spirit, I am fain to believe that this magnificent Chicago will banish the evil impressions inspired by Seth."

CHAPTER XV.

BENT-ANAT, OTHERWISE MADEMOISELLE
HELENE.

THAT first morning of his engagement Nit-Ra was personally conducted to Mr. Klymer's educational institution on Clark Street by an attaché in a blue uniform. The Egyptian was to receive a salary of two hundred dollars a week, and half this sum had been

advanced and expended, under the supervision of Mr. Klymer, for board and clothes.

A neat suit of brown khaki covered the man from Thebes, and fitted him well. He could not have been put into garments that would have displayed his graceful, well-proportioned body to better advantage.

With the young man in blue Nit-Ra walked the crowded streets, creating a vast amount of excitement as he passed. Klymer had counted upon this, and the attaché had been given a lettered banner calling public attention to Klymer's museum and the many objects of interest to be seen there.

Arrived before the building, Nit-Ra found the front of its three stories plastered with pictures. The largest picture of all, hanging just over the entrance and extending upward to the roof, purported to be that of Hoop-La, the Philippine Giant.

Hoop-La, as represented on the huge poster, bore a striking resemblance to the Wild Man of Toy Creek.

"It seems that I am not the only giant," thought Nit-Ra, following the attaché up a flight of broad stairs to the second floor.

"Here's where the freaks hang out," said the boy in blue as he ushered the Egyptian into a long room.

There were small platforms along both sides of the exhibition hall, and above each hung a card with the name of the attraction for which that particular stage had been set apart. It was early—the doors were not open to the public until ten o'clock—and Nit-Ra was the first freak to put in an appearance.

"There's where you belong," said the attaché, halting before a stage ticketed as reserved for the other giant who had loomed up so large above the entrance.

"There's a mistake here," said Nit-Ra, his eyes on the card. "I'm the

Egyptian giant. You're giving me the other giant's place."

"My orders is to land you on this here platform," answered the boy in blue and brass buttons. "We only got one giant, anyhow."

"But my name isn't Hoop-La! And I never even heard of the Philippines."

"Aw, what's the diff?" And with that the boy faded away.

Nit-Ra, greatly perturbed, climbed to the platform and seated himself comfortably in the big rocking-chair that had been provided for his use. Certainly there had been a mistake, and, as soon as he could see Mr. Klymer, he would have it corrected.

The eyes of the man from Thebes traveled up and down the hall, taking account of the label over each platform. There were cards for "The Armless Wonder," "Hophra, King of the Zulus," "Mademoiselle Helene, Albino," "Mephistopheles, Fire-eater," "Petrified Man Dug Up in Arizona," and "Jo-Jo, the Human Orchestra."

These attractions summed up the human freak department of Klymer's educational enterprise. On the third floor was a small waxwork exhibition, warranted to thrill the strongest nerves, a shooting gallery, and a cage of monkeys. On the first floor was a stage where hourly performances were given.

Mademoiselle Helene's platform was directly across from Nit-Ra's. The Albino's nearest neighbor was the Petrified Man. A pair of dingy chenille curtains swung in front of the Arizona curio.

Save for a negro boy, who was taking up a final dust pan full of sweepings, the Egyptian was alone in the hall. At least he thought he was alone, but was presently undeceived.

"Hello, there, Hoop-La? Howdy! We're neighbors, and we might as well be sociable."

Nit-Ra's startled gaze, following the direction from which the sound came,

rested on a shaved white head that had been thrust from behind the chenille curtains.

"Who are you?" asked the Egyptian.

"Why, I'm the Prehistoric Relic from Arizony," answered the other with a sepulchral grin.

"Oh!" murmured the man from Thebes. "By the way, my name isn't Hoop-La."

"Sure not. That's your stage name. "By the same token, I ain't petrified, nuther; only lined over, see? Perfessional secret. Us freaks gen'rally gits onto each other, so I might jest as well put you next at the start."

"Then you weren't really dug up?"

"Eh? Dug up? Well, I should hope not!"

"Then you're deceiving the public!" cried Nit-Ra. "You're perpetrating a fraud——"

"Shucks!" and the gleaming white face took on a statuette look of disgust. "I'm just as much of a freak as the Zulu or the Fire-eater or as Mademoiselle Helene, who jest blew in. She's no more of an albiner than me; peroxide albiner, that's what *she* is."

The mademoiselle had mounted to the top of her platform, laid down her guitar, and was busy unfastening her cloak.

"Sam Jackson, you mind your own business!" she called. "I'll give you to understand that I'm a lady, and you cut out them remarks or I'll put up a holler. I've already spoke to Mr. Klymer, and he's got his eye on you. There! I guess that'll hold you for a spell."

"Ya, ya, ya!" mocked the Relic, and withdrew from sight.

The mademoiselle threw aside her cloak, and stood forth in a blaze of green and gold. This costume was cut low at the neck and high in the skirts, and had elbow sleeves.

Around one bare, alabaster forearm was twisted a serpentine bracelet. Small golden sandals covered her feet. She seated herself, deliberately ar-

ranged her skirts, and failed to notice that the giant had risen and was staring at her with breathless attention.

Suddenly she looked up. The giant met her eyes, and she gave a little scream.

"Where—where did you come from?" she asked tremulously.

"Be not alarmed, lotus blossom," smiled Nit-Ra. "I recognize you; you cannot hide your identity from me!"

The mademoiselle was visibly shaken. The giant's soft voice, however, reassured her in some degree.

"I didn't have a thing to do with it, you know," she remarked eagerly. "It was all that little red-headed Bings."

"You are the Princess Bent-Anat," pursued Nit-Ra, clasping his hands rapturously, "the beautiful star that arose in old Thais, and——"

"You've got me mixed with some other lady," broke in the mademoiselle.

Sentiment, however, was her long suit. The fervor of Nit-Ra's words was unmistakable, and she began to languish, to arrange her fluffy hair, and to pose.

"Osiris is good to me!" breathed Nit-Ra, his hands on his heart. "He has brought you down through the ages to meet me here, and to cheer my wandering spirit. Bent-Anat, can you not remember that moonlit night on the Nile? I lay at your feet, and your little hands, wandering over the strings of the zistrum——"

"I'm guessing for fair now," interrupted the mademoiselle, slightly nervous. "Helene is my name, not that other thing you called me."

"Aye, Mademoiselle Helene now, but in those ancient days you were the Princess Bent-Anat."

"Hello, old girl!" called the Armless Wonder, moving softly into the hall in his bare feet. "What kind of a hocus pocus you workin' with the giant?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said the Zulu, slapping his spear against his

rawhide shield. He had trailed into the hall directly behind the Wonder. "Klymer won't stand for any of this gum-drop talk. He fired the snake charmer last week for makin' eyes at the What Is It."

"Speak when you're spoken to," snapped the mademoiselle, settling back in her chair.

The Zulu nudged the Wonder, and they went on to the places appointed for them, winking at Nit-Ra as they passed.

Calming himself with an effort, the Egyptian resumed his seat. He had made a great discovery—a discovery that meant much to him—but that was hardly the time or place to follow it up.

A few minutes later the freaks were all in their places, the doors at the entrance were thrown open, and the public began to drift in. For Nit-Ra that first day passed like a dream.

He was heedless of the fictitious narrative with which a gentleman in black introduced him to the people at hourly intervals. When bidden to stand, that his great height might be seen to advantage, he did so mechanically, and when the gentleman in black left him, and the people flocked away to feast their eyes on another freak, he sat down and continued to throw his soft and surreptitious glances at the mademoiselle.

That first day he was content to gaze from afar and to let his actions and the words he had already spoken sink into the mademoiselle's mind. Somewhere at the back of her subconsciousness lurked the ghost of a forgotten memory. A little time and those days in Old Egypt must come back to her; then she would remember that she was really the Princess Bent-Anat, reincarnated as Mademoiselle Helene.

The man from Thebes, when he wended his way homeward through the brilliantly lighted streets, was still dazed by the emotional wave that had rolled

over him. He could think of no one else but Bent-Anat.

The sublimated Bent-Anat, on the other hand, was thinking entirely of him, but her thoughts differed from his in a marked degree. En route to her boarding house that night, she stepped into a telegraph office and sent the following:

DOCTOR AMZI GINGEL, Williamsburg, Kansas.
Have located Nit-Ra. Will hold him until you get here.
HELENE.

CHAPTER XVI.

NIT-RA IS APPREHENDED.

THE mademoiselle made it a point, on the following morning, to be at the museum at an early hour. A similar point was covered by the man from Thebes, and they had a delightful little chat, with only the sable attaché in the great room with them. The attaché, busy with his broom and dustpan, gave them but scant attention.

The mademoiselle was on her platform, and Nit-Ra sat on the edge of it, close to her slippered feet. The Egyptian sighed heavily several times, and the mademoiselle picked absently at the strings of her guitar.

"Doesn't it come back to you, Bent-Anat?" murmured Nit-Ra, peering up into her face. "Did you not see the glorious past in your dreams last night?"

"I done a week in the Pantheon at Niles, Michigan, once," blushed the mademoiselle. "Was it there?"

"Ah, no," he answered disappointedly. "I referred to the River Nile, 'Aur-Aa' in our ancient tongue."

"Oh, yes," she answered, for to "hold" Nit-Ra against the arrival of her father she felt that she must play a part and play it well. "I believe I do remember that boat ride, but it was quite a while ago. Excursion boat, wasn't it?"

"A shallop, Bent-Anat," he returned with a catch in his voice.

"That's right," she said, gazing at him with a clearing face; "come to think of it, it *was* a shallop. But you were Nit-Ra then, not what they got you marked up now."

"Trickery and deceit have surrounded me ever since my awakening!" exclaimed the man from Thebes. "In this magnificent city I had expected better things; and what do I find? Why, this educational institution is a humbug. The Petrified Man was not dug up in Arizona——"

"I should say not!" broke in the mademoiselle with a haughty look toward the chenille curtains. "Pa taught him that stunt."

"And the Zulu chief is an improvised American! Even the Fire-eater coats his throat with a chemical before he swallows those blazing balls of cotton."

"The Armless Wonder is the real thing," interposed the mademoiselle, "and so's the Human Orchestra. And you, Nit-Ra, you're all to the good."

"Look at the name they've given me," was his bitter response.

"Stage names goes in this business, Nit-Ra," she answered softly.

"You and I, Bent-Anat," he went on passionately, "are sadly out of our element. But, perhaps," and his heart looked through his deluded eyes as he spoke, "perhaps we two may yet be happy in spite of our disturbing environment."

"I shouldn't wonder," she whispered. "How'd you ever get out of that cyclone?" she added, feeling that they were getting on treacherous ground and that it would be well to change the subject.

"Osiris befriended, and Thoth directed, me."

"Didn't lose anything, did you?" she asked with ill-concealed eagerness. "You had some papers——"

"I have them still," he answered;

"three papers which, at first, I took to be the papyrus that was to befriend me when I stood before the forty-two judges of the under-world."

Her eyes glowed.

"Don't you think, Nit-Ra," she whispered, leaning toward him, "that your princess had better take care of those papers for you?"

"Not you, my star of Thais, not you!" he exclaimed. "Something tells me that there is danger wrapped up in those papers. I could not expose you to peril."

She realized that it would not be best to press the point too far.

"That cyclone," she breathed, leaning back in her chair and smothering her disappointment, "was the worst ever. Pa and I come down in a river, and up to the time I left Kansas we hadn't seen the first thing of Jim Simpson or Bings or Pinkey. Team was gone, too, and so was the wagon."

She heaved a melancholy sigh.

"It was an awful come-down," she went on, "for people like us that was used to better things. I struck out on a freak circuit, and Pa he went to work with a patent churn."

Nit-Ra shivered and got up from the edge of the platform.

"Is that fat man who is selling the patent churn your father?" he asked gloomily.

She nodded. "He's a real nice man when you come to know him," she said.

The other freaks had begun to drift in, and Nit-Ra walked over to his own platform. It seemed incredible that the dazzling Mademoiselle Helene could be the daughter of the man with the churn. Truly, the ways of Thoth are inscrutable!

Under the spell thrown over Nit-Ra by Bent-Anat the hours lengthened into blissful days, and the days brought them to the week's end. The handsome, dreamy-eyed giant had made an immense hit with the public, and Klymer

had already secured his promise to stay on at the museum indefinitely—providing Mademoiselle Helene also remained.

It was on Wednesday afternoon that Nit-Ra took note of a tall, slim, spectacled gentleman who seemed unable to break away from his vicinity. This gentleman, it soon became evident, was studying the Egyptian.

When the crowd had thinned away to the waxworks upstairs, or to the stage performance below, the spectacled gentleman would draw off to one side, twist his head into a sharp angle with his right shoulder, and peer steadily at the man from Thebes. Then he would jot something down in a book.

Taking up another position, he would continue his survey and resume his writing. These strange proceedings were kept up for an hour or more, after which the spectacled gentleman vanished as mysteriously as he had come.

Thursday afternoon found him again in the museum, and Friday and Saturday, pursuing his usual tactics. But on Saturday he was far behind the customary hour for his daily call, appearing about nine in the evening.

Nit-Ra, wrapped up in other things, had given but passing heed to the gentleman's pronounced interest. But not so with Mademoiselle Helene. Whenever the spectacled gentleman was present, gazing earnestly and writing assiduously, she was on nettles with anxiety.

Who was he, she asked herself, and why was he displaying this persistent curiosity? Had he an inkling concerning the formula, and was he endeavoring to forestall her father in securing it?

At six o'clock Saturday afternoon Mr. Klymer presented Nit-Ra with an envelope containing one hundred dollars in crisp, new bills. The Egyptian was the top liner and was paid a fancy salary.

The Petrified Man received fifteen dollars, and this also was the stipend

doled out to the entrancing Mademoiselle Helene. The Human Orchestra, who did more work than all the other freaks put together, received only ten dollars. But the astute Mr. Klymer probably knew his business.

At nine-thirty Saturday night, when the two upper floors were almost deserted and the last performance was being given in the theater below, a party of five climbed the stairs to the freak hall, entered hastily, and proceeded at once to the giant's platform. The spectacled gentleman who, up to that moment, had been very much in evidence, dodged behind a breath-testing machine. Although he saw everything that took place, he kept exceedingly quiet.

Nit-Ra was astounded. In the group that approached and pressed about his platform were the little red-headed man whom he had encountered on several previous occasions, the fat person who had called at the Mings farm with the patent churn, and—could Nit-Ra believe his eyes?—Mahoney, the one-time Wild Man with headquarters on Toy Creek.

Mahoney was very different now from what he used to be. He had been shaved and shingled, outfitted with a new and complete wardrobe, and looked more like a prosperous confidence man than an ex-hermit. Yet Nit-Ra recognized him at the first glance.

With these three came two officers, one of them an inspector. While the Egyptian stood staring at his old acquaintances, wondering what had brought them there and why he should be the object of their attention, the officers climbed to the top of the platform.

"You are sure this is the man?" queried the inspector.

"That's the handy boy, all right," said Bings.

"I'd know him anywhere," averred Mahoney.

"It doesn't need a Bertillon system to

identify a fellow of *his* size and color," added the doctor.

Snap, snap! Nit-Ra looked down and discovered that two bracelets of shining steel had been affixed to his wrists. Then he straightened erect, his jet-black eyes fairly aflame.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"You are arrested," said the inspector, "on a warrant sworn out against you by Doctor Amzi Gingel and Richard Mahoney, charged with the larceny of important papers and an immensely valuable star sapphire. Come with us, and come quietly."

CHAPTER XVII.

FAITHLESS BENT-ANAT!

MR. KLYMER hastened out of his private office and joined the group at Nit-Ra's platform.

"What's this?" he cried. "One of my attractions under arrest? What's the matter here, inspector?"

"Your giant appears to be a thief, Mr. Klymer," replied the inspector. "Instead of coming from the Philippines he hails from Kansas, having left that part of the country with goods that don't belong to him."

"I can't believe it!" cried Klymer. "Why, gentlemen, he's one of the best-natured freaks that was ever put on exhibition. Fact, I assure you. Inspector, you've got a wrong steer somehow."

"Then it's up to these men that swore out the warrant," replied the inspector. "They tell a straight-enough story."

"Mebby he has the goods on," suggested Bings. "Search him and see."

"A good idea!" said the inspector. "Frisk him, O'Connor."

Nit-Ra leaped aside with his back to the wall.

"I will not submit to the indignity!" he declared. "This is a vile plot to secure property that is rightfully mine.

Bent-Anat! Bent-Anat!" he called, looking toward the place where Mademoiselle Helene was nervously adjusting her wraps, preparatory to leaving. "Tell these men that I am from Thebes! Tell them that you knew me there in the days when all Egypt did me honor!"

"He must be shy a few," muttered the inspector. "Is this part of his business, Mr. Klymer?"

"Well," returned Klymer, "he thinks Mademoiselle Helene is the reincarnation of a princess he says he used to know. It's a harmless bee, and I've been letting it buzz."

"Mademoiselle Helene," said the doctor importantly, "is my daughter. It was a telegram from her that brought us here. She said that she'd hold Nit-Ra until we arrived, and she's done it. Has he the formula, Helene?" the doctor called to his daughter.

"He told me he had," answered the mademoiselle.

"Then you are faithless, Bent-Anat!" called Nit-Ra, his whole frame quivering and drooping forward. "The evil of the time and the country has left its blight even upon you. Nothing is left for me now but a quick journey to Amenti."

And thereupon ensued a struggle such as the inspector and O'Connor had never before been called upon to face. Mr. Klymer and the doctor and Bings fled to the farther end of the room; but Mahoney, remembering the time the hillside had tipped over on him at Toy Creek, joined issue with the officers, and between them the unfortunate Nit-Ra was hammered into a stupor and stretched prostrate on the floor of the hall.

Klymer was at his wit's end. The reputation of his house as a resort for ladies and children was likely to suffer.

"Get him away from here—quick!" he implored.

"What's this?" panted the inspector, picking up a blue stone from the floor.

"The sapphire!" exclaimed Mahoney. "Give it to me! It's mine."

The inspector thrust it into his pocket.

"You'll have to prove it's yours, Mr. Mahoney, before it is turned over," he curtly remarked.

"Look for the papers—my papers!" begged the doctor, who had scanned the floor in the vain hope that the formula might also have been spilled out during the tussle.

"Time enough to look for your papers when we get him to headquarters," said the inspector. "He's all in now, and it is a good time to get him downstairs and into the wagon."

With O'Connor at one end of him and the inspector at the other, Nit-Ra was hustled out of the museum and tumbled into the patrol wagon, which had been waiting at the curb. There were two officers with the wagon, besides the driver, and these, with O'Connor, were deemed an ample guard.

The inspector, accompanied by Mademoiselle Helene, Gingel, Bings, and Mahoney, followed the wagon on foot and at a leisurely pace.

"We can take a short cut through the alley here," said the inspector, "and get to the city hall ahead of the wagon."

As they turned into the alley a form brushed past them almost at a run, following the course of the vehicle which was bearing Nit-Ra in the direction of Washington Street. William Bings caught a good look at the figure as it passed under an electric light. He gasped and made a grab at Gingel's arm.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the doctor.

"There—there goes McFinn!" whispered Bings excitedly.

"Bother McFinn!" growled Gingel. "He's not in this."

"Don't bank on that too much," returned Bings. "He's trailing the

wagon, and it's a safe guess he's bound for headquarters like the rest of us. Right here's where I drop out, doc; it won't do for me to cross trails with the professor in the police department. I'll see you later—at the hotel."

So, when the party finally reached police headquarters, Bings was not one of its number. The patrol wagon had not arrived. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes passed, and still it had failed to appear.

The inspector's nervousness increased by swift degrees. He went out into the court between the city and the county building, where patrol wagons and the Black Maria usually left their passengers, and continued his anxious wait.

Finally the vehicle arrived. There was something funereal in the sounding gong, and apprehension tugged at the inspector's brain.

"Everything all right, Stryker?" he called out to the driver of the wagon.

"I don't think," was the rueful answer. "Pris'ner slipped the cuffs at the corner of Monroe, grabbed O'Connor's club, batted O'Connor an' Gibbs into the bottom of the wagon, knocked McRay off the rear step—and ducked. I waited while McRay tried to find him, but it wasn't any use. Gibbs is able to talk, but I think O'Connor ought to be in the hospital."

An extra man assisted Gibbs out, the wagon drove off with O'Connor, and five minutes later police phones were jingling all over the city. The chief was getting his dragnet out for a seven-foot Egyptian, wanted for larceny and assault with intent to kill.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAHONEY'S DESPAIR.

DOCTOR GINGEL had actively but fruitlessly pursued Nit-Ra from the Mings farm. One clew after another was followed until ten days had

been spent. At the end of that time the Egyptian was still at large, and the doctor had given up the search in disgust and returned to Williamsburg.

There he met William Bings most unexpectedly, and was presented by him to Mr. Mahoney. Bings explained that he had met Mr. Mahoney some eight weeks before, had told of the disaster to the Panacea Company, and had requested him—Mahoney—to keep his weather eye out for an escaped Egyptian.

Mr. Mahoney was clamoring loudly for a star sapphire which, he declared, the Egyptian had stolen from him. Mahoney had dropped Bings a line at Kansas City, and Bings had come on as fast as the cars could bring him. The two had begun an exhaustive search of the surrounding country, but without effect.

Then the doctor told of *his* search, and the clew which had led up to it. While the three discouraged ones were debating their next step the telegram arrived from Mademoiselle Helene.

Neither Bings nor Doctor Gingel had very much money; not nearly enough, in fact, to take them to Chicago. Mahoney, however, dug up an old kettle, twenty paces west by north of a blasted sycamore on the edge of Toy Creek, and emptied it of a thousand dollars in gold, silver, and small change.

The doctor thereupon persuaded Mahoney to go into partnership with them. An agreement was drawn whereby Mahoney was to furnish funds to continue the pursuit, and when the Egyptian was overhauled the spoil was to be divided, Mahoney taking the star sapphire and the doctor and Bings the formula. In pursuance of this agreement the doctor and Bings were to declare, if necessary, that they knew the sapphire belonged to Mahoney and that it had been feloniously appropriated.

With this understanding, they pro-

ceeded to Chicago, got out their warrant, and the arrest followed. The wonderful escape of Nit-Ra was the deathblow to the doctor's hopes.

The sapphire, of course, had been saved. At the very moment of the Egyptian's escape the stone had been safely reposing in the inspector's inside pocket.

The resourceful doctor now trimmed his sails to another breeze. In spite of the agreement which had been drawn up and duly signed, he declined to state that the sapphire belonged to Mahoney until the latter had promised to give him a third of the proceeds the stone was to bring.

As to the agreement, its every provision smacked of fraud, and to produce it in a court of law would be tantamount to the arrest and imprisonment of its signers. Mahoney saw that he was cornered.

As the day following Nit-Ra's escape failed to witness his recapture, Mahoney, Bings, and Gingel repaired to headquarters and demanded the sapphire. By his flight the guilt of the thief seemed perfectly established, and by the testimony of Gingel and Bings—who was also to come in for a share of the proceeds—the ownership of the stone seemed equally well proved.

So it fell out that Mahoney secured the sapphire. Gingel and Bings clung to him like leeches until he had visited the largest jewelry store in the city and consulted the gem expert who was to be found there.

Mahoney had had some experience, but not enough to enable him to arrive at any idea of the stone's value. According to his notion, it should be worth many times the sum which a flawless diamond of the same size would bring.

A cry of delight escaped the expert's lips as Mahoney dropped the gem into the palm of his hand.

"What will you give for it?" de-

manded Mahoney as the expert screwed a magnifying glass into his right eye.

"Just a moment," answered the expert, and dived behind a screen. When he reappeared it was with a disappointed air, and he laid the stone contemptuously on the showcase.

"It's blue glass," said he, "and its intrinsic value would be high if placed at fifteen cents."

Mahoney reeled, the doctor went pale, and Bings tottered over to a red plush divan and dropped weakly.

"Are—are you sure?" gasped Mahoney.

"Positive!" declared the expert. "It is very old and might be worth a few dollars as an antique. Some one who is up in Egyptology could tell you more about that."

Mahoney pulled himself together,

dropped the amulet in his trousers' pocket, and strode out. Gingel and Bings followed him sadly.

The sun was as bright, the sky as serene, and the world was wagging in very much the same way as when the three had entered the store. And yet, somehow, everything seemed changed.

"I'm going back to Toy Creek," growled Mahoney. "The more I see of this wicked world the less I like it."

"There's a little multum-in-parvo instrument that I used to sell," murmured Gingel. "I guess this is a good time for me to fall back on that."

"Me to the provinces," said William Bings sadly. "But we ought to keep track of each other somehow, in case anything turns up."

After settling this point among themselves they separated.

BOOK III—THE EIGHTEENTH OF APRIL.

CHAPTER XIX.

NIT-RA MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

PROFESSOR McFINN, candle in hand, ascended the winding iron stairway, pushed open the trap in the roof, and let himself out into the glass cupola that capped his Hyde Park home.

"Nit-Ra!" he called softly.

At the base of a telescope which occupied the central part of the observatory sat the Egyptian. He was bowed over a small table near him, his face in his arms.

The professor set down the candle. By its light he could see that Nit-Ra had erected a figure of the heavens, and had been laboring over the same old astrological problem that had claimed his attention for months.

"Are you weary, my friend?" inquired the professor, laying a hand on Nit-Ra's shoulder.

"Not weary, Hotep," answered the Egyptian, lifting his head, "but over-

come by the malefic aspects of the problem I have just solved."

"Then you have worked it out?"

"To the very minute."

"Well done!" exclaimed the professor approvingly. "For upward of six months now you have haunted this spot, scanning the stars until they paled into the morning dawn. Your persistence has won its reward, and I congratulate you."

Nit-Ra seized the hand extended to him, holding it gratefully while he answered:

"You have been my true friend, Hotep; but this is as it should be. As head priest in the temple at Thebes during my reign it was you yourself who instructed me in the stars, taught me to read them for good or ill, and to cast nativities. You are one, at least, over whom these malignant times have cast no spell.

"As you led my mind toward the heavens in those ancient days, so you have bared the truth to me now in these

modern times. You have shown me how gain is the watchword, and subterfuge the means, by which your people rise in power; how honest endeavor is dwarfed and nullified in the scramble for high places; and how the palm is borne by him who is able to hide the nefarious practices by which he wins success."

The Egyptian laughed softly.

"If I were to draw your America in hieroglyphs," he finished, "it would be as two dogs, bristling and glaring at each other over the bone of wealth."

"You are too severe, Nit-Ra," answered McFinn. "My country is great, and drunk with prosperity. Let the intoxication wear off, and human nature will adjust itself."

"The intoxication begins at the lowest round of the ladder," said Nit-Ra, "with lead nickels, cabbage-leaf cigars, bad eggs, and sanded sugar. If a man on one of your street cars can dodge the conductor he will boast for weeks over the fact that he saved a fare. Such petty grafting can hardly be the result of prosperity!"

"You are too new here, my friend, to understand. It isn't the nickel the man saves on the street car that makes him exult; it is the fact that he has, in a small way, beaten a corporation at its own game.

"I hold, you know, that this is a mighty good country in spite of its imperfections. Even universal graft furnishes excitement that tinges life agreeably. The constant thought that somebody is trying to skin you becomes a source of inspiration to a vigorous and resourceful people.

"You of the East will never be able to comprehend this. But I should like to assure you that, since the day of your power, Nit-Ra, the Orient has sadly deteriorated."

"On that point," returned Nit-Ra quickly, "my convictions will always clash with yours."

"If you were to see for yourself, to visit Egypt now and make a personal investigation——"

"That is precisely what I intend to do, Hotep," interrupted Nit-Ra.

"As a case in point, my friend," pursued McFinn, "your own degenerate countrymen discovered the vault in which you had been laid away, looted it of its royal mummy, yielded it up to strangers for gain, and suffered it to be smuggled out of the country."

Nit-Ra shook under this clinching argument. Nevertheless he answered doggedly:

"I shall see for myself, Hotep. But before I leave America there are a few honest debts which I must cancel. This duty performed, I shall emigrate. If Egypt proves degenerate, I shall place an asp in my bosom and sleep with my fathers."

The professor heaved a long breath; then, rousing suddenly, observed:

"But I am forgetting the errand that brought me here. A very unsavory-looking tramp is below in my study. He asked me point-blank if I knew anything about you or could give him any clew to your whereabouts. He seemed so well informed that I thought I would come to you before I denied him."

"What name did he give?"

"Hungry Hank, I believe, is the sobriquet he offered."

A cry of delight escaped Nit-Ra, and he arose instantly.

"Apart from yourself, Hotep," said he, "Hank is the only honest man I have met since my awakening. I should like to speak with him privately."

"You are sure you can trust him?" queried McFinn. "You are under ban of the law, you know, and must take no chances."

"I would trust Hank with my life!"

"Very well, then," said McFinn. "take the candle and go below. I will await you here."

A few minutes later Nit-Ra had en-

tered the study and was standing face to face with the inglorious one whom he had set as a pearl in the social diadem.

Hungry Hank was ragged and soiled, but through the stubble of his flabby face ran a grin of joy as his gaze rested on Nit-Ra.

"Yous is de king bee, Nit, dat's what!" he exclaimed heartily, swooping down on the Egyptian's outstretched hand. "It does me proud t' land on yer fist wit' me own duke. How's tricks, anyway? An' while we're talkin' about tricks, dere's a little box o' me own I got t' open. If it wasn't fer dat I wouldn't be here."

CHAPTER XX.

NIT-RA'S BARGAIN WITH HANK

THE man from Thebes welcomed the hobo like a brother; gave him the easiest chair, offered him a choice cigar, then sat and listened while he opened his "box of tricks."

"It's like dis, Nit," said Hank as he puffed luxurious clouds of smoke into his surroundings, "I never t'ought fer a minit dat yous would git pinched by de cops. Yous is too many fer any peeler dat walks. An' I never t'ought, w'en yous give dem boys wit' de star a slip, dat you'd fly yer kite out o' Chi.

"I been t' Cinsnati since dat happened, huntin' warm corners durin' de cold snap. Late in March I headed north, jolted Chi by droppin' in on it April 1st, den started right in t' hunt up McFinn, de Egyptologist, calculatin' t' ask him a few about yerself.

"Last night I prowled around de place here, but piped off a brace o' coves standin' acrost de street in front. One of dem was sandy-complected an' was readin' a book in de light of a street lamp; t'other cove was a sort o' Limpin' Jim, an' seemed t' t'ink his friend was more 'r less of a nuisance.

"Dat's de place, Scrymgeour,' says

de chap wit' de hobble, p'intin' t' dis house. 'Question is, is de mummy dere 'r ain't it?'

"Der treatist says, Peters,' pipes up de odder, 'dat in a case o' dis kind it's best t' make haste slowly, an' den t' call w'en we ain't looked fer. S'pose we go 'way an' come back ter-morrer night at ten?'

"Dey flew de coop, at dat, an' I fol-lered t' see w'ere dey went. Dey rounded up at a hotel, all right, so I says t' myself, 'If Nit's at McFinn's, I'll call dere ter-morrer night ahead o' dem guys an' put him next.' So dat's me at de present speakin'."

Nit-Ra had been fully informed concerning Peters and Scrymgeour by Professor McFinn. He knew the detectives were looking for a stolen mummy, and that they were acting in behalf of the Egyptian government.

"You are always thoughtful, Hank," said the man from Thebes, with feeling. "That is one of the many things about you that I admire."

"Aw, go on!" said Hank uncomfortably. "You got plenty time t' pull yer freight between now an' ten."

"I can't leave before to-morrow night."

"But dey'll come, an'——"

"I hope they will come," interrupted Nit-Ra with a smile; "I should like to talk with them."

"Won't dey nab yous?'"

"You overlook the fact that they do not seem to be fully informed in the matter. They are looking for a mummy."

"Yous is der boy!" murmured Hank admiringly. "I'd give me eyeteet' if I had dat block o' yourn. Dat's right."

"Your call here to-night is most oportune, Hank," continued Nit-Ra, "on other grounds than those that concern these detectives. I know that you are exceedingly clever, and I have a bit of work that will call for all your skill and finesse. There is fifty dollars in

the job for you if you will undertake it."

"If it's somet'in' dat's goin' t' help yous, Nit," returned Hank, "yous ought t' know better dan t' offer me a wad fer doin' it."

Nit-Ra smiled tenderly into the bleared eyes and uninviting face of his friend.

"You may have to use the fifty for expenses," he went on; "at least, I shall insist that you take it. I must be in San Francisco by the seventeenth of April. You are aware, I think, that I am under ban of the law, and that if seen by an officer I should be immediately recognized.

"Now, will you agree to take me in hand and get me safely across the country and into San Francisco? I warn you that if you are caught assisting me you will be liable to suffer."

"Caught? Me?" Hungry Hank gave a raucous laugh. "Don't you ever t'ink it, Nit. An' you won't git pinched neider. De job's mine. Yous want t' start ter-morrer night?"

"Yes."

"Den, w'en I shows up here, you have dem glad rags yous is wearin' in a bag, see? Git inter somet'in' dat's more in keepin' wit' der feller yous is t' travel wit'."

"I'll be ready."

"Dis McFinn must be a purty good pal o' yourn, hey?"

"Next to you, Hank, he's the best friend I have. When I escaped from the officers, months ago, it was he who took me by the hand, spirited me through alleyways and dark streets, and finally succeeded in getting me to his home, here in Hyde Park.

"I have been in close confinement ever since—which was exactly what my safety demanded—but I am now eager to be out and away."

"Well," said Hank, starting up, "I t'ink I'll mosey along. Ter-morrer I'll look up de trains, so't I'll know jest

where ter take yous, an' how, when we leave here. Can yous let me out o' de kitchen door? Dat'll be better dan leavin' by de front."

Nit-Ra conducted his friend down a back stairway, gave his hand a confiding clasp, and sent him out by the rear of the house. He had barely returned to the study when a ring at the bell echoed through the hall.

Instead of proceeding to the observatory to call McFinn, Nit-Ra seated himself in a chair by the professor's desk. McFinn had but one servant, and that worthy presently appeared.

"Two callers to see Professor McFinn," the servant announced, laying two cards on the desk in front of Nit-Ra.

"Twombly Peters," ran the legend on one card, and "Horace Chester McAlpine Scrymgeour, British Embassy," was the burden of the other.

"Admit them," said Nit-Ra grimly, settling back in his chair.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SLEUTHS RECEIVE A CLEW.

TWOMBLY PETERS and Horace Chester McAlpine Scrymgeour entered the study of the famous Egyptologist and stood deferentially before Nit-Ra.

"Pardon me for not rising, gentlemen," said the man from Thebes, who had no desire to let his stature tell against him in the interview, "but, owing to certain circumstances, I think it is best for me to remain as I am."

"Do not trouble yourself, my dear sir," answered Scrymgeour.

"By no means," added Peters. "You are Professor McFinn?"

"I am Professor McFinn's assistant. Perhaps I can serve you as well as he? I do not wish to disturb him at the present time. Will you be seated?"

The sleuths took chairs, vis-à-vis with the assistant. Scrymgeour pulled out

his compendium, turned the leaves quickly, read, then handed the book to Peters, marking a paragraph with his thumb nail.

In the pursuit of information bearing upon the whereabouts of stolen property, care should be taken to go to the fountain head, wherever possible. But, if the source of the information is one who, even in a remote way, is at all concerned in the larceny, then an employe may be bribed, or given the "third degree," or even wheedled into disclosing facts which could not be had from the principal.

Peters returned the book with a nod of approval.

"I am Mr. Scrymgeour, of the British embassy," said the undersecretary, leaving the treatise on his knee, where it would be handy for reference.

"And I am Twombly Peters, of New York," said the detective.

"We are looking for a mummy that was looted from an Egyptian tomb," proceeded Scrymgeour, "and smuggled to America without the permission of the Egyptian authorities. Perhaps you have heard Professor McFinn speak about the matter? He was—er—indirectly interested."

Nit-Ra nodded.

"Very good," continued Scrymgeour, with a pleased look at Peters. "Several months ago we traced this mummy to Kansas, where it was being exhibited by a rascal named Bings in connection with a certain traveling medicine company. We had almost captured Bings and recovered the mummy when a cyclone came along and swept the medicine company, as we thought, out of existence. I returned to Washington, and Mr. Peters to New York."

"What followed?" queried Nit-Ra.

"Mr. Peters, a few days ago, discovered a person answering the description of the man who had been at the head of the medicine company, vending a patent can opener on a New York corner. Mr. Peters, who now admits his error, should have arrested the man;

but, not having a copy of this excellent treatise"—Scrymgeour laid his hand on the book—"he was at a loss how to proceed, and merely questioned him. Gingel, for that was the man's name, referred him to Professor McFinn, of Chicago. I was telegraphed for, joined Mr. Peters in New York, and we came on here together."

"You and Mr. Peters are working for the Egyptian government?" asked Nit-Ra.

"I am working for the Egyptian government," said Mr. Scrymgeour with dignity, "and have retained Mr. Peters on a per diem."

Five dollars a day and traveling expenses no doubt looked very good to Peters. Even a professional, in a dull season, might bear patiently with a book amateur on such favorable terms.

"How can I serve you?" asked Nit-Ra.

Scrymgeour gave the treatise earnest consultation for some minutes.

"Would you mind," he asked timidly, "telling us whether Gingel had any grounds for referring Peters to Professor McFinn?"

"He had excellent grounds," answered Nit-Ra calmly.

The detectives jumped forward in their chairs.

"Indeed!" cried Scrymgeour. "You overwhelm me, sir."

"Is the mummy here?" asked Peters bluntly.

"The mummy," Nit-Ra deliberately answered, "will be in San Francisco on the seventeenth of this month."

"Where can we find it?" queried Scrymgeour excitedly.

"If you will call at the St. Francis Hotel at eight o'clock in the evening of April 17th, and ask for a letter, you will receive directions as to where you must go to find the mummy. But you are not to enlist the police. When you go to the place mentioned in the letter it is necessary that you go alone."

"Pardon me," said Scrymgeour, rising. "Whisper," he added to Peters, and the two passed to the farther end of the study.

"What shall we do in this case?" asked Scrymgeour.

"Personally," said Peters, "I don't like the conditions. Better look it up."

Scrymgeour looked it up. "Ah, here it is!" he murmured, and read the following in a low tone:

"It is well, when securing information regarding stolen property from a source not absolutely known to be reliable, to accept without hesitation any conditions that may be imposed; particularly so if information is given voluntarily. There is everything to lose and nothing to gain by taking a contrary course."

"That is sufficiently emphatic," said Peters, and they returned to Nit-Ra.

"We are obliged to you, sir," said Scrymgeour, "and your instructions shall be strictly followed. We thank you very kindly for your interest in the case, and will now withdraw."

Nit-Ra rang for the servant to show them out. When in the hall, Peters excused himself to his companion and turned back.

"I should like, sir," said he to Nit-Ra confidentially, "to have this case last as long as possible. I have worked Scrym for several months' pay quite successfully so far, and if you could prolong the pursuit into the coming summer I'd be glad to make it right with you."

"We'll see," answered Nit-Ra.

When Peters rejoined Scrymgeour, the latter likewise excused *himself* for a private word.

"You understand, my dear sir," said he, "that the glory of this achievement belongs to me. Peters is merely a paid employee, and really sometimes he is a good deal of a drag, don't you know?"

Scrymgeour thereupon rejoined his friend, and the two departed.

7BThrill

"We shall have a delightful gathering of incompetents in San Francisco," muttered Nit-Ra, whirling to the professor's desk.

On a sheet of plain paper he wrote the following:

MR. RICHARD MAHONEY, on Toy Creek, near Williamsburg, Kansas.

This is to inform you that, if you will get word to Doctor Gingel and William Bings, join them, and all proceed to San Francisco together; you will there meet the undersigned early in the morning of the 18th. The formula for the Piute Panacea enters largely into my request. I should like to exchange it for the sapphire amulet. The place of meeting will be determined by a letter, addressed to yourself, which will be awaiting you at the St. Francis Hotel at eight o'clock in the evening of April 17th. Gingel and Bings and, if possible, the other person who was associated with them—I do not refer to Mademoiselle Helene—*must* accompany you. Under no circumstances is Mademoiselle Helene to accompany your party.

NIT-RA.

On the following day this letter was mailed, and on the following night a ragged seven-footer with a bundle, hearing the cry of a loon from the neighboring alley, took affectionate leave of Professor McFinn, and let himself silently out of the professor's kitchen door.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GATHERING OF THE INCOMPETENTS.

AT eight o'clock in the evening of April 17th four men filed into the prominent St. Francis Hotel, in San Francisco. They had been gathered, as it were, from the four winds.

The large gentleman who looked like a prosperous confidence man had received the surprising letter from the Egyptian. He had immediately communicated with Mademoiselle Helene, through whom the three who had conspired to spend money and time for the acquirement of a piece of cut glass had agreed to keep track of each other.

Mademoiselle Helene, in her turn,

had sent word to the doctor and William Bings. The meeting occurred in Chicago, and was a surprise in one respect, for Bings had been working a shell game in Minnesota with Jim Simpson—and had brought him along.

The doctor had supposed—perhaps hoped—that Jim Simpson had met his end in the cyclone. But chasing Negratoes in the far-away Philippines is a good deal of a toughener, and Simpson had survived.

Ownership of the formula, therefore, was vested in the original three who had signed the agreement on the day after the flight from Ottawa; the original three, plus Mahoney, for he would not show his letter from Nit-Ra until a new agreement was drawn in which his name was included.

Thereupon he produced the letter, and made the surprising announcement that he had lost the piece of blue glass while en route from Chicago to his native wilds half a year before.

Nit-Ra's letter was plain enough. What he wanted was to exchange the formula for the so-called sapphire. Now, as the four schemers did not have the bit of blue glass, what were they to do?

Bings and Simpson, fresh from their shell-game operations, were ready with a suggestion. There were four of them and only one of Nit-Ra. What would be easier than to overpower him and take the formula by force?

Gingel and Mahoney agreed forthwith. Thereupon Bings armed himself with a slungshot, Simpson secured a set of brass knuckles, Gingel borrowed a revolver, and Mahoney bought a sword cane.

Thus equipped, and harboring their dark intentions, they filed into the San Francisco hostelry, as already stated. Mahoney, acting as spokesman, leaned over the counter and asked for his letter.

Would he receive one, or would he

not? All four scarcely breathed while the clerk ran through the bundle of mail in Box M.

A letter was flung out, and four anxious faces instantly cleared. Mahoney's hand trembled as he tore the envelope open and drew out the inclosed sheet.

Be at 206 Jasper Street, south of Market, at five o'clock sharp to-morrow morning, and ask for me. Remember, not a minute later than five in the morning, and not a minute earlier.

NIT-RA.

The four had retired to an out-of-the-way corner of the lobby, and here Mahoney had read his message.

"Now, why do you suppose he's so particular about the hour?" asked the doctor nervously. "Think he's up to some trick?"

"Hist!" put in Bings. "Look at who's askin' for mail now!"

Four pairs of eyes were turned toward the counter, and there beheld two forms quite familiar to Gingel, Simpson, and Bings.

"Twombly Peters!" gasped the doctor.

"And Scrymgeour!" added Simpson breathlessly.

"Sure!" spoke up Bings. "They're on Nit-Ra's trail. He knows it, and he's trying to play safe. We'd better play safe, too, and duck out of this."

It was necessary to explain matters to Mahoney, but the other three contrived to do this while on the way back to the cheap hotel where they were staying.

"Nit-Ra's a sharp one," said Mahoney; "he's got things fixed, all right."

"So have we," said Simpson.

Whereupon they nudged each other with their elbows and laughed at the futility of the Ancient Egyptian mind attempting to combat the Modern American.

Back in the St. Francis, Peters and Scrymgeour were puzzling over their own communication.

Be at 206 Jasper Street, south of Market,

at five o'clock sharp to-morrow morning, and you will find the mummy. Remember, not a minute later than five in the morning, and not a minute earlier.

"Why do you suppose," asked Scrymgeour, his hand wandering toward the pocket where he usually carried the invaluable treatise, "he is so particular as to the hour?"

The treatise, much to Scrymgeour's regret, had been lost or stolen during the journey to the coast.

Happening to look up at that moment, Peters saw three people whom he knew just leaving by the street door. He took three hasty steps in pursuit, then gave over the idea and returned to the wondering Scrymgeour.

"Didn't you see 'em?" he asked.

"Who?" palpitated the undersecretary.

"Why, Gingel and Bings and Simpson."

"Are *they* here?"

"They just left the hotel. Ah, ha!" and a knowing look crossed Peters' face. "I am beginning to understand why the hour of our visit to Jasper Street is so important. Those fellows are on the track, and whoever has charge of the mummy knows it. Let us accept the situation just as it is, Scrymgeour, and not be too critical."

On the following morning, as Peters and Scrymgeour approached the low brick building at 206 Jasper Street some one had just been admitted. They were not close enough, however, to see who it was or whether there were more than one of the callers.

Their own rap was instantly answered by a Chinaman.

"We are here by appointment," announced Scrymgeour. "An ancient Egyptian mummy has been left in this place for us and we have come to get it."

The Chinaman made no response, but seemed to know exactly what was required of him. Leading the detectives

along a narrow hall, he stopped in front of a door that was just closing.

"You go in there," said he, pointing, "and you findee what you want allee light."

They opened the door and entered, Scrymgeour nervously pushing Peters on ahead.

"Ah, Mr. Peters and Mr. Scrymgeour!" exclaimed a bland voice. "At last, gentlemen, we are all together. Now for the rest of it."

A quick movement followed. The door was slammed and locked. The detectives caught a glimpse of an immensely tall man, whom they recognized as the one they had seen in McFinn's study, hastening to a narrow slit of a window. He threw something out.

"There goes the key," said the good-natured giant with a laugh. "Now, then, we are all together and there is time for a brief exchange of ideas."

In the silence that followed the detectives stared at Gingel, Bings, Simpson, and Mahoney, and they, in turn, stared back at the detectives. Then all eyes turned apprehensively on Nit-Ra.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CRACK OF DOOM.

NIT-RA was in a very amiable mood. He stood at one end of the narrow room in which his six guests were locked, with an open-face silver watch lying before him on a table.

"Gentlemen," said he, appealing to Mahoney and his group, "have you met Mr. Horace Chester McAlpine Scrymgeour, of the British embassy? And Mr. Twombly Peters? Yes or no? By Thoth, it is hard for me to tell, by your actions, whether you have met each other or not."

The Mahoney group glared its hostility at the two men opposite. Scrymgeour drew closer to Peters, and Peters backed against the wall.

"You are the man, I think," said

Peters, his voice trembling slightly, "who told us to come to San Francisco and get the mummy. Where is it?"

"Before you," answered Nit-Ra. "I will thank you, in referring to me, to make use of the masculine pronoun. I am the mummy that was stolen out of Egypt, only to be revived by an accidental breakage of Piute Panacea bottles in the town of Olathe, Kansas.

"And for that," thundered Nit-Ra, "I hold you two incompetents jointly responsible. Had you proceeded about your work in a professional manner Bings would have been captured and my mummy recovered long before he had met these medicine people and made the final catastrophe possible.

"I once was a king," cried Nit-Ra, towering above the six in the majesty of his wrath, "and Bings and these medicine people have carted me about the country, exhibiting me to the morbidly curious. Osiris alone knows how I have suffered at your hands. But you, Peters and Scrymgeour, might have prevented this. Your failure to do so has invited my anger and led me to seek reprisal.

"I have advance information of a tremendous seismic disturbance which is to lay this proud city in ruins," Nit-Ra went on, consulting the watch. "It will occur in four minutes."

He looked up.

"The door is locked," he continued, "and the key is in the street. The windows are narrow, and exit by means of them is an impossibility. At one time this house was a resort for opium smokers, and was constructed with the view of guarding against police interference. So, you see, you must all remain here with me and await the crack of doom."

The Egyptian's hearers were dumb with amazement and consternation. It is not to be supposed that they took much stock in his announcement of the coming seismic disturbance, but his tre-

mendous earnestness and the shrewd plan by which he had gathered them all together worked upon their nerves and dazed and bewildered them.

"Against you, Mahoney," went on Nit-Ra, "I have the greatest grievance. In your attempts to secure the amulet you have halted at nothing. You secured it finally by heaping upon me the crowning disgrace of this, my second existence.

"My statement that I wished to exchange the formula for the amulet was a ruse. And yet I stand ready, at this moment, to carry out that exchange. Where is the stone?"

"I haven't got it," answered Mahoney with dry lips.

"You haven't it?" shouted Nit-Ra, roused to fury.

"It's lost," answered Mahoney, pulling the sword out of the cane. "Keep away from me, Nit-Ra, or I'll run you through like a rabbit."

"Open! Open!" wailed Scrymgeour, pounding on the door.

"Quiet, you fool!" growled Mahoney. "Turn around here and face this lunatic like a man. We are six, all told," he cried, "and are we going to let one man get the better of us?"

"Well, hardly," answered the doctor, displaying his revolver.

"If it comes to a fight," struck in Simpson, slipping the brass knuckles onto his right hand, "I think we'll stand something of a show."

"Why not?" piped Bings, flourishing the slungshot. "We're heeled, and he hasn't a thing to use."

"I'm with you, of course," said Peters. "This fellow is plainly a madman. The game he is playing is worse than folly. The sound of a disturbance here will bring the police, and when the officers come the door will be broken down and we will be released."

"Will you give up that formula?" demanded Mahoney.

"Never!" flung back Nit-Ra, crouch-

ing as though for a spring, his eyes like twin coals and every muscle taut and ready.

"Then, at him!" shouted Mahoney.

In another instant the narrow room was filled with twisting, writhing, and struggling humanity. The sound of blows, given and received, the crack of Gingel's revolver, groans, frantic appeals for help from Scrymgeour—all this horrid din was suddenly caught up and intensified by a muffled roar from without.

The building seemed to buckle and heave; one wall fell outward, the chimney of a neighboring structure toppled over and sent the roof down before it as though it were cardboard. A yellowish dust arose, blinding the eyes and choking the throat.

The struggle to overcome Nit-Ra had merged into an individual battle—a battle for life. Gingel, pinned to the floor by a fallen timber, caught at a flash of white.

"Papers!" he thought. "The formula!"

He clutched the scraps, clung to them, and finally a loosened brick struck his head, and he stiffened out, unconscious.

When he came to himself he was in the street. Ruins were all around him, and through them little spirals of smoke were ascending.

Sitting up, dazed and only semiconscious, he watched half-clad forms flitting about him like phantoms. Was he asleep and dreaming?

"Mahoney!" he called, groping about with his hands. "Bings! Simpson!"

A groan answered him, and he looked around to behold a fellow sufferer who was binding a bleeding wrist with a handkerchief.

"They've all gone," said this individual, who, on closer inspection, proved to be Scrymgeour.

"Gone!" echoed Gingel. "Did they get out alive?"

"Yes; and ran south as though the fiend were after them. I'll dock Peters for this!"

"Where's Nit-Ra?"

"He hasn't been seen since the shock."

"Shock?" returned Gingel feebly.

"We've had an earthquake, don't you know! Why, man, the ground is still rocking."

"Anyhow," said Gingel, "I've got what we came after."

He was still gripping the white scraps which he had picked up on the floor of the house.

"I stayed to pull you out," said Scrymgeour. "The rest of the cowards fled, and would have abandoned you to your fate."

"I shall remember you, Scrymgeour!" cried Gingel in a burst of generosity. "I'll give you a half interest in the Panacea. The rest have forfeited their rights to it."

He staggered to his feet and stood beside the undersecretary. Rubbing the dust from his eyes, he looked at the supposed formula. The next moment he had dropped backward into Scrymgeour's embrace.

"Brace up, man!" urged Scrymgeour.

There was no answer. Gingel lay a dead weight in the Englishman's arms. Lowering him as easily as he could, Scrymgeour knelt at his side, peered into his face, and laid a hand over his heart.

There was no doubt about it. Doctor Amzi Gingel was dead!

Scrymgeour, shaking his head sadly, arose to his feet. The scraps of paper which had fluttered from the doctor's hand caught his eye. He stooped and recovered them.

The sheets were not the written scraps that had held the formula. Instead, they comprised the few leaves of Nit-Ra's journal, which have already been adverted to.

With a final look at the doctor, Hor-

ace Chester McAlpine Scrymgeour turned away slowly and joined the tide of fugitives that was flowing toward the San Bruno Road and southward into the hills.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

AN indefatigable worker among the ruins, and one who earned much praise from the military for his persistent efforts, was one Hank, a hobo. He came over from Oakland on a pass the second day of the fire, and confined his energies to the vicinity of 206 Jasper Street.

That section of the town had taken fire early, and had been swept clean. Hank, however, prodded among the smoldering embers, and it was not until the third day after the shock that he gave up, crossed back to Oakland, touched up a generous railroad company for transportation to Chicago, and started East.

Hank had taken Nit-Ra to that place on Jasper Street, and had introduced him to the proprietor. But Nit-Ra would not let the tramp stay, insisting that he go over to Oakland and sleep out Tuesday night in one of the parks.

The tramp had returned, of course, to look for his friend. When he left San Francisco it was with the profound conviction that Nit-Ra had got clear of the wrecked building and had escaped to some Puget Sound port and there taken ship for the Red Sea.

This hypothesis of Hank's, in view

of a lack of any trustworthy information, must be allowed to stand.

Of the six who had hurried to San Francisco at the instigation of Nit-Ra, Gingel alone did not return. Fate had singled him out, and disappointment, when he had learned the true character of the papers supposed to contain the formula, had given him his coup de grace.

Mahoney went back to Toy Creek presumably, as weather reports have been coming from that vicinity of late. The shell workers returned to Minnesota, where they were joined by Mademoiselle Helene and where, a few weeks later, she and Simpson were quietly married.

Before she became Simpson's bride, however, Mademoiselle Helene insisted that he should get into some honest business. He is now selling razor strops in the Northwest, and his wife is assisting him with music and song.

Bings is probably in the penitentiary somewhere. And if he isn't he ought to be.

Simpson, in a burst of confidence, told Helene that he had secured the formula from a sick soldier on the way over from the Philippines. The soldier had received it from a friar in Cebu.

The soldier had died on the transport, the friar was unknown, and so it may be surmised that the secret has been forever lost.

That is, unless Nit-Ra has it. But Nit-Ra is as much of an unknown quantity as the friar.



A DANGEROUS GIRL

By Charlotte Mish

AFTER he met her he couldn't sleep; he lost his appetite, he became haggard and thin, he lost all interest in everything.

In love? No, she had the "flu," and he caught it.



The Lost Days

by
Trainer
Lansing

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

The railway engineers of various trains entering New York City from other parts of the State and country discover that for some unaccountable reason they are all twenty-four hours late according to the scheduled time of leaving their starting points and arriving at New York City. In other words, when the date throughout the country, except in New York City, is positively Tuesday, March 13, in New York City the date is just as positively, but unaccountably, Wednesday, March 14. Therefore, either New York City has inexplicably gone one day ahead of the rest of the nation in time, or all the remainder of the country has dropped one day behind New York City. The situation that at once arises in all the walks and activities of American life is bewildering and chaotic in the extreme. Financial powers are confused and disrupted to the verge of panic. All the great national industries are staggered. Disagreements over New York City time and that which prevails elsewhere in the country result in riots. Quarrels, murders, suicides, and other abnormal acts occur which testify to the extraordinary tension under which the country is laboring. Meetings for the preservation of the city's safety are held, to either solve the mystery or determine on some means of restoring harmonious relations between New York City and the remainder of the country. At last, the tremendous problem is laid before the United States Senate, and a resolution is drawn for investigating the mystery by a committee of six senators, at whose disposal for mastering the emergency is laid the sum of fifty thousand dollars. The committee at once departs for New York City on its mission. They leave Washington on Tuesday, March 20th, and although their journey is but five hours long, they arrive in New York City on Thursday, March 22d. Another day has been lost from the nation's time, or New York City has, with equal mysteriousness as before, lived two days and nights while the rest of the United States has lived but one.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW YORK DEFIES THE COUNTRY.

SENATOR ALDEN tried to comprehend the fresh catclysm of events which confronted his committee, as he scanned the pages of the New York evening newspapers that night.

The topic spread over all of the first page. No other subject in the world's news, by common consent of editorial instinct, received a line of that space in the final editions.

Incoming and outgoing thousands

of travelers discussed it, likewise, to the exclusion of all other ideas. From inconvenience their troubled thoughts merged rapidly into fear; and from fear they grew to terror. Never before, in the recorded or traditional history of the world, had they a precedent to guide or reassure them.

Some of the more timid ones were discussing the prophecy in the Book of Revelations, where the story is told of the end of time. One gray-bearded patriarch, on the municipal ferry going to Staten Island, solemnly read to his fellow passengers:

"'And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.'

He closed the book, and gazed at the others, with the light of religious fervor in his eyes.

"Brethren," said he solemnly, "the last days are here."

A quick-witted boot-black grabbed a woman about to jump overboard and tried to comfort her in the Sicilian dialect of the Italian language. Another, whose clothes proclaimed him "a sport," gently cautioned her to "be game!"

Back in Manhattan proper, the executive committee members of the Committee of Safety were hurriedly reconvened by telephone calls from the twenty-five vice presidents, for another meeting in Madison Square Garden.

Again the enormous throngs broke traffic regulations and drank up all the liquids in the vicinity, while waiting to hear the results of the meeting. Proprietors of near-by cafés, saloons and hotels sent out envoys extraordinary for new kegs and cases, sometimes lowering them through coal-holes into cellars from the rear, when the main streets refused to yield a passageway for the power-driven trucks or team-drawn vehicles.

Star-men and special writers bent once more to the feverish tasks of feeding the omnivorous crowd with extras from all newspaper offices. The papers flowed in hundreds of thousands from the great triple and quadruple-decked Hoe and Goss presses. In the business offices, managers sent telegrams imperatively urging paper manufacturers to rush more of the great white rolls

of transformed spruce to supply the regular editions whose reserve stock had been depleted by the unusual drain upon it.

The Committee of Safety did not immediately begin its formal deliberations. Individual members congregated in small groups, constantly changing in personnel, interrogating each other. Men seemed relieved to find others confirming their opinion that it was really Thursday, March twenty-second, instead of Tuesday, March twentieth.

They were just as certain that the rest of the United States had gone mad as on the first occasion of the confusion of the calendar. And this, too, notwithstanding that millions of Americans everywhere held the same opinion regarding the residents of Manhattan.

When the preliminary discussions had been thus settled, the chairman's gavel fell. The meeting came to order. As on the former occasion, the Hon. Seton Ridgeway presided.

In the membership of the committee, consisting almost wholly of business and professional men prominent in public life, with here and there a sprinkling of the scholastic element from the local universities, there was quickly apparent a unity of opinion that some means for avoiding the legal imbroglios, otherwise arising, must be quickly found.

But, on the one hand, they were confronted with the Scylla of the element of time as the essence of all their local business agreements. On the other was the Charybdis of every contract of the same character with the innumerable people outside of the metropolis itself.

One broker arose to point out how the disagreement as to which day of the week it was affected the purchase and sales of grain which Wall Street or individual speculators made with Chicago. It meant a loss of millions of dollars in commissions and the pur-

chase of the transactions in that commodity every day.

A banker followed, explaining how no financial institution could hope to carry on its delicate business unless the question was speedily determined, because with Washington, D. C., where the government treasurer had his official residence running on one schedule of time and with New York running on another, with first one day difference, then two, and no one knowing when the gap would still further widen, every bank would be jeopardized that had the custody of government funds. In case of the withdrawal of any amount, because of the uncertainty as to time, loans to reliable customers might be forced into liquidation, and widespread economic disturbances arise.

A landlord began a speech by asserting that he would never be able to pay either the interest nor the principal of his mortgage, if the tenants could insist on occupying his apartments two days of the month, rent free.

"Gentlemen," interrupted Chairman Ridgeway, "these discussions are not really germane to the condition we must face. We know that they exist, but continually looking at them through the spectacles of each individual affected, cannot help us to meet and conquer the crisis. We must *do* something. Has anyone here any suggestion as to what it shall be and as to how we shall proceed?"

A slender, poorly-clad figure, with a Hebraic cast of countenance, arose in the front rows of seats.

"Mr. Bresident!"

"Mr.—er—er—I have not the honor of knowing your name, sir."

"My name is Henry Hockenstein. I want to know for vy ve don't find vare dese lost days is and kill 'em off! And kill 'em before dey comes any more?"

The roar of laughter kept Chairman Ridgeway pounding the table with the gavel for several minutes.

"That is the milk in the cocoanut," said he. "I am sure that any individual that could achieve such a result would be sure of a mighty substantial reward and the gratitude of all American people everywhere."

"Misther Chairman!" yelled a brawny Celt, still further to the rear.

"The gentleman may speak."

"I'm Mike McGinnis, an' I drive a truck. What I want to know is this: If we kill off these lost days, what becomes of the wages we've earned? Are they killed, too? All I get is me wages. And all I have to feed me wife and six kids, and pay rent and gas bills, and buy clothes, is them same wages. If yer kill off the lost days, me boss won't pay me for lost time, will he? An' if he don't, how am I a-goin' to pay me bills? I'm in favor of telling the rest of the country to go to the divil. I know that I worked on them two days. An' if any of them rubes had been sweatin' blood in an' out of the warehouses an' down to the piers, as I did, on them two days, they would know whether they had been workin' or not—and whether they was livin' or dead, an' whether there was such things as days or whether there wasn't. I object to killin' off any time I've put in, until I know what is to be done about payin' me. An' I guess yer'll find plenty more of the teamsters' union as'll tell yer the same thing."

Shouts and cheers followed the declaration. The chairman waited patiently until they had subsided. The meeting continued. At last, after a long series of harangues, Vice President Charles H. Winney presented a resolution:

Whereas: The difference of calendar time between New York City, in the Borough of Manhattan, has caused great trouble to people in every walk of life, and it is necessary that it be amended or rectified in some way which shall be fair to all concerned, and Whereas: It is the consensus of opinion of this mass meeting of citizens of New York

of all classes and occupations that the balance of the country and not New York is at fault in the matter; now, therefore, BE IT RESOLVED: That this meeting goes on record as forever standing by the present calendar as in daily use, and here and now intimates its intention to resist any and all attempts to force on it an artificial, blundering, and certainly erroneous method of keeping time; and demands of the President and Congress of the United States, or such other subdivisions of political or legal authority, that they shall compel the balance of the country to conform to the New York schedule without delay, and not further impugn or insult the intelligence and knowledge of this community in matters of which practically all of its residents stand as a unit.

The resolution was adopted with cheers. New York defied the rest of the country to force them to drop two days from the calendar which everyone knew, beyond a mere fragment, had actually been lived, the same as all other days that had preceded.

At this juncture a message was handed to the chairman. He advanced to the edge of the platform, and read it aloud:

“‘The Senatorial Investigating Committee from Washington desires the attendance of the twenty-five vice-presidents, to give testimony regarding the difference in the calendar time between the Borough of Manhattan of New York and the rest of the United States. We await your arrival in order to begin our work, because of the extraordinary character of the emergency.’”

The crowd rose as one man.

“Tell ’em to go to the devil!” roared McGinnis.

A torrent of cheers welled from thousands of throats.

The chairman held up his hand:

“In my opinion,” said he, “we should comply with the order of the committee, while in no wise failing to stand our ground as to the letter and spirit of these resolutions. It may be that the

investigation will help to solve the mystery.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SENATORIAL COMMITTEE GIVES A DECISION.

THE Senatorial Committee held its sessions in private. In no other way could they proceed with the facility which was so essential to an early decision. Expert stenographers, working in relays, took the testimony of different witnesses, rushed to other rooms where speedy typists were waiting and laid the completed transcripts before the members only twenty minutes behind the proceedings during the night session.

The first witness on behalf of Manhattan was Chairman Ridgeway. He told of his awakening on Wednesday, March fourteenth, as usual. He described his bath, breakfasting, and then he said he went to work.

“What were you doing, if you remember?” asked Senator Ferne.

“I was completing a brochure, ‘The Best Methods of Suppression of Pernicious Propoganda,’” answered the witness.

“What kind of a day was it?” queried Senator Marcy.

“A typical New York day—rather more cloudy than usual. I had to use a light in my study to save my eyes from too much strain.”

The witness testified to facts for nearly two hours. He was succeeded by other men, all very prominent in the activities of Manhattan, and their testimony seemed to agree in all essentials with his.

Then the committee began to interrogate a few working people from outlying districts—Brooklyn, Jersey City, Tompkinsville, and other points, whose employment necessitated their crossing the river or bay to and from their homes. All of them told of arriving in New York, apparently a day behind

the schedules of the ordinary calendar, and some of them were quite explicit as to the confusion that resulted.

These were positive that their employers were wrong. Others seemed dazed as to the real day of the week, and frankly stated that they could not state whether or not they had been right or wrong.

The bewilderment of the committee was apparent from the questions which the various Senators asked—and the replies of the witnesses, all of whom were under oath, did not tend to simplify the muddle.

All the first session succeeded in accomplishing was to get upon the official record a great mass of testimony which corroborated the previous accounts of the confusion, as printed in the daily papers of the entire country.

The committee rose at four o'clock in the morning, announcing that they would reconvene next day at ten in the forenoon.

At that hour they were again in their places, and Senator Alden began reading from a manuscript:

"It is most apparent," he began, "that there is a gulf of time between Manhattan Island and the balance of the United States, which is, as yet, utterly unaccountable. The testimony of men of well-known standing and unquestionable rectitude of intention, both in public and private life, makes the duty of this committee one of great gravity, and also one to be performed with tact and delicacy. The committee is convinced of the entire good faith of all the witnesses which have been brought before it on behalf of the residents of Manhattan. Nor can anyone deny the entire truthfulness and sincerity of the contradictory witnesses. The situation, thus arising, is not only unexplainable, but also intolerable from any point of view. It is the duty of the Senatorial Committee to immediately rectify it—

and this must be with entire equity to all concerned.

"If the committee were to consider only the question of the preponderance of proof alone, the task would be an easy one, because many witnesses from other cities could be brought before it to show that New York people, so far as Manhattan Borough is concerned, are vastly outnumbered.

"But that would be tantamount to crushing down the statements of right-minded and farseeing men by sheer weight of numbers. So, the decision of the committee will not be made upon that basis.

"There is an authority, however, from whose decisions there can be no reasonable appeal, however distasteful it may be to any citizen of the United States. The members of this Senatorial Committee, after carefully reviewing and discussing all of the testimony taken before it, have concluded that the taking of further testimony at this time would be unwise, because it would simply delay the decision which must be made, if we are to return to a normal basis of life and its activities, not only in New York, but throughout the entire country.

"Therefore, we have decided that the decision about to be rendered shall rest on what facts are already before us, because we believe that new matter will be wholly without further light, and serve to only confirm that already under consideration.

"The calendar divisions of time, so far as the years, months, and days, are concerned, rests wholly upon the earth's motion. This well-known scientific fact, while increasing the confusion of the committee as to how the difference could have arisen, has also aided it in arriving at a decision.

"A year of time is measured by the progress of the earth in its path around the sun in space. A month of time is approximately one-twelfth of the year'

period. A day of time, however, is caused by the earth presenting alternate sides of its circular surface to and from the sun—making night and day.

“It will be at once seen that it is scientifically impossible for a day to really pass on such a fragment of the earth’s surface as Manhattan, and not occur on the balance of the globe, without that fragment detaching itself from the earth’s surface and making days and nights of its own.

“The place called Manhattan is in its usual geographical locality. Therefore that contention is absurd. The committee, consequently, is forced to the conclusion that while a day and a night more than elsewhere have not *actually* taken place, they have in reality *appeared* to do so.

“Nor is this all. To avoid the possibility of any error, the committee has submitted the question of what the calendar day of the year really is to four astronomers. They are: The Greenwich Observatory of England; The Lowell Observatory at Flagstaff, Arizona; the observatory on Mount Wilson, near Los Angeles, California, and the one on Mount Hamilton, near San José, California.

“Telegrams from these three American observatories all agree, and a cable from the Greenwich Observatory also agrees with the other three. These astronomers are the highest earthly authorities on the question of time. They not only mark what is called ‘sun-time’ but also ‘siderial or star-time’ by means of which they correct the time of the sun itself, and thereby give us one additional day in each four years to keep us correctly on our planetary path.”

He paused, and looked around. The twenty-five vice-presidents of the Committee of Safety of Manhattan were nodding their approval.

“They all declare that to-day is Wednesday, March twenty-first, in reality,

and not Friday, March twenty-third, as Manhattan believes it to be.

“Therefore, the committee has no choice in the matter, but to announce that it so finds, and that Manhattan must readjust its business activities, judicial proceedings and all other relationships of every character to correspond.”

The men sat in stunned silence.

“New York is certainly wrong,” went on Senator Alden. “But the duty of this committee does not end here. We have another and even more important task ahead of us, and that is to ascertain how, why, when and where this tremendous illusion has arisen, and to prevent its recurrence again, if possible.

“To that end the committee will now return to Washington, and report to the Senate of the United States this testimony and their decision regarding it. We shall then ask for another appropriation of enough money to provide one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, for the investigation and discovery, if humanly possible, of the cause of this error. I would suggest that we co-operate with the Committee of Safety of Manhattan, and that they, too, appropriate an equal sum, if the amount is not too burdensome, and with us endeavor to prevent such a contingency again arising. The committee stands adjourned, without delay.”

The dazed vice-presidents of the Manhattan Committee of Safety lowered their flag without a return shot. They hadn’t a shell with which to reply, and their apparently impregnable fortification had been shattered by the first broadside from the cowboy senator. The newspapers printed extras of the developments. Some of them, refusing to abide by the decision of the committee, ran two date-lines.

“Manhattan, Friday, March twenty-third. Elsewhere, Wednesday, March twenty-first,” they read.

CHAPTER IX.

ENTER, PROFESSOR MIDGLEY.

THE man approached Senator Alden and Seton Ridgeway where they were talking. He was a queer looking chap. His head was very large in proportion to his body—at times it wobbled, as if out of balance with the slender neck which supported it.

Chin, sidewhiskers, eyes and glasses, were of the type which cartoonists use to depict "The Common People."

"My name is Micah Midgley," he announced with a curious, cracked voice. "I'm professor emeritus of chemistry, physics and general biological and histological research at Rosewood University. May I have the pleasure of a few words with you about these lost days?"

"Certainly," said Senator Alden, kindly, "especially if you can throw any light on the matter."

They adjourned to the Senator's room, where his secretary was packing for the trip back to Washington.

"Gentlemen," went on the scientist, "I have the advantage of both you in one essential. I was at Rosewood following my usual occupation in research work there—I have no classes unless I desire to lecture in place of my assistants—when this first lost day appeared. In common with other people of the United States, including you, Senator, I believed Manhattan had gone mad. I wondered what could cause such an inexplicable series of circumstances. So I came to New York to investigate."

"Did you learn anything?" queried Chairman Ridgeway.

"I did," emphatically replied the speaker. "When the second lost day appeared, I found that I was affected the same as yourself and nearly all the other people on the Island of Manhattan. I believed the rest of the United States had gone mad, this time."

He joined in the hearty laugh which followed.

"What does that prove, if anything?" asked the Senator.

"It proves, presumptively at least, until the phenomena again appears in other localities, that it only affects people on Manhattan Island, and not always all of them."

"Have you any theories by which to account for it?"

"That is what I wish to talk about. Gentlemen, a professor of science, even with the many years behind him which I have, and on a fairly comfortable salary, still does not find himself at sixty-five wealthy. I have only a modest home, and enough to educate my children and live simply. I believe I can find what causes these lost days. Just how I am not prepared to say."

"If you can," broke in Mr. Ridgeway, "you can have a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars from the Committee of Safety, or from my private purse, if they won't give it, provided you will prevent their reappearance."

"And I believe the national government will not be behind private citizens in rewarding you," supplemented Senator Alden.

"All very well," replied the scientist. "But, I must make many investigations, must have assistants, and must purchase supplies of whatever kind I find necessary. I might, perhaps, have to lay out in cash as much as two thousand dollars, and I could not, gentlemen, of course guarantee that I would accomplish anything. But I can try, if you will see to the defraying of expenses."

Chairman Ridgeway guaranteed the payment of all bills, advanced five hundred in currency to start the work at once, and Midgley bade them both a courteous good afternoon.

"You may not hear much from me, but you will each receive a telegram every day, in which I will give out as much or as little as I feel is necessary

for your information," said he, as he went out the door.

Whereupon, Senator Alden and his colleagues caught the fast train for Washington, Seton Ridgeway went back to his writing, and Midgley started for a down-town laboratory.

The most exciting incident of the day was the release of Attorney Robert Hart from the Tombs, by order of Judge Murphy, and a reconcilliation between the two gentlemen, which took place in private in the judge's chambers.

The court also sent back to the grand jury for consideration the mass of testimony which the district attorney had been presenting before the first indictments had been returned against Police Lieutenant Daniel Delaney. All other judicial proceedings taking place on either of the lost days was also set aside, and the dockets of the courts cleared of the enormous mass of cases which had been thrust upon them.

New York, again on the same schedule of the days of the week as the balance of the country, once more settled down to its never-ending task of keeping ahead of the rest of the world in everything except time.

Each day Chairman Ridgeway and Senator Alden received a telegram from the queer-looking professor.

The first one was:

Thursday, March twenty-second. I have gone to work.

The next:

Am beginning preliminary investigations.

This was followed on the day following by:

Find I have to discard one theory.

Have discarded another theory

Came the day after that.

At last, on March thirty-first, the two gentlemen felt a stronger pulse-throb than usual, when they read:

A clew.

The next day:

Following clew, trail getting warmer.

Enhanced their pleasure.

On April second, the message read:

Solved! Meet me in New York City with the executive committee of the committee of safety.

Senator Alden, Seton Ridgeway and the other gentlemen privileged to enter the apartment, faced the scientist on Tuesday, April third, in a fever of excitement.

"First," said the man at whom they were firing volleys of questions, "let us arrange for the orderly procedure of this explanation. I do not desire it to be heard, at present, outside of the Senators, the vice-presidents of the Committee of Safety of Manhattan, and my own assistants. I will, myself, afterward give out a statement to the press, scientifically accurate, free from misstatements, and so lucid that it may be easily understood. For this reason, no reporters will be allowed in the room at this time."

Roars of indignation from the representatives of the press drowned the speaker. But he sat calmly down, and refused to proceed until his request had been complied with. When they had gone he went carefully over to a small object inside the fireplace, and disconnected one of the two wires which swung it down the chimney.

"The enterprising representative of the New York *Sphere*, who hung his dictagraph down the chimney from the roof, will not worry me," he observed amid general laughter. "Now, if the equally able representative of the New York *Blurb* will come out from under the divan and leave the room, we may proceed."

Another roar of laughter greeted the shame-faced man who emerged and left the room. Somehow, the hard-headed men of affairs who had gathered to hear the explanation of the mystery, found their appetites curiously whetted, and their respect for the queer professor rising.

CHAPTER X.

HOW MIDGLEY FOUND THE TRAIL.

A PRELIMINARY statement is necessary, gentlemen, for you to understand what is to follow. I will make it as easy to comprehend as I may. Listen carefully, please, because everything I say will be in some way linked up with the solution of the mystery."

The men addressed assumed various attitudes of comfort and attention. The professor turned to a series of blackboards behind him.

"I will first say, gentlemen, that I prefer not to be interrupted. It will break the trend of my narrative, possibly unnecessarily prolong the explanation, confuse some of you, and in general prevent a thorough comprehension of how the lost days arose, and why we will now abate either their reappearance or even its remotest possibility."

The professor had to stop just there, to let a roar of applause die down.

"Let me first state, gentlemen, that time, as understood by us in our everyday life, is an illusion. I hope to make this plain to you. It really has no existence. Yet, because of the nature of our lives, we are forced to recognize it, and conform our affairs to it.

"For instance, time is like the reflection of a man in a mirror. There is really no man actually there. Yet the image moves, and has apparent life. You will the more easily understand this, as I go a little further. We will suppose that we are now in Buffalo. Two trains are starting from the station on Exchange Street. One is called the Empire State Express, and it leaves the station at one o'clock, to make its eastward nine-hour run to New York. Along side it, on a parallel track, stands another train. This, however, is a Lake Shore passenger train, and it runs out along Lake Erie, westward to Chicago. The gong strikes. Both trains move

out, simultaneously, on parallel tracks, and so close that the engineer of the Empire State Express can reach out and grasp the extended hand of the fireman of the Lake Shore Express.

"Yet, gentlemen, the superintendent of that station will tell you, without hesitation, that the watch of the engineer of the Empire State Express indicated one o'clock, while that of the engineer of the Lake Shore train will say that it is twelve o'clock.

"If the engineer of the Empire had a watch saying twelve o'clock, and the one on the Lake Shore indicated one o'clock, neither of those men would probably ever again pull a train out of that shed."

He looked around at the faces of the men turned up to him, and smiled his query:

"What has become of that hour of time? Was it ground beneath the powerful drivers of the engines of these locomotives? No, because time, as I have explained, is an illusion of our senses. It is the method, merely, by which we divide the one revolution of the earth on its axis into something which, for our own convenience, enables us to better carry on our endlessly diversified affairs.

"The turning over of the earth on its axis is an *event*. The *reflection* of that event, we call a *day* of time. That is why a railway train, the faster it runs the less time it takes to cover a given distance. Scientifically speaking, it more nearly approaches the speed of the revolving earth. So, we divide the reflections into hours—twenty-four of them. And, by means of clocks and watches, we harmonize these little mechanical affairs of our own invention so that their *motion exactly approximates* that of the earth. For instance, these little hands on clocks and watches twice make the circumference of their painted or enameled dials."

All of the time Micah Midgley was

enabling his audience to understand him by reference to figures on black boards, representing the subjects he was discussing.

"If that is clear," he went on, "let's start with the understanding, clear and explicit, in our minds, *that time is not a thing, but is only an appearance, and a creation of our senses.* That is why there is an apparent loss of an hour between those two Buffalo trains, one going east and one west. That is why we set our watches ahead one hour at various places on the earth's surface, until we reach the international date line, in the middle of the Pacific, where it is always one day and an inch across it to the west it is always a day later."

Various nods and gestures of assent from the men present showed he was comprehended.

"Now, gentlemen," resumed the professor, "I therefore concluded that whatever it was that had affected people in Manhattan, and had not affected people in Brooklyn, Jersey City, and other points near by, *must have caused the appearance of the passage of twenty-four hours which really did not pass, as we have been shown by the astronomers.*

"More than that, the twenty-four hours that seemed to appear in New York proper, and then to vanish, *must have been included in the ordinary twenty-four hours which people outside experienced, as usual, without disturbance of any kind.*

"Do you all understand that?"

"Yes," "We do," "Go on!" came from various parts of the room.

"One more little explanation, and we are fairly on the road to solving the mystery," said Midgley, beaming down at the audience, who smiled back in response. "Now, we are all human beings. We all have eyes, ears, mouths, fingers, noses—various organs to convey to our brains the phenomena of life through different channels. The

mind directs the body and largely rules it. But, the converse is also true, the body also rules the mind by ruling the brain, through which the mind acts. The body supplies the brain with blood.

"There are people who deny this. But," he pulled out a leather case from his inner pocket, "if any of them are here, I will shortly convince them that what I say is true. I will give any man who thinks the brain rules the body and not the body the brain, one-fiftieth of a grain of hyoscyamus. He will shortly become the victim of a perversion of his ideas—just as soon as the drug is absorbed into the circulation and carried to the brain by the blood.

"I have known men, under this influence, to sit down and try to pick a knot-hole out of the floor—while their fingers never got nearer the floor than six inches.

"In this case, as something in the body affected their brain, and in turn the mind, which functions through the brain, it was *their sense of distance* which was caused to err.

"They seemed to see that knot-hole six inches nearer to their eyes than it really was. Do you all understand me, gentlemen?"

"You bet!" "Keep on!" "It's clear as day!" were a few of the replies which floated back.

"Very well. As I was saying, the hyoscyamus affected that particular man's sense of *distance*. In the present instance, something had affected—not one man, but many men and women—in their sense of the flight of *time*.

"This, so far as one individual is concerned, is nothing new. Men have been known to forget their names, or their homes, and wander away. They have come to themselves, sometimes years afterward and miles away, without any realization of the lapse of intervening time.

"But on no such theory could we account for this doubling-up process,

which made New York apparently live two days while the rest of the country lived only one.

"Yet, there was no getting back of the facts. As I have before stated, I was at Rosewood when the first day was lost. I thought the rest of Manhattan mad. I was in Manhattan when the second day was lost, and I thought the rest of the United States mad. Whatever had happened, I was a victim of the second appearance of this peculiar condition, as well as yourselves.

"But the fault lay, gentlemen, with me, the same as with you, in my own *sense of time*. Something, somehow, and coming from somewhere, had affected me, and my first start, therefore, must be made to find out what this thing was that affected my mind as to the flight of minutes and hours. When in New York, it undoubtedly *seemed* to pass on the second lost day twice as fast as it would surely have seemed to pass in Rosewood.

"And, whatever it was, it was undeniably something which affected my brain, because the brain alone receives the messages which come to me from all the rest of the world, including the other parts of my own body.

"Right there, I took up the trail. I must find this thing, whatever it was, and wherever it originated.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW MIDGLEY FOLLOWED THE TRAIL.

MY first theory," went on the professor, "was that there might have been some sort of gas which had affected the senses of the people without their having become aware of it. Perhaps it had arisen from some opening or crevice in the subway, or in one of the many deep excavations which are constantly being made in Manhattan for the erection of buildings.

"Neither I nor my assistants could

confirm this. We made careful tests of the air in all of these places. It disclosed nothing abnormal. Besides, had it been due to this cause, it is more than probable that it could not have been confined to the island proper. Gas of any sort, almost, is lighter than air, volatile, and has a tendency to diffuse or spread over the surrounding country. So, when this theory did not receive confirmation in a practical way, I abandoned it."

He turned to another blackboard.

"You will see here a small outline map. It represents the principal sources of food and milk supply for Manhattan. If my next hypothesis was true, I would soon be able to find proof of it. I was carrying on my investigation from the general standpoint, remember, that large numbers of people had been affected, in some way, so that their minds had been dominated by this *appearance* of two days of time instead of one.

"Was this caused by some infection of their food?"

"I determined to ascertain. I had my assistants trace out the sources of milk, butter, eggs, meat, vegetables, which came to the principal supply depots for the distribution of those things in Manhattan. Then we visited the places where they had been sent in. The idea was shown to be utterly groundless in less than twelve hours. First, because no one locality supplied enough of food to affect all of the people who had certainly lived both the lost days. Second, because some of this same food had gone to people in the suburbs of New York, who had not seen either of the lost days."

The audience, now intensely interested, listened to the various theories and the discarding of them, with an eagerness with which a boy watches the detective closing in on the villain in a moving picture show.

"Then I turned my attention to the investigation of some phase of magnetic

or electric energy, which might, *possibly*, have affected the minds of the people in this way. But this, too, was found untenable. All of the clocks of Manhattan were controlled, in the greater part, by telegraphic correction hourly from Washington. No known electrical disturbance would confine itself to the rigid boundaries of Manhattan, refusing to cross to New Jersey, Long Island, Brooklyn, or up into Westchester County."

He paused again, and looked carefully over the hall. The white, strained faces, upturned to his, were reassured by the kindly smile which illumined his features as he came to the final theory and the result of its test.

"There was only one thing remaining, which was in common use on Manhattan Island, which, so far, had not been subjected to my examination. It was the WATER!"

A great wave of relief went up from his hearers. They anticipated the disclosure by jubilant exclamations, nods and general smiles. But the professor held up a warning hand.

"Your hardest task of comprehending me, friends, has now arrived," said he. "Give me your closest attention, please.

"I will not worry you with an extended account of the way I went over the entire Croton water shed, with my faithful men. But, try as we would, we could find no trace of any infection from natural causes. Nor could we discover, by the most exhaustive quantitative and qualitative tests of the water itself when we examined it, any substance which would support the idea that the water had caused this strange illusion."

The solemnity of his utterances once more settled over the faces of his hearers.

"At last, when I determined to make one final effort, I passed an obscure hut away back on the side of a hill, near

the main conducting pipe of the Croton Reservoir.

"I cannot tell you what impelled me to look inside that building. But I obeyed the blind impulse, and saw a man sitting in the midst of the floor, surrounded by newspapers from many cities.

"He was in spasms of laughter, alternating between hideous frowns of animosity which crossed his face. One moment he would rock with joy, the next he would clasp his hands to the high heaven, and roar out fragments of denunciation against an unseen audience.

"'Probe, you blithering idiots!' he snarled. 'Keep on with your blundering mass meetings, appoint all the jackasses officers that you wish to name, resolute and be hanged with your Committee of Safety, and your senatorial committees—and when you have all got nicely settled down again, New York will lose another day, and everything will go to the devil again, as long as I wish it to do so!'"

The audience was now as silent as if of one man only. Midgley took up a glass of water, wiped his forehead, and resumed:

"Then this chap would go off into an almost uncontrollable spasm of laughter, as he read the terrible confusion that had resulted from the mysterious disappearance of the lost day. He had not less than one hundred newspapers, from all of the larger cities of the East and many of the Middle West and Pacific coast, and he devoured the news articles as well as the editorial discussions most avidly."

Professor Midgley pointed to a large bundle of newspapers at the edge of the platform on which he was standing, and then resumed the thread of his narrative.

He told of hearing the man's raving in monologue against New York City, and all that was therein; of his frequent

references to his starving wife and sick child. Tears came into his eyes as he depicted the mind-state of the lonely hermit—actuated by the implacable idea of an astounding revenge which should first humiliate, and, eventually, render the largest city of America uninhabitable—because of a grievance which he had for years held against it; and of the man's continual reference to "bi-vibrato-cordexis."

"Clearly," concluded the professor, "I was at the end of the trail." He pointed to a large porcelain jar, almost the size of a keg, standing by the newspapers, and cried, dramatically:

"Gentlemen, in that container is the essence of The Lost Days!"

CHAPTER XII.

EXIT, THE LOST DAYS!

BRING in Charles Fairchild," cried Midgley.

The chief assistant went out of the door, and presently returned with three other individuals. Walking between two stalwart men was a defiant figure, whose contemptuous glances swept the assemblage of representative men in supreme scorn.

"Gentlemen," said the professor, "in the brain of Charles Fairchild, whom you see here, arose the marvelous idea of humiliating and confusing you with the appearance of time that never existed. His hope was the destruction of the commercial and financial fabric of the city which had so severely dealt with him and his, in by-gone years. Studious, alert, able, willing and well-qualified in his profession of chemist, Fairchild was caught in the undertow of society fifteen years ago in Gotham.

"For weary weeks he walked the city, seeking employment which he could not obtain. His money dwindled. His wife and child sickened. Proud and sensitive, he avoided the usual channels for relief, and with the kiss of his dying

wife and child still warm on his lips, he left the city, his life consecrated to the one purpose of returning some day and dealing out an ingenious retributive and secret vengeance."

Micah Midgley continued the story which had been told him by the recluse. He traced him to London on a cattle steamer; he told of his visit to Cairo as a member of the English regiment in which he had enlisted; of his fight in the Soudan with the natives; of his receiving a bullet wound in the battle and being left for dead on the field, when the troops retreated before the onslaught of the natives; of the recovery, with an impaired mind, but with the dominant thought of vengeance and his long journey by caravan into the portions of the unknown continent of Africa, where no white man had ever been before.

"He came at last," continued the professor, "to the most inaccessible spot in the world, outside of the polar regions. It is the oasis of Kufra, nominally under the control of Sheik-el-Senusi.

"It was far remote from the ordinary caravan routes used by traders through the eastern end of the Sahara Desert. Only two men knew the path in and out—Sheik Mahoub and his son.

"The natives, outside of the nomadic Arabs, have scarcely any language and no money whatever. They are mostly of the negro stock in a very low state of civilization. They dressed in sheep-skins, and hid their faces or ran away when strangers came near. But as they had some wealth in ivory and feathers, Fairchild started bartering with them, and soon amassed a little fortune in gold dust which he received in exchange from the Arabs.

"From a medicine man of his tribe of Negroid-Arabians, calling themselves the Maghrabi, Fairchild learned of the narcotic properties of a native root, which seemed to make time pass much

faster than in reality. In the long intervals between caravans, he drank it. It acutely affected his sense of time. Every day seemed to become two—and no race of men seemed exempt from its influence. It was taken in the drinking water, the roots being steeped slowly, to extract the medicinal properties.”

Midgley filled a small glass, and held it up to the light. The audience gazed curiously at it. One or two of them shuddered and turned away from the red gleam of the liquid, as if the rays of refracted light which it threw off in brilliant scintillations still held a strange potency over their imaginations.

“In this glass,” went on the scientist, “is enough of the concentrated essence of bi-vibrato-cordexis to affect the entire city of New York. Its properties are preserved by diluting it with an appreciable amount of alcohol. The professional skill of the wronged chemist, Mr. Fairchild, is evident from the purity and power of the composition.”

The noted chemist continued the tale of Fairchild’s adventures in Africa; of his rewards to the natives for bringing him all of the roots which had matured in the locality; of his final distillation of them into the triple-powered extract, and of its careful transfer from the little kettle he had used into a water-tight goatskin, in which he had brought it, by another route, on camel-back to the oasis of Kufra, when he emerged from the desert; of his conversion at Cairo of his accumulated gold dust into a letter of credit, and the second transfer of the precious fluid, this time to the same porcelain jar then in the room.

“From Cairo he came to Marseilles by steamer, thence by rail and boat to London, and again by steamer to New York,” went on Midgley. “There he set about his plans for his unique plans of vengeance on the city which he hated. He purchased a small plot of ground

on the Croton water shed, remote from the usual traveled routes, yet close to the main conduit which supplies Manhattan. Then he was ready to launch his thunderbolts of confusion, with the results which are now thoroughly familiar to all of you.

“My own tests with this bi-vibrato-cordexis drug show that it unquestionably has the power upon the human body of particularly increasing and even super-stimulating the cerebral brain cells. This causes the person so inoculated to imagine that time passes twice as rapidly as before. From this peculiar property it derives its Latin name, bi-vibrato-cordexis meaning the double-vibration-root.

“It also possesses another peculiar power. Each individual atom of the extract unites with water—and only one. Water is composed of hydrogen two atoms, and oxygen one atom. There are also always present organic and sometimes vegetable salts, but I am speaking of chemically pure water. This extract has a peculiar affinity for the oxygen.

“Thus, it became scientifically possible for a relatively small amount of the extract to affect the entire water supply of the Borough of Manhattan. In this way, and in this way alone, the illusion arose.”

Vice-President Bartley Anderson was on his feet.

“Do you expect us to believe this fairy tale?” he sneered.

For an answer, the professor quickly filled a glass with water and dropped into it a minute portion of the extract.

“Are you the lineal descendant of the doubting Thomas?” he queried. “Then, of course, possessing a legal mind, you will not prejudge the evidence. Would you care to drink this?”

“No!” declared the lawyer, emphatically.

“It is quite harmless,” went on the

imperturbable professor. "I did not take the theory I have outlined to you as proof without substantiation. One of my assistants willingly offered to test the story. Any one of you may have the same privilege. If you refuse, however, you must accept my personal statement as final, pay to me the reward which it was agreed that I should have, and forever afterward hold your peace."

The attorney sat down. No other doubters were heard.

"It only remains for me to say," resumed the professor, "that this is the last of the root in the world. You may also be interested in knowing that it has a past—a very remote one, dating back to the time of Scipio Africanus and the conquest of Carthage by the Roman Empire. The alchemists of that all-conquering nation—forerunners of the chemists and physicians of to-day—found and used it, and there is an account of it in an ancient manuscript in the archives of an Italian library. But it has never come into general use, because it is native to only the practically inaccessible oasis of the great Desert of Sahara, such as the ones the demented Fairchild visited."

Senator Alden and Chairman Ridgeway held a brief consultation.

"What shall we do with the balance of the drug?" asked the Senator.

"If you are satisfied as to its potency, and that it really contains within it the mystery of the lost days, we will take it and pour it into the ocean, far from any spot where it can possibly again affect civilized humanity," suggested the professor.

The matter was immediately submitted to a vote of the assembled vice-presidents and carried unanimously. The matter of the reward received a similar disposition—the committee authorizing the chairman to transfer the one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars to the credit of the professor,

then about to descend from the platform.

"Open the doors to the newspaper men," said Midgley.

The reporters passed into the inclosure, each receiving a sealed envelope from the solver of the puzzle.

"One more question?" put in Attorney Anderson.

"Proceed," said the smiling scientist.

"How was it that some people escaped the influence of this drug, when practically everyone drank the water?"

"That's easy," said Midgely. "Those who did not suffer from the hallucination were using some other water, generally bottled, and obtained at a point remote from the source of the main conduit into which Fairchild poured the bi-vibrato-cordexis."

"And now," jubilantly announced Chairman Ridgeway, "the swordfish and the shark can continue the discussion as to whether it really is Thursday, April fifth, or Tuesday, April third. I don't mind telling you, professor, that I shall be glad to see the last of that jar containing the lost days."

His remark was the signal for the general adjournment. The vice-presidents became again plain toilers of the earth. The necessity for their committee no longer existed.

Senator Alden lingered. He came over to the scientist, with outstretched hand.

"I can only say that it is simply wonderful and wonderfully simple," said he, earnestly. "I shall use every effort to have the Congress of the United States supplement your reward with another amount equally large. You have well earned it."

Midgley bowed his appreciation and escorted the distinguished young man to the door. Only Fairchild and he were left in the room. He turned to the broken man with a quizzical smile.

"Brace up!" said he, kindly. "My

friend, you have long carried a wrong perspective of the puzzle men call life. Would you care to look at it again, from a different angle, and with me?"

The forlorn individual raised his face. The sneer was gone. The solicitude of the learned man who was speaking reached the germ of good in his and every other human heart—no matter how deeply encrusted and overlaid with that misdirected energy which the world calls "sin."

"Yes!" said he, clearly.

"Then come along to Rosewood,"

said Midgley, briskly. "A man of your insight has a great future in the wonderful realm of industrial chemistry—that fairy land of fact, whose lavish treasure waits only the discernment of the seeker who has a humble spirit and a contrite heart. Who knows what surprises await us on the long, long road of human progress? For our feet are set on the eternal ways and an infinity of resource obediently waits to answer the call of that infinity of mind which mankind, as a race, is at last slowly realizing that it possesses."

THE END.



SIMPLE FLOWERS

By Charles Kiprooy

OH! you have hoarded what you might have spent
 When giving was so sweet a thing in you,
 And now that our resplendent night is through
 Considered well my purpose and intent . . .
 I am no fleshless dreamer penitent
 Of that which even one could never do
 Who dares to linger when the game is new . . .
 The oak grows as the early twig is bent.

This friendship might be as a simple flower
 Whose roots are gaining strength through friendly hands,
 Or like some strange and half exotic power
 That the possessor never understands,
 It might have turned in that one lovely hour
 To something splendid in our clumsy hands.

The Conqueror

***Tod
Robbins**



IS it not a pitiful thing," said my friend, "that more of us are not successful in the battle of life? On all sides we see old hulks floating with the tide. How few of us know when to stop playing a game. We go on and on; then comes defeat. All those who use the body or brain to the uttermost find some day that the load which they once carried so easily is too heavy for them. And there is no sadder man in the world than the man who was."

"Then why do they persist?" I asked.

"Because life is a battle, and stagnation is worse than death. I know only one man who conquered; I know only one man who was successful. And how do I know that? Because he is dead. That man was Victor LeRue."

"Not the great composer?"

"None other. He, indeed, was the great musician of this century. What a soul the man had! It was like a lark, sailing up and up into the sky. One grew dizzy watching its flight. His music carried you away to a land of his own, where every note was a pure joy dipped in the dew of melancholy. Fortune had nursed him as a child. There was never a happier man in France than Victor LeRue."

"But," I began, "he——"

"Just so," said my friend quickly. "I was coming to that. Victor LeRue and I were like brothers in the old days. What hardships and joys we experienced together! But when the larder was empty, when the fire was out, was Victor LeRue sad at all? Not he. 'We're living now, Rene!' he'd cry. 'To fight is to live.' And taking his violin out of its case, he'd play some daring, rollicking troubadour air—a tune fit to put heart in a mouse. Closing my eyes, I can see him now—his crisp black hair, his bold blue eyes, his teeth flashing white through his beard."

"But those days of a garret life did not last long. Soon Paris had made him her favorite son, and each year brought him greater success. Now his music echoed through the world, and he had to travel and show himself. And I saw him less and less, till sometimes many months intervened. But when he came this good friend of mine was the same old Victor LeRue."

"One night, many years after he had come into his own, I heard his well-remembered knock on my door. 'Come in, Victor,' I cried. A moment later I felt his hands on my shoulders."

“‘Rene, Rene,’ said he, shaking me playfully, ‘we are getting old and bald, I see. For shame! Why not a wig, Rene? Modesty should go with age.’”

“‘It’s a joy to see you, Victor!’”

“‘Ah,’ said he, glancing at my easel, ‘I see that you paint as well as ever. Lucky man! Time has scalped you, but left you your art. With some of us She is not so thoughtful.’”

“‘You should not complain, Victor. That last opera of yours took Paris by storm. I was there the first night. It was wonderful!’”

“‘You think so?’ cried Victor LeRue with a smile like a ray of sunlight. ‘I am glad that you liked it, Rene. You are a critic whose opinion I value. But this morning I met a man who had been defeated by life. You remember Julian Mannette at the art school? Well, I paid him a visit. I found the poor old fellow, as usual, before his easel. You know what art he had in him once?’”

“‘I should think so!’ I answered. ‘In his day there was no better landscape painter in Paris than Julian Mannette.’”

“‘In his day, yes,’ said Victor LeRue. ‘But, ah, Rene, his day is over and he persists! He is the unhappiest man in the world—the man who tries to deceive himself and fails. His last painting was abominable. There was no life there—nothing but lines. Everything that it attempted was a miserable failure. It was stiff and unnatural. And this was the work of Julian Mannette! It was enough to make you weep. And he wanted a word of praise from me. I could see it in his eyes—the look of an old beggar on the street.’”

“‘And what did you tell him?’”

“‘I am not a Brutus, Rene. I lied most artistically. I told him that it was magnificent, that it should hang in the Louvre. Then I fled.’”

“‘That was kind of you, Victor.’”

“‘One should be kind to the conquered,’ said Victor LeRue. ‘But let us change the subject. To-night I blow

away all clouds; I am the happiest man alive.’”

“‘You were always that.’”

“‘Yes, but to-night I have reached the pinnacle of art, of life. I can go no higher, and I am fortunate in knowing that I *can* go no higher. Knowledge like that arms one against life. But, Rene, I have brought with me two compositions that I wish to play to you. You will be the first to hear them.’”

“There was a piano of excellent tone in one corner of the studio. Victor LeRue seated himself before it. Unrolling several sheets of music which he had taken from his pocket, he let those long, powerful fingers of his stray over the keys. He struck a few cords carelessly, and, turning about, faced me. His blue eyes were flashing brightly; there was a red spot in either cheek. ‘I have named this “The Conqueror,”’ he said. ‘It is a funeral march.’”

“‘Why, that was his most famous composition!’ I broke in.

“‘Just so,’ said my friend; ‘his most famous composition. And that night, when he played it for me, I saw what he intended that I should see. Closing my eyes, it seemed to me that I was in a city gone mad with joy. An excited multitude was singing and throwing roses into the streets; every house-top was bright with waving banners. One could hear, in the distance, the music of an advancing host. The heroes were marching home from the war; the conqueror was returning to his city. Nearer and nearer came the tread of tramping feet. It shook the ground; the houses trembled before it. Now soldiers were passing, soldiers hacked and bloody, carrying rich booty in their stiffened hands; while, from a distant temple, girlish voices musically proclaimed their deeds. And then a great shout rent the air, mingling with the music of the trumpets

and the drums, 'Hail the Conqueror! Hail the Conqueror! The Conqueror is coming from the wars!' And now a great black war horse was coming down the street. But no rider sat upon his back, and his head was bending low. Now the music from the trumpets and drums grew slower, sadder—slower, sadder—till it waned into a groan. And here came the conqueror at last, lying dead upon his shield, borne along like a bloody trophy from the war. Then the wailing of the people rent the silent air; the roses fell from the rooftops like drops of blood; but in the temple the girlish voices sang in joyous tones."

"Well, how do you like it, Rene?"

"Coming out of my dream with a start, I saw that Victor LeRue had stopped playing and now sat facing me. 'Like it?' I cried. 'Why, it is the finest thing that you have ever done! You have painted a picture for me in music! It is wonderful!'

"I think it is my best. But I want you to hear this also, Rene.' He again touched the keys.

"This time my ears were pleased by a very pretty composition. But it had none of the fire or depth of the first. It made me see nothing. In fact, I was rather disappointed with it.

"It's pretty,' I said when he had done.

"And disappointing, Rene. Quite right. I see that you're as honest a critic as ever. This last composition of mine shall never see the light of day. See, I destroy it.' And picking up the sheet of music, he tore it into microscopical fragments. 'So it is done, Rene.' Leaning forward, Victor LeRue smiled brightly.

"But you should not have done that!"

"Nonsense! It is better out of the way. I have always kept my fingers on the pulse of Art. It has been waning considerably of late. But let us change the subject. I want to hear of nothing but pleasant things to-night.'

"For an hour more we talked. At last he rose and grasped my hand with even more than his customary warmth. 'I have enjoyed this evening, Rene,' he said, 'as I have often enjoyed the sunset after a long day.'

"But if you must go, don't forget your music.'

"I'll leave 'The Conqueror' here,' said Victor LeRue carelessly. 'If anything happens to me you can have it played at my funeral. You promise that, eh, Rene?'

"Yes, yes, I promise that,' I answered, laughing.

"Then, Rene,' said Victor LeRue, 'I wish you a very good night. It is the happiest and most successful man in the world who is bidding you adieu. Remember that always, Rene.'

"Two hours later I was sitting at the piano in the twilight. I was playing 'The Conqueror,' while again I seemed to see the joyous city and the warriors returning from the wars. Suddenly the violent ringing of the telephone bell jarred me out of my dream. Rising I took the receiver off its hook.

"Well, who is it?' I cried.

"This is Gabriel,' said a voice which squeaked like a violin out of tune. 'This is Gabriel—Monsieur LeRue's valet. Come—come quickly! My master has killed himself!'

For several moments there was silence.

"And *did* they play 'The Conqueror' at Victor LeRue's funeral?" I asked at length.

"Yes," said my friend slowly. "And all the way to the churchyard it seemed to me that I was in some triumphant procession. It was as though a conqueror were returning with victory on his shield. The houses seemed gay with banners; the people whom we passed were smiling; and even the horses were prancing in the sunlight like chargers on parade."

The Terror of the Rats

By
Croydon
Heath



CHAPTER I.

THERE is a row of benches in Bryant Park where human derelicts sun themselves by day and try to sleep by night. Several of the pedestrians hurrying through the little park wondered why a clean-cut, well-dressed young American should sit among this hopeless group staring dull-eyed into nothingness.

There were reasons enough had they known; he had, for example, the common bond of poverty, and, like most of his companions, he was bankrupt of hope.

Six months before he had been a brilliant young lawyer. Now he was disbarred and in disgrace. He had been employed by a railroad corporation as a trial lawyer, and had been dismissed because plans of their operation had leaked out. His employers claimed that he alone had the information.

Jack Thornton had not given up without a struggle, but when his efforts to clear himself were fruitless he tried for odd jobs. They were offered first to

discharged soldiers. There were ten men for every one position, he found.

So it was, with a little less than a dollar in his pocket, wearing his last presentable suit of clothes, he sat in Bryant Park filled with bitterness toward his lot and mankind.

Eighty-five cents between him and starvation! Isolated by his family for the disgrace they had been brought to, he was cut off from the pleasant ways of friendship by a crime he had not committed.

That night, in his bedroom, he read and reread the accounts of his trial as they were told in one of the great papers. He had not been imprisoned. He had not even been convicted of the crime his employers sought to fasten on him, and it had been assumed that he covered up his tracks with extraordinary ingenuity. Yet the bar association had no doubt of his behavior and had cast him out.

He tore the paper into little bits. The whole thing was branded on his brain. He did not want to be found with the thing on him if accident or

starvation took him in his search for work, but one escaping piece of the paper fluttered to the narrow bed and lay face up, inviting his attention.

The first line of an advertisement stared at him. "Have you physical courage?" it read. He looked at it with interest.

Have you physical courage? Have you health, brains, and resolution? Are you free of all family ties? Dare you try what most men could and would not do? Weaklings need not apply.

There followed merely the initials and number which advertising departments affix to such things, and Jack Thornton, looking at it, discovered that it had been inserted half a year ago.

He had carried it with him six long months, and his eyes had fallen upon it when it was too late. But was it too late? Newspapers were systematically run, and records were kept of advertisements. Perhaps the name of the advertiser might be obtained. Within half an hour Jack Thornton was making his inquiries.

There was not a chance of finding anything, the clerk declared, as the same initials and number were used again and again. Advertisers rarely left names and addresses, and it would tax bookkeeping departments too much to record every one of the million yearly transactions.

The clerk, seeing disappointment written so plainly on a thin, white face, looked at the ad curiously.

"If I were you," he advised, "I should put in an ad myself. It'll cost you twenty-five cents an agate line. Don't wait for the Sunday edition, for every day's a good day with us." He pushed a blank across the counter. "Ours is a high-grade clientele; the other sort don't count."

Thornton calculated that he would need three agate lines, and that would leave him with a dime. This is what

he wrote and handed back to the obliging clerk:

I have physical courage, health, resolution, am free of family ties, and can do what most men dare not. I need work.

The clerk handed him a receipt and a number. "Well," he commented, "even if you don't get an answer people will wonder who you are. Come around about two. You'd be surprised how quickly people answer when they want anything."

At twelve Jack Thornton formally vacated his hall room. He was now in possession of ten cents and a good suit of clothes, the wherewithal to shave, two collars, and the world to sleep in. He told himself as he walked leisurely to the newspaper office that there would be no answers. He had probably thrown away his last seventy-five cents, the victim to the modern craze for advertising.

It seemed amazing when, in answer to the yellow slip he passed across the counter, a clerk handed him a letter written on the stationery of the Screen Club, an institution of which the ex-lawyer had never before heard.

"If that's the way you feel," the letter read, "come and see me to-day any time between two and six at 125 West Forty-seventh Street. Ask for Mr. Lund of the Lund-Kelly Company."

Thornton found 125 West Forty-seventh Street to be a building devoted mainly to the motion-picture industry. He was told he must wait, as Mr. Lund was now at luncheon. Mr. Lund, it seemed, was well known, as scores of people came in to ask for him, and from "stills" hung around the wall he learned that the Lund-Kelly Production Company had produced many startling pictures. He was wondering what use this eminent man could have for him when he was startled by a summons to meet him.

Lund wasted no time, but looked him

over with professional scrutiny, and then said:

"I was afraid you were a rum hound. Can you ride?"

"Yes," said Thornton. "Why?"

"How well?" Lund demanded. "I want a man to ride a bad horse."

"I can," Thornton said confidently.

"This business brings us the greatest number of fakers," Lund declared, "and I want to be shown. Will you come around to Durland's and get aboard an outlaw?" Lund watched him keenly.

"Sure. I'm ready," said Thornton, for he knew he could sit any horse another man could. He rose to his feet.

"That's all right," said Lund. "I've got no horse at Durland's, but if you'd tried to back out I should have known you were a fake. Ever hear of Durham Monmouth?"

Thornton nodded. This Durham Monmouth was a screen idol. Men as a rule disliked him, but men do not support movies, and with women he was a great box-office attraction.

"I'm using him in a Western picture made in West Fort Lee," Lund said, smiling. "The big scene is where he gets away from pursuers. He has the girl in his arms and he comes to a deep ravine. If he doesn't cross it the jig's up. So down he goes. It's so steep the other fellows don't venture, but he goes down with the girl. The horse rolls over, and all three go down to the bottom. I'll have half a dozen camera men working so we won't miss anything. It's great. No fake stuff, but the genuine article."

"But the girl," Thornton protested; "she may get killed."

"She's fake," Lund admitted, "but that won't be noticed. She'd fainted, and the dummy would deceive anybody."

"The horse may get killed."

"Sure," said Lund; "that's all in the game. But you'd be surprised what

they can do without getting even a scratch."

"Durham Monmouth takes the most risk," Thornton asserted. "He may get rolled on."

"He won't get even his pompadour ruffled," Lund declared. "Do you suppose I'm going to risk a fifty-thousand-dollar star like that? What sort of a producer do you think I am? That's where you come in. You're the same build, but he weighs a bit more. That's easily fixed."

"What do I get out of it?" Thornton asked.

"Five dollars a day," Lund told him. "That's good pay, considering most of 'em are paying only three."

"Five dollars a day for breaking my neck?" Thornton said scornfully.

"If you break your neck you won't need fifty million," Lund said earnestly, "and if you don't break it you're five dollars ahead of the game. What are you kicking about?"

"Supposing I get the horse and girl down without a fall? I've ridden in pretty bad country out West."

"We'll try it till you do fall," Lund said simply. "I must have real action." His was the unconscious egoism of one who serves his art.

Jack Thornton rose to his feet again.

"I need the money," he said, "and I'm not afraid, but to get five dollars while this Durham Monmouth gets the credit and a thousand a week doesn't seem fair to me. Fifty or nothing!"

In the end he agreed on half that sum, and arranged to be driven out to Fort Lee at ten next morning.

The invested seventy-five cents was already offering big returns, and he strolled into the newspaper office, caring little this time if another had been lured by his bait. The movies! He was tall and personable and might film so well that directors would come to him with offers. He had been told in prosperous days that his clean-cut fea-

tures and dark eyes would show up well on the screen. Of course there was risk, but he had ridden often enough to know that many bad falls entail only minor injuries.

But there was another answer for him in the newspaper office. At first he thought this must be a mistake, but the initials and number were correctly given. In this communication there was a single orchestra ticket for a popular play running at a Forty-fourth Street theater, but not a line in explanation. It happened to be a play which Thornton had long wanted to see. In any case, whether this were an accident or some noncomprehended design it would do very well to pass the evening.

New York, as he well knew, was full of curious happenings. It might be his next-door neighbor at the play would make an astounding offer. Anything might happen. Thornton was no longer depressed.

He was disappointed to find his seat was on the aisle and on his other side a fat and rather sleepy lady. The lady, except for encroaching on his seat, paid no attention to him. Not an eye—so far as he could see—was fastened on him from any point. He told himself that the sending of the ticket was a mistake, and when the play was over he went through the crowded lobby, feeling he had been cheated of a thrill. He had looked for adventure, and had been disappointed.

It was only when some one at his side asked him for a match that he noticed a slight man of middle height with a very precise way of speaking, a certain manner of clipping his speech which hinted of an alien tongue. But of what nationality he was Thornton could not determine. He took one of the stranger's proffered cigarettes. Not for a week had he smoked, and these Abdullahs were the favorites of a day long dead.

"An excellent play," the stranger

commented; "the hero's rôle was a grateful one. He had," and the stranger looked Jack Thornton full in the face, "physical courage, health, and resolution."

A feeling of excitement took hold of the young American as he heard his own advertised phrase repeated. It might be merely an accident; it probably was no more than that; perhaps it was *not*. He looked fixedly at the small bright eyes of the other.

"And he was free of family ties," he remarked, and waited with fast-beating heart for what would come next.

"And could therefore," the stranger went on calmly, "do what most men dare not."

"Exactly," Thornton agreed. "He needed work."

He looked closely at the other as he said it. Coincidence plays odd pranks in the world. It might be, after all that this slim, polite stranger was speaking idly, but there was a feeling within him which forced him to believe the other was answering him from phrases of an advertisement that meant a great deal. If this were so and the man talking were indeed the donor of the orchestra seat there must of necessity be a meaning as yet unguessed in his remarks. To bid him adieu would no doubt force a declaration from him.

"Good night," said Jack Thornton politely.

It seemed as though the stranger had not heard him.

"So many need work," the unknown said musingly, "and in so great a city as this there must be some who would enjoy work which offered large returns and, perhaps, some excitement."

"Does that mean risk?" Thornton demanded.

"That would depend," the other said, smiling a little.

"Upon what?" Thornton asked quickly.

"Upon how well one played the game?"

"Game?"

"Yes, game," the stranger repeated. "You people of the English-speaking races may always be led into any contest, be it never so dangerous, if it is like a game."

"Are you picking players for such a game?" Thornton inquired.

"A player," the other corrected, "one player merely."

Perhaps, under ordinary circumstances, Thornton might have been content to keep on this fencing match with words, but he felt that he was too nervous, too much on edge to keep it up.

"I hope you'll find him," he said with a kindly nod of his head. "Good night again."

"One moment," said the other, this time with a vague uneasiness, as the young American took a step or two away from him. It was plain now to so observant a man as Thornton that the stranger needed him.

"I am without family ties and lonely in a strange city. It would give me much pleasure if you would consent to take supper with me at my hotel. This play we have seen—there are interesting phases in it we might discuss. Will you do me the honor?"

"With pleasure," Thornton said, and stepped, at the other's invitation, into a limousine drawn up at the curb.

Over the supper the stranger laid aside his mask. He took a clipping from his pocket and passed it over to his guest. It was the advertisement.

"This is yours?" he queried.

"It is," Thornton answered, "and I should like to play on your one-man team."

"You say here," the stranger went on, "that you have no family ties."

"I meant it," said the American. "My mother is dead, my only sister estranged, and my father," and his face was darkened by a frown, "has said

that for which I can never forgive him."

Thornton was amazed to see an expression of displeasure pass over the other's face.

"Then," the host said after a pause, "you could leave your country without the formality of calling on friends and relatives."

"I'm afraid I'd have to," Thornton said bitterly. "I used to think I had the sort of friends who would stick by me in every sort of trouble. I know differently now."

He saw the stranger carefully appraising him as though to find out whether he were in immediate need of money. Thornton was thankful his only suit was a good one and his linen for the moment spotless. He knew that a destitute man has a poor chance of making a good bargain. The stranger had a curiously interesting face. It was small, bronzed by sun or race, with eager, inquisitive eyes.

"You are not in a position, then?"

"Oh, yes," Thornton said idly. "I'm in the moving-picture business."

After a minute of deep thought the stranger spoke.

"Let us have no misunderstanding," he began. "I need the man that placed this advertisement in the *Morning Leader*, but I must make no mistake in selecting him. My judgment will be passed upon by those who are greater than I. I dare not merit disgrace. I can tell you only this, if you are what you say, tell me frankly what led you to offer yourself. There must be no concealment. I am asking much and giving little in return, but I have the reward to offer and you are the seeker."

He listened with deep interest to the story of Thornton's unmerited misfortunes.

"Had you wished," he said slowly, "to put forth reasons why you are suited to our purpose you could not have done better."

"How do you mean?" Thornton asked.

The stranger waved a hand with a gracious, apologetic gesture.

"That may come later," he said. "For the moment I wish you to abandon your idea of making that dangerous ride tomorrow."

"Sorry," said Thornton, "but I can't."

"You were to have gained twenty-five dollars by risking your neck. Very well, I will give you fifty for remaining here in New York."

"You don't understand," Thornton explained. "It isn't the money, but I've given my word. The last thing that fellow Lund did was to make me promise."

"They could get another man," the stranger urged.

Thornton set his jaw stubbornly.

"You may believe my troubles were brought about by my own follies, but you won't get a chance to think my promise is to be broken. I gave him my word of honor not to disappoint him."

There was exquisite politeness about the other man. He rose from his seat and bowed. Plainly the entertainment was at an end, and it was equally plain that he was incensed at what he considered the stupidity of the American.

"If you prefer to make a miserable sum when I could offer you so much it is your own affair."

"I'd remind you," Thornton said with a touch of legal caution, "that you have offered me nothing but vague promises and one can't collect on them in this town."

"You have the sense to know these vague promises mean more to you than this folly of horsemanship which you are going to attempt."

"I'm a lawyer by profession," Thornton said, "and when I am offered twenty-five dollars, a sum I can live on for a month, I'm not going to turn

it down. I've had a very pleasant talk with you. Good-by."

"I said fifty," the stranger exclaimed. "Was that not enough?"

"Good-by," said Thornton again, and passed out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT morning Thornton was crowded into a limousine with a number of "extra men" who were being taken to the Fort Lee studio. He was tired from his night's sleepless rambling and could not help thinking of what he had probably missed by accepting this precarious engagement. He felt that the stranger was in deadly earnest in wanting him.

In the studio he found that extra talent was regarded very lightly and ordered about like cattle. It was an angry Thornton who finally climbed into a waiting car and was whisked off to the woods that lay beyond Coytesville. He saw Durham Monmouth in another car with Lund and the leading lady. He noted that he and Monmouth were enough alike in figure to make the substitution easy.

The horse he was told to mount was fidgety and frightened, but easy enough for him to manage. Lund was a very capable director, and was inclined to be friendly, but Monmouth's manner was hostile. Another extra told him the star was always fearful of being superseded by a younger and better-looking man.

As fortune would have it Thornton came out of his task with no hurt at all. The director and camera men were enthusiastic. Horse and man and dummy had rolled down the cañon without a scratch.

Thornton's sudden popularity and the interest which the leading lady took in him annoyed Durham Monmouth. He sauntered up, sneering.

"A rotten fall," he said; "it ought to be done over again."

"Nothing doing, Bull," Lund said incisively.

"That's good news," laughed Thornton. "Once a day is enough."

"Yellow!" sneered the famous star.

Thornton looked at him for a moment, and then smiled.

"If I were," said Thornton, "I shouldn't be hired to do what you are afraid of."

The leading lady, who frankly had an eye for a good-looking man and had liked Jack Thornton on sight, found much amusement in this. And because it was true it infuriated "Bull" Monmouth.

"These bums," sneered the celebrity, "who get picked out of the gutter think they're stars. I'll bet this guy has been finger-printed and has a picture in the gallery."

Thornton looked at Delia Probyn, the leading lady, with a look of apology, for he felt he had precipitated a row which must be vastly displeasing to her. Monmouth construed his look as that of a man seeking protection and interference, and when a man was physically a coward Monmouth was a terror. To-day he was bad-tempered. He had a headache from last night's libations, and Delia was making eyes at one who might be a dangerous rival.

He took a step forward.

"You're through!" he shouted. "Get out!" Then he raised his fist.

Delia Probyn clapped her hands.

"There's going to be a fight," she cried. "Come on, people! Bull is going to whip a wicked man who wants to flirt with me."

The thing was over very quickly. Monmouth had picked upon a man well known as an amateur boxer in his college days. Before Lund could stop the affair a lump as big as an egg was forming over Monmouth's right eye,

and his nose had lost its Grecian contour.

"I love you for that," Delia said, and wrung the victor's hand.

Lund had other views, for he saw that no close-up of his star would be possible for two weeks at least, and he was late with the picture as it was. He tore what hair he had left and swore that never, so long as he had influence, should Thornton get a job in any picture from Fort Lee to Hollywood.

"That's all right," said Thornton calmly, "but where's my twenty-five dollars?"

He retired with the spoils of war, but his journey townward was not altogether pleasant. It seemed he was barred from future picture work by reason of having thrashed a famous screen idol. His insistence on keeping his word had lost him the singularly fascinating opportunity which in very remote terms the stranger had offered. But, after all, twenty-five dollars was something. The six months of striving for work had taught him a proper valuation of money.

First of all, he rented a room on Fifty-ninth Street and satisfied his hunger at a modest table d'hôte. On Madison Avenue near by his father occupied the great brownstone mansion of the Thorntons. To the world he was stern, severe, and unforgiving, for only the father himself knew the agony of heart which comes to one who idolizes an only son and finds him unworthy. Old Lloyd Thornton had at first supposed his son innocent, but the mass of testimony which was woven about the boy gradually stripped hope from him and he had shut his doors forever upon one who had betrayed his trust.

Early next day Jack Thornton went to the newspaper office, hoping for other answers. There was one. It was typewritten, and no address was given. It read:

"In two days' time seek another an-

swer. To the brave the gods offer all that a man desires."

The two days passed slowly, and when the promised letter was handed to him across the *Leader* counter he could hardly control his eager interest, for from the feel of it there was an inclosure of some thickness.

When, in the security of his room, he opened it an astonishing thing met his gaze. He held in his hand railroad tickets to San Francisco arranged by the guiding hand of Cook's Tourist Agency, and he was provided with everything, sleeping accommodation, hotel duly specified at the city of San Francisco, and a fifty-dollar bill.

Thornton had long desired to leave New York and go to a place where he might earn money, for money to him was merely a means to an end. With a few thousand dollars he could start an inquiry which might clear his good name, and he did not know that his grieving father, who long ago had repented of his anger, would have given him his entire fortune. He was still young enough to feel only the bitterness of being mistrusted by his own kin.

In this ticket to California was the opportunity he needed, and since indecision was no part of his nature he was soon preparing for his long journey. Retrieving from the kindly care of a Sixth Avenue pawnbroker some essentials of his wardrobe, he set out blithely and felt well equipped for his adventure.

He felt certain that sooner or later the precise, carefully clipped speech of the mysterious stranger would fall on his ear, but in this he was disappointed. Many spoke to him unIntroduced, but they were all men and women of his own race. Some spoke of orange groves and assumed him to have money to invest, but none of the eyes that looked into his belonged to the affable man who had offered nebulous fortunes.

He had not been settled in his hotel

an hour when a letter was brought to him. Tickets again! The inevitable Cook had booked him this time clear through to Peking on the British India line, and he was to pick up a mail steamer at Honolulu, and this time two hundred dollars accompanied the coupons.

It was all very well for him to have been sent to San Francisco, but to be shipped to that northern city of ancient China coeval with Nineveh and Babylon? What could he find in that heart of a great race of four hundred million people living behind those immemorial walls of stone? What would his muscles avail in a land of native, alien-hating people?

It was a long journey, and among all the men he met not one asked him a mysterious question or hinted of knowing his errand. He traveled first class, and on estimating the cost of the journey he found that he was indebted to some unknown party for more than a thousand dollars. Now Thornton knew, as a man of the world, that in this life of ours gifts are not given by strangers for philanthropic motives; he would be expected to render service, and what service? He knew little of the Far East. Occasionally he had eaten the succulent food of the Chinese in a Pell Street restaurant, and once at a reception had spoken with a Chinese student from his old dormitory at Harvard.

But by now he was certain that the mysterious stranger was a Chinaman. He recalled, as he read up what he could find of China in the ship's library, that the man had seemed distressed when he had spoken bitterly about his father. A sentence in a travel book showed him the cause. "A marked trait of the Chinese," the book stated, "is their reverence for parental authority." The writer emphasized this by an anecdote where a pious Chinese gentleman, in order to save a dying father,

sacrificed his son. "The crime of parricide," the book recounted, "is punished by 'Ling Chih' or slicing into one thousand pieces. With a skillful executioner death should not take place until the last stroke of this terrible punishment."

Evidently, then, the agreeable gentleman who had entertained him in New York held these pious opinions and shuddered to talk to a son who spoke harshly of a father.

There was an English civil servant on board who seemed to know a great deal about the East. He seemed taken with Thornton's cheery ways, and as an old Oxford athlete admired the splendidly supple frame of the younger man. Thornton conversed with him freely.

"People talk about China as being mysterious," Thornton said. "Is that true or not? They seemed just ordinary, cheerful folk to me."

"People talk a lot of rot always," the other said, stuffing his pipe with a fragrant mixture. "The more they talk the less they know."

"Conversely, then," Thornton smiled, "you ought to know a lot, for you don't talk much. Tell me, Mr. Sandgate, is China mysterious and secret and non-understandable to us?"

"For those who have eyes to see, it is full of signs," the Englishman said vaguely. "I know it better than most, having been in China since Gordon's day pretty nearly, and I am still on the outside, although I speak well and even write decently in the language." He puffed at his brier. "Do you remember seeing some coolies at Hongkong who seemed to have forgotten to turn up one trouser?"

"I remember," Thornton said, "the right trouser, wasn't it? What about it, Mr. Sandgate?"

"They didn't forget," Sandgate said; "it showed merely they belonged to one of the secret societies, the Triad, I think."

"What is the Triad?" Thornton demanded.

"It used to be an antidynastic society. They wanted the Manchu emperors dethroned. Perhaps they wanted the Mings back. I'm told now they're a nationalist party. It's not wise to mix up in them. If I told what I have heard——"

He paused and relighted his pipe. It was plain he had said more than he intended. "Remember," he advised gravely, "we are guests in the East here of the oldest people of the world. They don't like us. So far they've had to put up with us, but China is waking, and she's waking far faster than Japan ever did. There are four hundred million of them, and they do not fear death. When the time comes they will wipe us out."

"You don't believe that?" said Thornton incredulously.

"I know it," the Englishman retorted. "Last century belonged to Europe—my people. This century belongs to you Americans. But next century will belong to Mother Asia, and China will be in the van. You can't stop it. It's one of the inevitable things written in the book of Fate. I shall be dead, but I pity my grandchildren's children."

"That yellow-peril stuff," Thornton commented. "I've heard that since I was a kid. Nothing to it, Mr. Sandgate."

"I'm glad to be reassured," the elder man commented dryly. "You've never been in China proper yet. I've been here a generation, and many Chinese are my friends, for I have traveled widely in the interior. I tell you that no matter what they say to us those who come to European or American colleges and schools are saying to themselves, 'China for the Chinese.'"

Thornton, although impressed by a man who seemed to know the country so well, thought of him as one of those whom long residence had made fanciful

and nervous, for never afterward could he get Sandgate to speak of secret societies. It was as though the elder men, conscious of having said too much, was seeking to atone by saying nothing. Thornton was piqued at this silence, but vaguely gratified when, at length, Sandgate did partially reopen the subject.

There was an American woman on board, a Mrs. Boyd, wife of a commission merchant at Nanking, who seemed curious as to what brought her attractive young fellow countryman so far afield. Sandgate was listening when Thornton gave a reason.

"I have been engaged," he admitted, "by the publishing house of Moffatt, Dodd & Brown to write a history of the Secret Societies of China."

"Never talk like that," Sandgate cautioned him. "You don't know what folly it is to talk so. China is honey-combed with secret societies, and it isn't healthy to make remarks of that sort."

In spite of himself Thornton was disturbed, and he wondered what part he was to play with this ancient, strangely secretive nation.

Thornton found the Hotel de Peking, to which his book of Cook's vouchers took him, a small hostelry of the second class, outside the walls of the Legation Quarter in the Tartar City, but it was situated in the Viale d'Italia, which had at all events a comprehensible name.

Mrs. Boyd had raised her eyebrows when she found he was not going to a more fashionable house. She herself always stayed at the Hotel des Wagons Lits, where there was central heat and people dressed for dinner every night. Still, if he had come to study Peking no doubt he had made a wise choice.

It was with something like excitement that he registered and asked for any mail that might have come. There was none. Every day for a week he asked

the same question and received the same answer. He began to chafe at the prospect. His money was decreasing and must presently be gone. What would he do then?

Some one told him that the real name of the Viale d'Italia was Ch'ang-an Street—the Street of Eternal Repose—and it seemed a more fitting one in view of his forced inactivity. As a rule Americans call at their consulates, just as Britons call at their clubs, when in far countries, but Thornton was not anxious to meet official America in the Far East. His own notoriety was of too recent a date and had attracted too much attention to be forgotten, so he waited and wished that he had been less lavish in outfitting himself in San Francisco.

Curiously enough it was on the day he realized, almost with panic, that he had come to an end of his funds that he met Joan Carrington.

He had become very lonely, and in a vain search for peace of mind he began to take long walks outside the city walls. He had walked to all the principal attractions within a few miles of Peking—the Temple of the Emerald Clouds, with its marble shrines, lofty *p'ai-lous*, and gates, the Summer Palace, and the Temple of Heaven, and he had decided to try his hand at writing about them for New York magazines, for inactivity was gnawing him.

The day that he met Joan was one of those perfect Peking days of sunshine and cloudless blue. He had gone to the Temple of the Five Pagodas—the Wu-t's-Ssu—on foot as usual instead of joining the tourists, who invariably employed rickshas. Thornton was amazed at the magnificence of this stately temple built by the Son of Heaven who had dwelt so long ago in the purple Forbidden City, capital of the Middle Kingdom. He was retracing his steps to the city when he saw a few hundred yards ahead of him a

girl, either American or European, walking quickly along the road near a Chinese farmyard. Ahead of her was a long gray wall.

It was just as the girl reached the wall that the thing happened. Two poorly dressed native men sprang upon her and threw a sack over her head. She had no time to scream. With a cry of anger Thornton sprang forward, and the two ruffians shuffled off toward the rice fields. When Thornton pulled the sack from the girl's head he looked into the eyes of the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"Are you hurt?" he cried.

"Only angry," she smiled, and then looked at him curiously.

"You're American!" she said, and sighed her relief. "So am I. Where did they go?"

He pointed in the direction they had taken, and replied: "I never thought Chinese ever went so fast. What was it all about?"

"Robbery," she told him. "They stole a gold chain I had around my neck." He could see where the tug had reddened her slender white neck. "I've never had anything like that happen to me all the years I've been here."

"Years?" he queried.

"I live here," she said. "I'm not a wealthy tourist or merchant, as you probably are. I'm just working."

"What luck!" he exclaimed. "I didn't think it could be done."

She wondered at his remark, as he was obviously a gentleman. He was well dressed, courteous, and, although his admiration for her was not hidden, there was none of that insolence in his look that her employer flung at her whenever his glance was turned her way. She suddenly realized that it was late, and the western gate of the city three miles distant. So, being upset over this singular act of violence, she was glad of Thornton's protection.

Long before the two had reached

the city walls he had learned that her father had been a Peking correspondent for an American newspaper syndicate and had died of cholera three years earlier. Instead of going back with her stepmother, who disliked her, she remained in the East, hoping to find employment. It had been a hard job, but she was now stenographer, secretary, and translator for a great American engineering magnate.

"He's really German," she explained, "and hides himself under our flag. The brother, his partner, is a British subject, so nobody can say a word against them." Suddenly she realized she had said more to this stranger than she should have, and changed the subject.

It was bitter, Thornton reflected, that he had met Joan Carrington at a moment when he could not possibly pursue the acquaintance, for how could he tell her of his circumstances, and as for Joan she thought it very strange that a delightful young American who seemed unfeignedly glad to meet her should bid her good-by without expressing a wish to see her again.

In the early hours of the following morning Thornton was awakened, not by any noise, but by that curious certainty—psychic in origin—which warns us of a strange presence.

His room was a small one on the ground floor. It was barely furnished, with a table, bed, and two chairs. Since there was neither electric light nor gas, he could make no quick illumination, and as he sat up in bed he could see nothing in the surrounding gloom.

"Who's there?" he cried. Even as he said this it seemed a stupid exclamation. If any one were in his room it could hardly be for a friendly visit, and why should an enemy respond? A moment later he had found matches and lighted the lamp that stood on a table at the head of his bed.

Sitting motionless in one of the chairs was a Chinaman, proclaimed by his long

blue garment and brilliant green waistcoat to belong to the affluent classes.

"What do you want?" Thornton demanded, hurling the bedclothes from him. He was startled, and betrayed the irritability the emotion brings with it. "If you don't answer I'll wring your neck."

"I am glad," said the intruder, "that you still have courage, health, and resolution."

It was the man who had answered his advertisement on the other side of the world!

"So it's you!" Thornton exclaimed, and sat down heavily on the side of the bed. The first impulse was one of gladness, of relief, of lifted suspense.

"You've cut it pretty fine," he continued. "If you'd have waited till tomorrow to pay me this visit you might have found me absent, Mr.— What am I to call you?"

"Mr. Wang will do," the other said suavely. "Where would you have been?"

"Outside, according to the hotel manager, for he has suddenly developed a mean streak."

"You will observe it no longer," said Mr. Wang. "He has been paid."

"That's kind of you," the other said with a sigh of relief.

"'You can call no deed kind,'" quoted Mr. Wang, "'if it is done in the hope of recompense.'"

"That's what I wanted to know," Thornton said slowly. "I'm not such a fool as to expect you to put up money for nothing. That isn't done by strangers. When am I going to know about it?"

"Now," Mr. Wang returned. "Happiness and trouble stand at every one's gate; yours is the choice which you will invite in."

"I'm for happiness ordinarily," Thornton said slowly; "crazy for it, Mr. Wang, but I don't want to invite happiness *and* trouble."

"'A child's slap on a plow buffalo's ear, and a hint to a wise man are sufficient.'" Mr. Wang seemed copiously supplied with proverbs, but Thornton was finding out that such quotations were inevitable among the educated.

"I'm waiting for the hint to be elaborated," the American returned. "I'm anxious to know why I'm here. I want to be told *why* you've gone to the trouble of importing *me*, about whom you know nothing."

"About whom we know everything," Mr. Wang corrected. "Do not ask how we know. Of your misfortunes we know. You have chased kites and fallen over straws. You have been disgraced who have an honest heart. There is only one way by which you can overcome your enemies. First to be reconciled to your honorable father."

"Even that sounds pretty good to me now," murmured the expatriate.

"And second you must get money and confound your enemies. These are the gateways to the Hall of Secure Peace. We offer you the opportunity to make money."

"To make it honestly?" Thornton demanded.

When he saw the olive cheek of the other flush he felt ashamed at the imputation. Since he had been in China he had rid himself of many an inherited prejudice against this ancient nation. He knew that whether this man was really Mr. Wang or another he was of the higher class Chinaman, a man of honor.

"I didn't mean anything offensive," he said apologetically, "but the prospect of making money and clearing myself is too good to be true."

"With Mr. Sandgate," Wang said, inclining his head, "you conversed much about the institutions of my honorable country. He knew more than he told you, but he knew only that which he was allowed to learn. Listen well to this, Mr. Thornton. You desire, as we

say it, that your enemy be forced to paint your front door. It can be done. You were disgraced because you were said to have sold certain concession secrets to a rival. The plans which had been intrusted to you were stolen by a clerk at the instigation of a rival who is even now in this city."

"That didn't come out at the trial," Thornton cried.

"Only that which it was desired the public should know came out at the trial," Mr. Wang said calmly. "I have learned many things concerning the true facts of the case. If you do what we desire you can go to your honorable father and tell him you come unashamed."

"What must I do?" the American demanded, "before you give me these facts?"

"There may be danger," Mr. Wang said slowly, "but what is danger to one who has courage? Some would shrink from it perhaps, but why should you shrink who dare do what most men would fear?"

"That damned advertisement is beginning to irritate me," Thornton said querulously. "What *am* I to do?"

"When I next see you you must give me your word that you will do what

we want. If you do, there is the reward. If you do not, there is the problem of reaching your august home."

"Without your help?"

"Without our help," agreed Mr. Wang.

"Certainly you are a benevolent being," Thornton declared.

Mr. Wang smiled faintly, but his quotations for every occasion were not forgotten.

"'Benevolence being of the heart, no rules can be set for its acts.'"

"When do you next see me?" Thornton demanded, seeing the other rise and gather his blue robes about him. "I'd like to get this thing settled."

"Three nights hence at the Inn of Tatung, fifteen miles beyond the Middle Gate. You need say nothing to him who keeps the inn. They will be bidden to expect you. For the expenses of the journey and for what you need until then you will be pleased to accept this." Mr. Wang placed what seemed to the penniless Thornton a large sum of money on the bare table. He bowed with the dignity of his race and passed silently into the outer darkness.

Thornton looked at the money, and his eyes opened. "It must be murder!" he said to himself.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

VERY SHORT STORY

By Charlotte Mish

HE was afraid—terribly afraid. He had always been a coward, and now the thought of going to war was a constant horror to him. Thus far he had avoided the draft by a more or less fictitious excuse of physical defect. But now, as he sat in his room, the horror became more and more real to him. Suppose they would "get" him to-morrow! Perhaps even now the summons was on its way to him! He felt sure, positive, that it was. So he took out the revolver in the drawer. Just before he pressed the trigger he heard the sound of other shots somewhere, and then—

"Pore divil!" his landlady told a neighbor the next day. "He was barred from goin' over there, an' whin he heard th' shots an' th' whistlin' an' knew that *peace was here* and he wouldn't never git a chanct to go, 'twas too much fer th' pore lad!"

Tales of the Double Man

By Clyde Broadwell



III.—My Duo-Ego Sweethearts



Being an account of "The Double Man's" strangely abnormal love affairs, compiled by Mr. Broadwell from miscellaneous memoranda written in the diary of Mr. William Gray prior to Gray's collapse and recovery as recounted in the two preceding numbers of THE THRILL BOOK.—EDITOR.

I LOVE, am loved, have wooed, have won, and shall marry a woman whom I never have met, never have seen, and never expect to meet or see!

Mortal voice never breathed her name in my ear, nor have I ever read it in newsprint or otherwise, yet I know that her name is Elaine Brandon and that she dwells in Cape Town, British South Africa, eight thousand miles from myself, William Gray, Wall Street broker, in New York.

I speak to her every day, yet never have spoken a word to her! I have thrilled at her caress, yet never have been caressed by her! Never have my eyes beheld her, I say, even until now, as I write in my diary concerning her, yet her every facial and bodily feature and gesture, her every mood and fancy, are as familiar and dear to me as my own mother's; I should say mothers', because of my plural birth.

You who have read part of my strange history as "The Double Man" will not consider my seemingly fantastic statements either paradoxical, anomalous, or insane. They are absolutely truthful and sane. Let me explain:

While, as William Gray, I never have seen Elaine, nevertheless the moment I fall asleep at night in New York I awaken simultaneously to greet the dawn in Cape Town as Arthur Wadleigh, representative of the London Ivory Company. As Wadleigh I am engaged to Miss Brandon.

Each morning I, William Gray, soulfully animating the body of Wadleigh, go to my window and salute Elaine across her paternal garden and mine own—the rear of her home facing the rear of mine. I shall desist, so far as possible, from the use of my name and Wadleigh's and use the personal pronoun except when exigency compels me to differentiate. It will be so

much simpler thus to explain the apparently contradictory statements with which I began this document.

My explanation will be more readily understood if the reader bear in mind that my physical body remains in New York with Wadleigh's soul within it and that by transmigration I actually become Wadleigh. Conversely, when Wadleigh returns to his own body, ousting me, I return to my body in New York.

Sometimes I wonder if we actually have two souls for the two bodies or one only to share between them. But this theory is too absurd to consider. Nevertheless, I cannot otherwise explain the tremendous occult puzzle which I know scientists hardly can believe fact. I even wonder if I am myself or Wadleigh, and I am certain that Wadleigh often wonders if he be himself or myself.

It is really a difficult task to differentiate between us, so uncannily weird is the intertransmigratory existence which has disturbed our normal human estate.

If I did not know these things as facts—if I did not suffer from the knowledge and endure the experiences I describe—if I did not know that each of us, Wadleigh and Gray, was born of a different mother—I, like you, doubtless might consider myself insane.

However, I am not writing to argue my sanity, but to explain the peculiar status I occupy in the physical and spiritual worlds, and to leave a record for the benefit of posterity and the study of scientists. Permit me, therefore, to resume my narrative:

Elaine always awakens before I do and always greets me with a smile and a kiss blown across the garden shrubbery.

Regularly, before strolling to the office of the London Ivory Company in Cape Town, I vault the low boxwood boundary between our gardens and kiss Elaine. At first this to me was a per-

functory caress, administered entirely in the interest of Wadleigh, as I so considered it. It did not seem fair to blight Wadleigh's love affairs by indifference just because of our unhappy, doubled-up existence, nor was it right to neglect the girl whose troth was pledged to him. I therefore abated nothing in the ardor of my embraces and caresses, despite my thought that I was bestowing them entirely for Wadleigh.

But as the days passed I found, to my horror, that I actually was falling in love with this woman whom physically I never should see or know or caress. I say horror because I am a man of honor, and I am engaged to Erla Kingsley, a Manhattan society girl.

Until these strange occult happenings befell me I actually adored her—Erla, I mean. Now I find myself adoring Elaine. And, what is more, I am growing fonder and fonder of her and more and more jealous of Wadleigh.

I often wonder if it be possible that Wadleigh is jealous of me. Poor fellow! I suppose so. Or am I pitying myself? It is very strange.

Here is sweet Elaine, believing that Wadleigh is kissing her, when really it is I, William Gray, tasting the nectar of her lips, inhaling the fragrance of her tresses, reveling in the glory of her smiles, and enjoying her delightful companionship.

Now that my love for her is become personal, I find myself often wishing I might never exchange bodies with Wadleigh and be compelled to return to mine in New York.

In my business affairs in New York, her vision—Elaine's, I mean—comes before me and I try to woo sleep so that I may cross the eight thousand miles of space to her side in Africa. But Wadleigh is not always susceptible and often keeps me awake in New York longer than I care to be kept

awake. He can do this simply by remaining asleep in Cape Town!

I am afraid that this statement, so clear to me because of my fuller knowledge of the wondrous transitions, may prove incomprehensible to the reader of these memoirs. To make myself clearer, although mayhap I shall but more confuse the facts, there are certain times—certain intervals—in which the occult forces which are chaining our souls in this mystic bondage exchange the exchanges of souls, if I may so express it, so that I become actually myself, William Gray in New York, and he becomes Wadleigh in Africa.

These are the only times that Wadleigh actually sees Elaine and that I actually see my own fiancée, Erla Kingsley. I doubt that I made this point quite as clear in preceding statements concerning my abnormal experiences.

In these intervals, when I am myself and Wadleigh is himself, I gnash my teeth in impotent impatience for the other exchange, so that I may behold Elaine. But this avails me nothing. The immutable law which governs the destinies of men cannot be swerved from its course by human passions. I must needs worship Elaine from afar or in dreams, until I again behold her with the bodily eye of Wadleigh animated by the soul eyes of myself, William Gray. Do I make myself clear?

I shall not attempt to describe the beauty of that dark-haired English girl in another continent. All the adjectives I might use could not do justice to her, nor, for that matter, could they adequately portray the exquisite blond beauty of my own fiancée, Erla Kingsley. Besides, I much fear me that the enraptured word pictures I might limn would be ascribed by the reader to the extravagant exaggerations likely to result from the transports of a lover in describing his beloved.

Never shall I forget one glorious night in her garden arbor—I mean Elaine's arbor, understand, not Erla's. I have such a penchant for diverting from subjects in discussion that it is annoying both to myself and to my friends, and I trust the readers of this difficult-to-explain and difficult-to-understand memoir will be generous and condone me in such offenses against good diction.

Not alone was this evening memorable for the rapture of Elaine's near presence, or the mystic magic of the Afric moon and spangled sky wherein blazed the wondrous constellation of the Southern Cross, but for an incident which may savor of the ridiculous in the telling, yet was fraught with the most poignant agony of realization to me—realization that, physically speaking, I never could hope to win this wonder woman Elaine for mine own.

What a strange maze for normal men to understand! Even the telling of my tale involves me in a labyrinth of words through which it is difficult for me to guide into full comprehension of my case those who may read my script. But I shall write on.

Elaine was inclined to be sad on this particular evening, nor was I without a feeling nearly akin to melancholy, even though happy to be near the girl of my heart's desire.

I had been exceptionally busy all day, and was physically and mentally overtired. Soulfully, however, I experienced no fatigue. But, then, the soul, even though it animate the flesh, cannot control it beyond the limitations immutably set by nature. Man must sleep; he must become tired; he must yield to the demands upon his physical structure, lest he wrack his nerves. Otherwise, no matter how soulfully strong a man may be, his soul must flee the body, thus rushed into decay.

The spell of the African night was upon us, its peace and quiet and mys-

tery weaving gossamer dreams that fitted well with the music of the zephyrs rustling the foliage overhead.

"You are sad, Elaine," I observed.

"And you?"

"Moody, more than sad," I answered.

"You have seemed so different from the old Arthur," she said. "There is some subtle change. I don't know what it is; maybe I dream. But, do you know? *I sometimes think you are a stranger!*"

Her face was pallid in the moonbeams that filtered through the arbor's lattice. Her eyes held a question. Of course I was a stranger, I thought bitterly. I was not Arthur; I was William—

"You dream," I chided gently, although my heart was sore. "Have I been lax in my attentions? Have I hurt your feelings in any way? I have not intended to."

"No, it isn't that," she said. "But there is an aloofness. I do not know just how to describe what I mean. You seem somewhat remoter than you should be—as though your body were here and your spirit elsewhere."

Startled that her woman's intuition had penetrated the mystery in Wadleigh's and my lives, I sought to sway her from her mood.

"Merely imagination, Elaine!" I exclaimed. "The moon's spell; that's all."

"But it's such an insistent feeling!" she said. "I am serious."

"I'm not myself to-night," I said truthfully; then lied: "I'm overwrought from a heavy day's work, Elaine. That may explain."

"Poor fellow!" she sympathized, for she was ever soft-hearted and gentle. "I should let you go home——"

"No, no, Elaine!" I exclaimed, knowing only too well that this would mean an end for the night to the precious hours I might spend with her and a sudden flight back to my body in New York. "I am not so tired as I am nerv-

ous. I wouldn't care to sleep—just yet."

"But you need rest," she chided, "and you must take it. Just doze; let us dream—here, in the moonlight."

I kissed her.

"As you will, dear," I said. "We don't need words, do we?"

She gave me a tender glance that thrilled me.

"You are a lover, Arthur," she murmured. "You seem to understand just how to meet my every mood."

For many minutes we sat in silence. Remote from the world of facts, we dwelt for the time in a paradise of fancy. Gradually the glamour of the night and its enchantment abetted my physical languor in superinducing the sleep I had wished to fight, so that I soon was nodding—nodding—nodding slowly—

And awakened as William Gray—as myself—in New York! While, sitting beside Elaine in that far-off arbor under the Afric moon and stars, slumbered the soul of Arthur Wadleigh beside the girl of his heart!

Here in New York, I was rubbing my eyes and staring at the clock on my mantel. It was far too early to arise, and it seemed so unfair that I should lose those few precious hours with Elaine.

Even as I yawned lazily, I felt sleep again coming upon me—and awoke with a start that brought a low cry from Elaine, beside whom I again was sitting as Arthur Wadleigh.

"You were resting so peacefully," she said, "until that gnat bit you."

I felt the sting of its bite still in my hand.

"I'm glad it did bite," I said with an earnestness that seemed to puzzle her. For she could not understand how, in instantaneous intertransmigrations, I had awakened and slept again in New York, even while sitting beside her in this arbor.

"You were so tired that you fell asleep," she explained. "I didn't wish to disturb you, so I sat as still as I could. Then the gnat began to buzz around us. I tried to chase it away, but it persisted, and finally bit you in the hand. But I killed it," she concluded, pointing to the insect, which had fallen to the ground and lay inert in a patch of moonlight.

An insect's bite, then, had aided Fate in weaving this web the tighter about me, I thought. But I blessed the insect for all that.

Thus actually stung to wakefulness, I passed two more happy hours with Elaine, who was quite solicitous about the tiny wound on my hand. We went into her home, and her mother bathed it with an aseptic lotion, which effectually prevented poisoning. It caused no ill effects then or afterward.

Nor was Elaine the only one to notice something peculiar, some subtle change in my demeanor since the strange visitations of double entity. Erla Kingsley, my fiancée, took me to task one night during one of those stages or intervals in which I was actually myself in my own body and not Wadleigh in my own body or his.

"Sometimes," she said wistfully, "there is something odd in the way you act toward me—as though you did not care for me——"

"Erla!" I exclaimed.

"I mean it! As though you cared for—for—some one else!"

"There is no other," I protested, and with honorable purpose in lying. Why should I blight Erla's life because of what might prove to be a chimera?

Her eyes brightened.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "Do you know? *Sometimes I actually believe you are not with me even when you are with me!*"

"Nonsense!" I sniffed.

"I mean it!" she insisted. "Why, only the other night you fell asleep

while I was talking to you—actually fell asleep! The idea! You never did that before."

I marveled, then remembered an occasion—not the one in the arbor, which I have detailed, but another—when a sudden call upon my slumbers as Wadleigh had been made and I had been awakened by what I thought was the noise of a burglar in my Cape Town residence. After a little search, I had retired and fallen asleep again. It must have been in this interval, guarding Wadleigh's property, that sudden slumber had overtaken me while conversing as myself, William Gray, with Erla Kingsley.

"I was overtired," I explained. "How long was I asleep?"

"Not more than half an hour. Do you forget? What is the matter with you lately? *You seem sometimes to be another man!*"

"Pshaw!" I shrugged, pretending anger. "What nonsense! I've been under a frightful strain lately. The C., B. & Q. deal is telling on my nerves, I guess. It ought to be consummated before long, and then——"

"Then," she interrupted, "you'll be yourself again, poor old boy! I didn't mean to be so mean as to scold."

Was ever man before confronted with such a situation—such a two-continent conundrum?

Who can conceive of a man with two interchangeable bodies and souls eight thousand miles apart? A man who in each existence is entirely cognizant of the business deals and love affairs and domestic matters of his otherwise stranger self? It seems too unbelievable to be true. I admit it, I, who am undergoing this selfsame existence which I declare beyond human belief. Some day, perhaps, science will unravel the puzzle and explain it far better than I can.

The facts interweave with such intri-

cacy of action that even the nimblest wit might find it difficult to follow every ramification. I can merely indicate the problem confronting me by the citation of certain incidents which stand out the most prominently.

There are too many who might sneer at my tale could I not produce verification. So I have taken the precaution, in case my sanity be brought into question, or I be thought a modern Munchhausen weaving wild tales, to preserve every document which passed between myself, Gray, and my other self, Wadleigh, in South Africa. They are in my office safe at No. 4½ Wall Street, New York City.

These papers are mostly in the form of letters, although there are a few agreements and contracts couched in legal phraseology, concerning business relations I established with myself as Wadleigh, after learning that he—that is, my other self—was Cape Town representative of the London Ivory Company.

Similarly, as Wadleigh, I have stored papers in my safe in the offices of the London Ivory Company in Cape Town, showing correspondence and contracts with myself as Gray, acting in New York in a brokerage capacity.

These documents will convince even science, which doubts facts until they are proved, which denies and will deny God exists until He proves He does, forsooth.

Let those who will scoff at this manuscript. So scoffed the ignorant at the theory that the earth was round; so scoffed doubters of Watt until the steam engine was born; so scoffed they at the telephone, the telegraph, the wireless, the submarine, the printing press, the aëroplane, the concrete ship.

In the New York vernacular, I should worry. I know I am telling the truth. Having completed my interruption upon this narrative, an interruption which I consider warranted as a

matter of self-defense, I shall hurry on to the conclusion of this particular tale.

Matters could not continue thus indefinitely without some explanation to both Elaine and Erla. Indeed, a growing strangeness was rifting the lute of our sweet companionship, so that discordant notes were struck.

Ultimately, both as Wadleigh and as Gray, I quarreled with Elaine in Cape Town, and as Gray and Wadleigh I quarreled with Erla in New York. Even the explanations given of my double entity but provoked the scornful wrath of each girl.

Elaine actually went so far as to call me "crazy." Erla, not quite so blunt, nevertheless intimated the same thing when she called me "ridiculous."

I shall draw a veil over the painful experiences I underwent when Elaine broke her engagement with me, as Wadleigh, and Erla broke hers with me, as Gray. I was broken-hearted, or, shall I say, hearts-broken, plural, to be technically correct?

No amount of pleading could change their decisions. I became morose as Wadleigh. I became morose as Gray. My friends in Africa began to shun me. My friends in New York began to shun me.

Doctor Marvin Porter, my family physician in New York, whose father before him was physician for the Gray family before I was born, warns me time and again to go far away for a rest; as though travel would do me any good! Near or far, the interchanging of Wadleigh's and my souls goes on just the same.

Down in Cape Town, my physician, Doctor Philip Spaulding, gives me the same advice, laughing down my vehement declarations that distance or climate has nothing to do with my transmigrations into my other body in New York—that of William Gray. You can see how dreadfully confusing it is to

tell of such matters and how much more dreadful is the experiencing of them.

Some day I shall visit Wadleigh in Cape Town. Yet I am sure that Wadleigh at the same time will try to visit me in New York, and that at the very least we shall pass each other en route.*

However, I may be mistaken. I do not believe it impossible for us to meet, but I do think it possible that our impulses will be the same at the same moment, so far as a visit to each of our other selves is concerned. Yet I always feel I am in error when I say "visit each other," when I know that it is myself visiting myself in each instance. It is the only way that I can make myself clearly understood, however, so I must continue this method of expressing myself so that science and posterity may understand somewhat of my mysterious malady. It is really gruesome.

What does the future hold for Wadleigh and me? The metaphysical enigma which has made my life and his a huge question mark probably will be solved when scientists learn all the facts. They then may be able to fathom the cause of our synchronous spiritual flights across the eight-thousand-mile abyss of space which separates our physical bodies but becomes merely a step for our souls.

Shall I ever win back Elaine?

Shall I ever win back Erla?

Shall I ever again be myself, singly, or shall I always live doubled in body and in soul?

*Such a visit as Mr. Gray mentions above actually was attempted later, as told originally in "The Double Man," the first story of this wonderful series. It transpired exactly as Mr. Gray surmised it would, Gray visiting Cape Town and Wadleigh running up to New York, passing each other on steamers headed in opposite directions. It must be understood that only the return of Mr. Gray to sanity has made it possible to obtain these facts in the earlier stages of his mysterious malady.—EDITOR.

And if I win back Elaine, shall it be as William Gray's soul in Wadleigh's body or as Wadleigh's soul in Gray's body?

And if I win back Erla, shall it be as Gray's soul in Wadleigh's body, or as Wadleigh's soul in Gray's body?

Or, in either case, shall I win either girl actually as myself?

What does the veil of the dread future conceal?

I have a vague foreboding of coming evil—not that enough has not been heaped upon me already, but that more will be added to the heavy burden I already am carrying, both as Wadleigh and as Gray.

NOTES BY THE AUTHOR OF THESE MEMOIRS.

The foregoing revelations, contained in Mr. Gray's diary, were most difficult to transcribe. Indeed, had it not been for Mr. Gray's restoration to reason through the "death" of Mr. Wadleigh in Cape Town, I doubt if the world ever would have been given this glimpse behind the arras that veils the invisible and unknown.

Mr. Gray agreed with me that his diary would be of invaluable help to scientists. So together we labored over the hieroglyphic scrawls he had written and which, alone, I never could have deciphered in entirety. I have purposely quoted the word "death," in referring to Mr. Wadleigh's demise, as Mr. Gray insists there is more than a possibility that his other self, Arthur Wadleigh, is not dead, but is in a state of suspended animation.

Deeply moved to compassion by the tragic fate, or fates, as you will, of "The Double Man," and in a spirit of profoundest sympathy, I wrote to Miss Erla Kingsley, detailing the facts in the strange metempsychosis between Mr. Gray and Mr. Wadleigh. I pleaded with all my power that she reconsider

the severance of her engagement to Mr. Gray, and concluded my appeal with the statement that Mr. Gray, since Wadleigh's "death," had been restored to normal mental poise.

In reply, Miss Kingsley wrote:

MY DEAR MR. BROADWELL: Your letter profoundly impressed me. I had no idea that Mr. Gray had endured such suffering through metaphysical misfortunes which he could not control. Indeed, had I known all the facts, nothing could have prevented me from attending him in his illness. When he explained to me his unbelievable experiences, I could not understand him. It was all so complex and he spoke so wildly that I ascribed his statements to insanity. Ultimately, as you have informed me, he actually became insane. I reproach myself, as I am convinced my hasty action in canceling our engagement helped greatly in wrecking his mind. But I rejoice that he has recovered. Inasmuch as science has proved he spoke the truth, even if science as yet is unable to explain his case, my anger has become heartfelt sympathy and sorrow for him and for his even more unfortunate counterpart, Mr. Arthur Wadleigh, in Cape Town, who, you inform me, is dead. My heart also goes out to Miss Elaine Brandon, Mr. Wadleigh's sweetheart, whose share in this mystic quadrangle of Fate so closely resembles mine. Indeed, from your remarks concerning her, I gather she is a most adorable and lovable person. I shall write to her, presuming upon her sorrow and mine as a basis for intruding upon her and expressing my boundless sympathy. Never before in the world's history have two women undergone such harrowing experiences in their betrothals. I dare say none others ever will face such dread circumstances again. Permit me to thank you, Mr. Broadwell, for your interest. Mr. Gray needs no forgiveness from me, but if he believes so, he has it. Really, I am the one who should and shall ask for his forgiveness. Sincerely yours,
ERLA KINGSLEY.

Armed with this letter, I went to Gray's office. He was overjoyed to learn that Erla at last understood and believed his marvelous story. But his joy was overshadowed as he suddenly realized that he no longer loved Erla, but *Elaine!*

He told me of this new dilemma, occasioned by Erla's letter.

"This puts me in an awful fix, Broadwell," he said. "I love Elaine, whom my physical eyes never have seen, but whom I saw with my soul. When Erla writes to me how can I reply to her? The engagement's off——"

"But you can resume it," I interrupted.

"I don't want to."

"But you *must!*"

"Must?" he inquired.

"Yes—or break Erla's heart."

"What of mine?"

What could I say? Nothing; absolutely nothing. So I desisted. I believe, though, that some happy consummation will evolve from this unhappy dispensation of Fate.

In my mail to-day was a courteous letter from Miss Elaine Brandon, former fiancée of Mr. Arthur Wadleigh. I append it here:

MY DEAR MR. BROADWELL: I have just received the dearest letter from Miss Erla Kingsley, who informed me of your kindly interest in the strange case of Mr. Wadleigh and his co-ego, Mr. Gray. Now that Mr. Wadleigh is dead, it is too late for me to make amends to him for my reproaches and hasty annulment of our engagement. No one knows—except God and myself—how much I have suffered since I learned the truth. My heart lies buried with Arthur in his tomb. He was such a splendid man before the dread circumstances that linked him with Mr. Gray and robbed him of reason, hope, love, and life. May God rest him! I never shall love or wed any other man. I am writing to ask that in publishing the strange facts in this case you spare no adjectives in heaping upon me the scorn and shame due me for having unjustly adjudged Arthur. For Mr. Gray I have the profoundest sympathy. I sincerely hope that he and Miss Kingsley will be happy together. As for myself—I shall be happy only when the curtain of life falls and I can seek with my soul that of the man I loved, still love, shall love, and yet wronged so cruelly and unjustly in life. Please convey my gratitude to Doctor Mordaunt P. Dale, whose able thesis on the case, coupled with Miss Kingsley's letter to me, opened my eyes to the true worth of my lost lover. My one hope and prayer is, that those other two,

Mr. Gray and Miss Kingsley, may never again become involved in such an awe-inspiring and fearful maze of superhuman mystery and contradiction. To you, sir, my best wishes in your studies of this problem and my sincerest regard. Cordially,

ELAINE BRANDON.

I hesitated long before I finally permitted Mr. Gray to see this letter. As I had feared, it plunged him into deepest dejection. Miss Brandon's statement that she never would love or wed another must have seared his heart. I saw his eyes fill with tears, and he breathed heavily, as though under tremendous mental strain. However, I could not do otherwise, and be just to Miss Kingsley, who was willing to resume her former relations with Mr. Gray.

Up to the moment of writing this, Gray has remained obdurately opposed to resuming his engagement to Erla.

Meantime, science still stands baffled

in the presence of a new occult mystery which may be on the threshold of solution because of some remarkable phenomena reported to Doctor Mordaunt P. Dale, the eminent psychologist and fellow of the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research, from his colleague in science, Doctor Lucien Trebaux, the French savant, who is watching and waiting for developments in far-off Cape Town, British South Africa.

So soon as I can translate the scientific jargon of these two eminent gentlemen into ordinary everyday English, I shall make public the new facts in the case of "The Double Man" through the columns of THE THRILL BOOK, to which I am deeply indebted for the uniform courtesy shown me, and without which magazine, which fills a long-felt need, I could not otherwise reach such a large circle of readers.



THE HEART'S HORIZON

By Philip Kennedy

LAST night we did not meet because a tryst
 Held you with your anointed God, and I
 Who have no God but you must wonder why
 A new love on an old love should subsist.
 Yet on these shreds a great dream can exist
 Or go into the wilderness and die.
 Ah! love, far down the dead and vacant sky
 The sun's warm fingers weave the twilight mist.

These evenings gather like a splendid storm
 That fills the heart's horizon like the night.
 Beyond these days huge clouds collect and form
 Pierced by their sudden shafts of ribboned light;
 But all the air is breathing and is warm
 Where I stand dreaming on our hidden height.

The Opium Ship

H. Bedford-
Jones

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Sir Gerald Desmond, late officer of his majesty's R. F. C., broke and drunk in Manila, picks up a consumptive Irish fiddler, Michael O'Sullivan, and the two become involved in a free fight with the native constabulary. From this brawl they are rescued by an unknown, and when Desmond comes to his senses, it is to find O'Sullivan and himself are shanghaied on the schooner *San Gregorio*, bound for Mindoro Island. Aboard the schooner are the wealthy owner, Don Gregorio Salcedo y Montes, his daughter, the beautiful Dona Juliana, bound for his plantation, and Señor Arevalo, a rich Filipino, who is a smuggler of opium. Desmond attempts to defend the fiddler from the brutal half-caste mate, and O'Sullivan kills the mate with a revolver. Then the two Irishmen, in the midst of a raging typhoon, start taking over the control of the ship. They set Arevalo to work with the crew, subject Canaughan, the skipper, with threats and firearms, and commandeer his cabin. But Arevalo, aided by the crew, whom he has bribed to serve him, imprisons the captain below decks and kills Don Gregorio with poison fumes. The Irishmen find Dona Juliana, whom they take under their protection against Arevalo, who wishes to force her into marrying him. Desmond rescues the skipper, and the three men, barricaded in the stern cabins with Dona Juliana and the ship's stores, determine to await developments of the morrow. They have heard Arevalo and their adversaries speak of a mysterious ship called the *Chang Yan*, which Arevalo hopes will soon meet the *San Gregorio*. The *Chang Yan*, a Chinese junk, commanded by Prince Chan, an opium smuggler, comes into view of the *San Gregorio*, and starts transshipping a large cargo of smuggled opium to the schooner. Desmond sees an imprisoned white woman on the junk, and, dropping overboard, swims to the junk and rescues her. Then he sets fire to the junk, and, with the woman, Rosemonde Burley, swims back to the schooner. But the Chinese crew of the junk, driven overboard by the fire, aided by the schooner's crew, attack the fugitives in the stern cabins. Arevalo and Captain Canaughan are killed in the fray, and Dona Juliana is taken captive. That night a hurricane wrecks the schooner on Paracel Island, the crew land, taking to the boats, and leaving Rosemonde, Desmond, and O'Sullivan on the schooner. In the morning Prince Chan comes down to the ship to parley for terms between the two parties. Balderson and his three white fellow seamen of the schooner's crew, have quarreled with the Chinese sailors. He suggests to Desmond that they join forces against the yellow, in order to secure from the Chinese the cargo of opium and the large sum of money left by Arevalo for its purchase. Prince Chan offers to give up Dona Juliana if Desmond and his friends will leave the schooner and take to the sea in one of the small boats. Desmond appears to agree with the proposal, Juliana is safely restored, then she, Rosemonde, Desmond, and O'Sullivan take to the small boat. But instead of putting out to sea, Desmond, wanting to have a try for Arevalo's money, lands on a near-by quarter of the island. That night Desmond awakes to the report of a distant pistol shot, and finds that O'Sullivan is missing. He sets out to find the fiddler, toward the enemy's camp, and finds on the beach the body of a murdered Chinese sailor. Then he discovers that the small boat of the Chinese is missing. Going on, he overhears Balderson and one of his men talking, which reveals to him O'Sullivan's ruse in seeming to make friends with Balderson, and also the disappearance of the Chinese boat from the beach. O'Sullivan has set adrift the boat, to the bottom of which is lashed the chest with Arevalo's money. Desmond, having brought O'Sullivan back to camp, the party sets out in the other small boat to overtake the drifter. Overaking it, they take on board the treasure chest, and continue their course over the open sea toward the colony of Annam.

CHAPTER XII.

O'SULLIVAN PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT.

INSTEAD of reaching the mainland within ten hours, as Desmond had hopefully stated, the boat was two days at sea. It was not until close to sunset of the second day that she came into the river mouth under the headland of Faifoo. Only thirty kilometers to the north was Tourane, but Desmond, being no seaman, was glad enough to see a civilized town where he struck land.

True, Faifoo was purely Chinese in looks and population—one of the strange bits of northern civilization that may be found set down as disjointed points in Annam—but it was none the less civilized. The natives in the fishing sampans spoke French after their fashion, and at the landing quay French was the universal tongue.

During these two days the situation aboard the boat had become tinged with a vague unpleasantness—at least, so far as Desmond was concerned. In Arevalo's chest he had found an even two hundred thousand dollars in bank notes. When he spoke of dividing this Doña Juliana had with much dignity refused any share of it except a sum sufficient to take her home to Manila; she stated frankly that she was wealthy and did not need it.

Rosemonde likewise refused.

"It is true that I am a nurse," she said with a touch of hauteur, "but I am so by choice and not by necessity, Monsieur Desmond! Thank you. I prefer to do without it."

Desmond had no knowledge whatever that, while he had slept, Michael Terence O'Sullivan had entertained the two ladies with a life history of Sir Gerald Desmond which was largely fable, but true enough to facts to leave the baronet dead broke. Thus Desmond could not understand the double refusal to touch the money.

"Then it's between us, Michael Terence," he said finally. "Shut up the box and stow it away, me lad, and we'll settle it when we get ashore."

He was quite well aware that in landing at any civilized port their story was going to create a sensation—and the chest of money was going to create suspicion. Therefore, when they discovered at the Faifoo quay that it was taken for granted they were a coasting party of visitors from Tourane, Desmond was hugely relieved. He saw difficulties vanishing, no port officer being in evidence, and he made inquiries about a hotel.

There was no hotel, it proved, except one kept by an Annamese; however, two rooms for guests were maintained at the Résidence, which the quay porters recommended. The French resident being in charge of the place, Desmond knew that the ordeal must be faced. So, hiring porters to carry the ironwood box and their other effects, he gave the word and they started across the Chinese city.

"Leave the talking to me," said Rosemonde as Desmond was bemoaning the inquisition which would come. He began now to realize why Captain Canaughan had been daunted by the same predicament.

"Leave the talking to me, and it will be arranged. I have my papers and a tongue."

"But I must go back to Manila!" exclaimed Doña Juliana, giving Rosemonde a look that was by no means sweet. "If you tell them a host of lies there will be trouble——"

Rosemonde tossed her chin in air. "Ho! Lies? *Mais, non!* I shall tell them the exact truth—only I shall leave out whatever I desire. You shall go back safely, Doña Juliana, but remember you cannot go from here. We must go to Tourane, and then to Haiphong or elsewhere to catch a Manila boat. We cannot hasten matters."

Desmond perceived with growing uneasiness that there was a distinct coldness between the two ladies. He unfortunately commented upon it and deplored it, and the chill grew more observable. O'Sullivan, meantime, was walking close behind the porter who carried the box containing two hundred thousand in cash.

Upon reaching the *Résidence*, the dusk of evening settling upon the town, the party was met by Monsieur Jacquard, the resident. He proved to be a burly, bearded Frenchman, more artist than political agent, who received them with open arms and exceeding great courtesy. His wife took charge of Rosemonde and Doña Juliana, he himself conducted Desmond and O'Sullivan to a room, and at sight of the latter's fiddle case he cried out joyfully, for he himself was a musician.

Supplied with razors, clean clothes, and all things necessary, Desmond and the fiddler set about making themselves presentable. They purposely delayed progress, however, in order that Rosemonde might have an opportunity to settle matters. At length, looking like new men in their "whites," and leaving the ironwood box tucked away beneath a cot, they followed a native boy to the library, where Rosemonde and their genial hosts awaited them. Doña Juliana, it seemed, was prostrated by a severe headache, and did not appear.

"The formalities are finished—the story is told—and I congratulate Monsieur Desmond upon reaching safety," said the resident. "What a tale! It is a veritable epic. And now let us dine, my friends; if the salt has not hardened the gay fingers of Monsieur O'Sullivan we shall have music later."

"If ye knew what was in that box upstairs there'd be music," murmured the fiddler, upon Desmond's translation. The Jacquards knew no English, and O'Sullivan knew no French, which was perhaps just as well.

While they dined, amid the sparkling silver and lights of the *Résidence*, another small boat had moored beside the one which they had lately abandoned at the landing quay. A brisk interchange of Chinese, and its crew, bearing a seaman's chest in their midst, vanished among the winding, twisting streets of the Chinese city. Behind them, their boat slowly settled and sank; the plug had been knocked out. Only coolies had observed their arrival, and these would say nothing of it.

Desmond, from the table talk, divined that Rosemonde had pictured the schooner as wrecked on Paracel Island, whither the *Chang Yan* had put in for water; and that she had accompanied Desmond and the others in the schooner's boat, after finding that the junk would remain at the island to repair damages caused by the hurricane.

There was room for disquiet, however, chiefly because of Doña Juliana. Desmond regretted the seeming lack of harmony that existed, and was at a loss for a reason. However, finding himself engaged in entertaining the fat and placid Madame Jacquard, he gave up all other thought and devoted himself to his hostess with some success.

After dinner O'Sullivan tinkered with his fiddle, Monsieur Jacquard opened his piano, and these two gave themselves up to the universal language of music. Madame Jacquard departed to visit Doña Juliana with motherly solicitude, and Desmond found himself with Rosemonde, unheeded by the two musicians.

"You look melancholy, my Irishman!" said Rosemonde, smilingly inspecting him.

"And why not?" demanded Desmond dolefully. "Here we've won out, and what's the end? You and Juliana unpleasant to each other, me and the fiddler wondering at it, and every one unhappy all around. Thunder o' Finn! If I could understand women——"

Rosemonde uttered a trill of gay laughter. Then she sobered quickly.

"You should be ashamed of yourself," she returned gravely. "Do you know what's wrong with that poor girl upstairs? She's ill with shame and love and heartsickness over your brutality. *Mon Dieu!* You've treated her with a cold politeness—ugh!"

"Divil take it!" exclaimed Desmond, astonished. "Would you have the nerve to insinuate that she—she——"

"Loves you?" broke in Rosemonde coolly. "Of course she does. Any fool could see it. And you've flirted outrageously with her."

"I have not," said Desmond flatly, a slow flush rising to his brow. "I've said no more than any man would say to a pretty girl, upon me word! It's you that I think of by day and night, Rosemonde——"

"You have no lack of assurance," she said, eying him with a cold appraisal. "Besides, why?"

"Why?" repeated Desmond, perplexed.

"*Mais, oui—pourquoi?*" If there was a smile in her eyes he failed to see it. "I am an old woman——"

"You're twenty-two, for ye told me so yourself," interpolated Desmond.

"*La!* I am a widow, and who loves a widow? A poor broken thing——"

"Listen to me now!" Desmond leaned forward. "Fairy mistress, why will ye be tormenting me so? I love you with all me soul—and it's not the outside of you that I love most, Rosemonde; it's all of you! It's the flaming spirit that makes *you!* Maid, wife, or widow, I'd love ye all the same. Praise be, what difference does the past make to the future?"

Rosemonde listened, a sudden whiteness in her face as the earnest force of Desmond's appeal reached her with its conviction. At this instant, however, the music ceased, and Monsieur Jac-

quard whirled his piano stool about with a triumphant flourish.

"*Mes amis*, is our duet satisfactory?"

"Admirable!" responded Rosemonde with enthusiasm.

"Teach him to play Shan Gow's horn-pipe, me lad," suggested Desmond-hopefully, but Rosemonde, stifling a yawn, stated that she meant to retire. Madame Jacquard appeared, and the two departed in company.

The good lady returned presently with word that Doña Juliana would be none the worse in the morning, and promised a speedy recovery from her trying experiences. Desmond talked over the situation with the resident, and ascertained that the best means of reaching Tourane and civilization would be to await the next coastal steamer, which would be in three days' time.

"Of course," commented Jacquard with a shrug, "you might summon an automobile from Tourane, or you might take a sampan from here. However, we shall be only too happy to have all of you with us for a day or two, and I think the ladies need the rest."

"Agreed, and many thanks to you," assented Desmond. With sudden panic he realized that at Tourane their paths would part; Rosemonde would go to her nursing station at Ben Ho.

"And you will return to Manila with Doña Juliana, I presume?"

"No," said Desmond. "I'm going to America. When I was playing in hard luck some time ago I swore that I would become an American, and, now that my luck has turned, I shall keep the vow."

"Congratulations!" said the good resident, an intense admirer of *l'Amérique*. "But we must not keep these gentlemen from their needed rest, my dear. I trust that a bed will be acceptable, eh?"

"It'll be Paradise," and Desmond smiled with an effort. He was thinking about Rosemonde, and her words regarding Doña Juliana.

When he and the fiddler were alone in their room, Desmond turned suddenly to his friend.

"Look ye now, Michael Terence!" he said gravely. "I have a question to ask of ye, for it's an observant man ye are; and I want ye to tell me the truth. Have I been actin' toward Miss Juliana in any but a gentlemanly fashion?"

The pinched features of the fiddler passed from astonishment into admiring perplexity.

"Ah, have ye now!" said O'Sullivan. "And who'd be blaming you, sir? Sure, the lady has the starlight in her eyes, and *ceol sidhe* in the sweet voice of her——"

"Devil take ye!" muttered Desmond angrily. "Listen to me, will you? Have ye seen any signs that the lady had a kind spot in her heart for me?"

"And who wouldn't, sir? Where's the colleen would not listen to the likes of you now? If there's any finer, handsomer gentleman on this side the world that——"

"Thunder o' Finn! Shut your face and go to bed!" roared Desmond, turning out the lamp to cover his mingled anger and confusion. He rolled in for his first real night's sleep in some time, and managed to forget his troubles in the arms of Morpheus.

With the morning, he was amazed and overjoyed to find that the sky was clear. Around the breakfast table were gathered the entire party; Doña Juliana met him with a smiling greeting and a warm handgrip, while she and Rosemonde had plainly adjusted all differences.

"Spendin' the night together did them good, for they're thick as thieves this morning," he reflected. "But whether it did *me* any good is another question."

The resident, who with his clerical assistants comprised almost the entire French group in the city, devoted himself to his guests. Rosemonde and Doña Juliana spent the day shopping

with Madame Jacquard, while Desmond and O'Sullivan accompanied their host upon a ricksha tour of the place.

Somewhat to his surprise, Desmond discovered that this unknown city of Fiafoo possessed not only antiquity, but history, having been conquered both by Chinese and Japanese. The fiddler, however, took but small interest in ancient temples and ruins, and at the Nippon bashi decided to return to the Résidence and make some obscure and vague repairs to his fiddle case. Desmond acquiesced, for he guessed that O'Sullivan was uneasy about leaving the iron-wood treasure box alone.

Upon returning home with the resident, however, Desmond went at once to his room and was astonished not to find O'Sullivan there. Before he had time to call one of the native boys, Monsieur Jacquard appeared at the door, looking much perturbed.

"Monsieur Desmond! I—ah—your friends request your presence in the garden," he exclaimed with some hesitation. "There appears to be unhappiness in the air, alas! Me, I confide it to you, I find there is always lack of ease where the ladies are concerned and——"

Desmond was finding the same thing. He sought the little garden around which the Résidence was built, and there discovered Michael Terence O'Sullivan and Doña Juliana. Desmond stifled a groan, for Juliana had plainly been weeping, and the fiddler looked extremely disconcerted.

"*Me voici*, as the divil said to Faust," greeted Desmond with forced lightness. "Well, my friends? And what's been bringing the tears to your sweet eyes, Miss Juliana? Has this wild fellow been giving you any of his blather——"

Doña Juliana held out her hand, her eyes meeting the gaze of Desmond with a misty tenderness.

"Dear Mr. Desmond!" she said quietly. "I have never thanked you for

all your kindness and help—but, believe me, I am not ungrateful! What with the danger and grief for my poor father——”

“Ah, don’t worry yourself with little things, sweet lady!” said Desmond quickly, and lifted her hand to his lips. “The honor of serving you is enough to make any man happy, and it’s proud I am of the honor.”

“Thanks and friendship are so little to give in return for such help as yours!” said Juliana, a faint smile lighting through her tears. “It seems now like some awful dream, and you and Mr. O’Sullivan have been such good angels that I shall pray for you always—and please, please be kind to me in your thoughts.”

Disengaging her hand, Juliana turned away swiftly and departed.

Desmond watched after her until she was gone; then he whirled. O’Sullivan met his eyes with an obvious uneasiness.

“Well?” said Desmond. “And what’s the meanin’ of all this, if you please? What’s been botherin’ Miss Juliana, anyhow?”

“I was doin’ me best for you, sir,” said the fiddler anxiously.

“What’s that? What d’ye mean?”

“Well, I minded what ye said to me last night about the lady an’ all, so I did be puttin’ in a good word for ye, sir. How was I to know it ’u’d bring the tears to her sweet face now? And the more I said——”

“Oh, the divil——” Desmond gasped, wordless for a moment. Before the anger that swept into his face poor O’Sullivan turned him about and fled incontinently.

A groan broke from Desmond as he realized that the blundering O’Sullivan had entirely misunderstood their talk of the previous evening. He started wrathfully after the fiddler, then checked himself. The dumb reproach of O’Sullivan’s eyes smote him.

“Thunder o’ Finn!” he exclaimed in

dismay. “Now he’s put me into hot water and no mistake; there’s no tellin’ what the honest fool has been sayin’ to her. But it’s me own fault for not makin’ the matter clear to him; he meant it for me own good, bless his floundering heart! I can’t find it in me soul to be chiding him.”

Accordingly he sought his room, and at sound of his cheerful whistle the fiddler’s pinched features assumed a grin of delight that all was well. Nor could Desmond bring himself to tell O’Sullivan the disturbing truth.

CHAPTER XIII.

PERSONALLY CONDUCTED.

DINNER was just being concluded that evening when Monsieur Jacquard was summoned from the coffee and cigars with word that a gentleman wished to speak to him on business.

The ladies had departed to the parlor. Desmond and O’Sullivan smoked for a few minutes, when their host reappeared, bringing with him a Chinese clad in spotless flannels, whose French was better than that of Desmond.

“This is Monsieur Mow Jung, of Tourane,” and at the resident’s introduction Mow Jung bowed and shook hands. “He arrived here this afternoon on his way north, and chanced to hear about the arrival of your party. As he is going on to Tourane to-night he has most kindly offered to place his craft at your disposal. This is naturally a question for your decision.”

Desmond, of course, had no earthly suspicion that any other survivors of the *San Gregorio* had reached Faifoo. He had been perfectly willing to break into his packages of bank notes in order to secure a general passage home.

This courtly offer of a passage up to Tourane surprised and gratified him, not for the slight saving in money, but because the French coasters were not elegant boats; besides, it offered another

day of intimacy with Rosemonde, which would have been hard to find aboard a coaster.

Therefore he considered the matter. Monsieur Mow Jung was very urbane and smiling, and made himself distinctly agreeable; his boat was a schooner operating under power, and the party could have the entire rear cabins to themselves. The resident knew of Mow Jung as a merchant of Tourane and believed him to be reliable.

Desmond led the way to the parlor and put the case before Rosemonde and Doña Juliana. They promptly seized the chance to avoid the publicity of the steamer trip, the more so as Mow Jung seemed to be very much a gentleman. He offered to delay starting until sunrise, and promised to land them in Tourane in time for luncheon. And upon this his kindness was warmly thanked and his offer accepted. Monsieur Jacquard undertook to set the party aboard the schooner before seven in the morning, and Mow Jung, with many bows, took his leave.

The resident now summoned O'Sullivan to the music room, while his wife departed with Rosemonde and Doña Juliana to get their packing done and secure a good night's rest. Desmond, after vainly endeavoring to tempt Rosemonde into a stroll in the garden, bade them good night and settled himself moodily by the piano with a cigar.

Halfway through the first selection, O'Sullivan broke a string. Monsieur Jacquard left off playing until the fiddler had tuned up, and O'Sullivan, while testing his new string, evoked a cadence that drew a cry of applause from their host. But O'Sullivan lowered his violin with a white look about his lips.

"What the divil did be makin' me play that now?" he exclaimed.

"Again!" cried Monsieur Jacquard, and seated himself at the piano. "Ah—a *gigue*——" and he began an accom-

paniment. O'Sullivan tucked the fiddle under his chin and played for an instant, then shook his head.

"Tell him that it's a bad tune to be playing now," he implored Desmond. "Bad luck to it! Whatever drove it into me head I can't see."

"What was it, then?" demanded Desmond, laughing as he checked Monsieur Jacquard.

"It was the *caoine* o' the banshee, if ye must know," said O'Sullivan sourly. "And it's bad luck for me, if not for you."

Their host shrugged his shoulders when Desmond had interpreted, and without protest swung into a lilted air that made O'Sullivan forget all about his banshee music for the remainder of the evening. Nor did the fiddler make further reference to it at the time.

With daybreak the hospitable Jacquards provided an excellent breakfast, together with a basket of luncheon in case the arrival at Tourane was delayed, and insisted upon accompanying their guests to the wharf. The farewells were brief, for Mow Jung was impatient to get under way; a handshake, an exchange of Gallic embraces, and the lines were cast off.

The boat proved to be a delightful surprise in that she was clean and free of the myriad pests of the nautical tropics. Besides Mow Jung, four men were visible; the engine was churning away, and at a good clip the schooner passed the river bar, rounded the headland, and struck out for the north with a flood of sunrise gold transforming her into a craft of faerie.

"We're off on the last lap at last!" exclaimed Desmond, but none too cheerfully, as they headed north. "Will you show us to the cabins, Monsieur Mow Jung? The ladies might like to open their effects."

O'Sullivan had long since vanished below in the wake of the ironwood box, to which he clung like a bur. Mow

Jung stepped to the companionway, and with a smiling caution to the ladies to mind the ladder, passed downward. Doña Juliana followed; but as Rosemonde set foot on the ladder Desmond touched her arm.

"Rosemonde, will ye give me half an hour in private? I want to speak to you out on the deck under the white sunlight, fairy mistress. It's the last chance I'll have, mostlike——"

For a long moment she met the level gaze of his blue eyes, and a smile crept into her face. But Desmond could not interpret this smile.

"Surely, Monsieur Desmond, you have deserved that slight favor. If you think Doña Juliana will not be jealous at least."

"Plague take it!" muttered Desmond. "I wish she'd think more of herself and less of Miss Juliana! And it's remarkable what friends they are now, those two——"

He broke off to follow the others.

Gaining the passage below, he found Mow Jung ushering the two ladies into a stern cabin, cramped in space, but lit by the deck skylight into cheerful seeming. The urbane Celestial turned to Desmond with a smile.

"Your friend, I think, is in the other cabin—the door to your left. I regret that we have so little space to offer, but since the journey will be so short, perhaps that will not be an inconvenience."

To Desmond, as he turned toward the indicated door, it occurred that Mow Jung's smile was a trifle too urbane, too suave—as though the smooth words concealed some cunning *double entente*. But he laughed at the thought, telling himself that of late he had grown too suspicious, and flung open the door.

Of what then occurred he had only a very vague notion. A flaming report burst out in front of him; a crushing weight seemed to strike through his chest with agony, and the acrid fumes

of powder gripped his throat. He felt himself falling helplessly, and his last thought was a wonder whether O'Sullivan had murdered him for the sake of the ironwood chest. At the thought he tried to laugh in dumb misery—and knew no more.

"Couldn't take no chances with him, huh?" A huge figure stooped above Desmond's body. "Open up that port an' let some light in here."

A port was opened, lighting the darkened cabin. Balderson straightened up above the prostrate Desmond, the latter's automatic in his crimsoned hand.

"He's done, huh? Where's the box?"

In the light were disclosed the shapes of Balderson, his two remaining comrades, and Prince Chan; no others had been able to crowd into the little cabin. Upon the lower of the two bunks against the wall lay Michael Terence O'Sullivan, firmly bound and gagged; above the rag that gagged him his dark eyes gazed in lurid horror upon the scene.

"Where's the box, huh?" repeated Balderson.

Prince Chan had been drawing something from beneath the bunks; it was the ironwood chest. About it was a rope which O'Sullivan had tied to replace the burst lock.

"All correct, I think," said the Manchu unexcitedly. "Have you a knife?"

At sound of a stifled scream from somewhere aft Balderson half turned to the door.

"The women! Mebbe we'd better see to them first——"

"My friends have already attended to them," and Prince Chan laughed smoothly.

"Aw, hell!" broke in one of Balderson's men. "Make sure o' the coin first, you fool!"

Balderson stroked his yellow beard with his bloody paw and nodded. His third man had already passed a knife to the Manchu, who stooped and cut

the line that held the box. Crowding in upon him, the others pressed him close as they hurled up the lid.

The ironwood box was empty.

With a roaring oath of wild fury Balderson swung up the automatic which he still held. Prince Chan was staring at the empty box, stupefied; the giant's weapon brained him before he had dreamed of treachery. As his body tumbled across the box the two men whirled on Balderson.

"Good Lord, Baldy!" cried one, aghast. "He ain't double-crossed us. It was this harp that come with the box. Now them chinks will croak us——"

Balderson roared with mad laughter, born not of mirth, but of fury unutterable.

"Did ye think he was goin' to let us live, huh?" he snarled. "Now we got to clean out the chinks—all of 'em—then take this blasted hooker and head south. We can foller the coast to the Bangkok River, and, once in Siam, we're safe. Get me? Safe with the opium an' all. Dump this chink under the bunk——"

Taking heart from his wild exuberance, they rolled the dead prince under the bunk and concealed his body by means of the box and O'Sullivan's fiddle case.

"But what about the yeller skipper?" demanded the man King. "There's him and his four and the six others."

"I'll bring in the skipper now and settle him," said Balderson. "Then we'll make this mick talk, huh? The four men on deck are safe until we want to tackle 'em. Two o' this feller's men are down for'ard; they're safe, too. There's four with the women; we'll clean them out first, an' take the others as they come down the companion to see what the shootin's about. Huh?"

"Good enough!" exclaimed King, and the third man nodded.

Balderson strode to the door, left it

ajar, and vanished. Two minutes later he came into sight again, and this time Mow Jung accompanied him. As the yellow skipper entered the cabin King drove forward with his knife; Mow Jung, a smile still on his lips, slipped quietly to the floor and was with his ancestors.

"Hell of a lot o' loot you get!" and Balderson kicked the body aside. "Or us, either, huh? Haul out that man!"

O'Sullivan was dragged from his berth and the gag stripped from him. Balderson looked down at him with a jeer and planted a boot in his ribs.

"Where's the stuff that was in the box huh?"

But the fiddler, gasping from that one kick, fell back limply. From the corner of his contorted lips trickled a thin stream of red.

"Let him lay, and settle them chinks," said King with an oath. "The stuff's here, that's sure. All we got to do is to look for it."

"King's right," assented the other nervously. "Do it, Baldy. We got to handle them chinks 'fore they get wise and do for us."

Balderson towered over them for a moment, then nodded heavily.

"Good!" he muttered. "Leave the mick tied up; we'll make him tell later. Come on and see to them four aft; make sure the women are safe, too. No more didoes like we had aboard the *San Gregorio*, huh? That's what come o' bein' gentle."

The three left the cabin, slamming the door behind them.

Desmond opened his eyes, and weakly surveyed the gruesome scene before him. What had taken place he had no means of knowing; the bound and senseless figure of the fiddler, however, together with the dead Mow Jung, gave him a hint. Then his amazed and staring gaze fell upon the face of Prince Chan beneath the bunks, disclosed to view when O'Sullivan had been dragged

out. This was a much more tangible clew, and Desmond's eyes widened in comprehension.

He tried to lift himself, and failed dismally. The swift pain of the effort made him bring his hand to his side; it came away crimsoned.

"Thunder o' Finn! I'm lyin' here with a bullet in me! Michael Terence, me lad! Is it a dead man ye are?"

O'Sullivan stirred a little at the voice. Desmond called again. The fiddler's eyes opened and gazed vacuously around, then struck on Desmond with recognition.

"Well, Michael Terence!" said the latter whimsically. "The top of the mornin' to ye, lad! Here's hopin' to meet ye in purgatory——"

"The money!" gasped O'Sullivan, reverting to the amazing loss. "It's gone, sir——"

"To be sure it is," came Desmond's faint voice. "Since I put it in the pockets of that new overcoat I bought, and the overcoat's lyin' in the top bunk yonder! And I'm gone, too, more by token. Who was it shot me, Michael Terence?"

"Balderson. Him and his men and Prince Chan were aboard here, the murderin' blackguards! Now they've turned on the yellow divils, and—but——"

The fiddler seemed to realize for the first time that Desmond lay shot before him. He began to cough terribly; when the paroxysm passed he got his bound feet against the fiddle case and managed to shove it toward Desmond.

"Are ye bad hurt, sir? There's a bit flask in here, and a pistol and knife and——"

"Saints preserve us!" ejaculated Desmond. "If I could but get your two hands free, me lad, we'd fight a bit yet. The bullet's in me, but how bad hurt I am there's no saying. If I had a drink——"

His head was supported by the wall,

and now he tried to sit up. With an effort he set his will to the task, but as his body came up he fell sidewise and lay limply across the fiddle case. As he lay thus his fingers found the clasps and opened the case.

Inch by inch his fingers groped about the thing. While he fought off the blind weakness that gripped him there came a rush of feet and a burst of shots from the passage outside.

"That's them," gasped O'Sullivan. "Doin' for the chinks like they said——"

"Ah!" Desmond's hand closed on the flask. Unscrewing the top was a tremendous effort, but at last it was accomplished. Getting the flask to his lips with shaking hand, he took a swallow of the fiery liquor. It revived and strengthened his body instantly.

"They were in too much of a hurry to kill me and have done," he said, smiling a little. "Now, Michael Terence! Here's the knife, and if ye can roll over a bit——"

The little man shoved his legs at Desmond, who cut the knotted cords about his ankles. In another moment O'Sullivan was free and on his feet.

"Can ye walk, sir?" He stooped above Desmond with a pitiful tenderness. "If ye could get to the cabins aft now, where the ladies are——"

The ladies! Desmond's jaw clenched suddenly at the thought.

"Give us your hand, me lad."

Breathing heavily, Desmond reeled up and stood leaning against the wall, while O'Sullivan eyed him with a keenly troubled look.

"Didn't I say that Balderson—would be tearing things up—if he cut loose?" gasped Desmond. "Now that—he's loose—he's a bloody maniac!"

The fiddler sadly shook his head. "It's little we can do, sir. Sure, the banshee was in that fiddle o' mine last night! Will ye let me have a look at the wound——"

"Leave be, Michael Terence." Desmond straightened up and stood erect. "I think I can walk a bit now. Stick your head out the door and see how the land lies!"

O'Sullivan opened the door into the passage and reconnoitered. Desmond, testing his strength, staggered across to the bunks, clinging there for a moment. He then reached into his newly purchased overcoat, which had been flung into the top bunk; from among the packages of bank notes that distended the pockets he drew forth an automatic. O'Sullivan had the pistol taken from the fiddle case.

Desmond had removed the bank notes, fearing lest the box be stolen or opened by the customs people at Tourane. This act, it now appeared, had precipitated the crisis between Balderson and the Manchus, and Desmond thanked his stars for the inspiration.

"All clear, sir!" reported the fiddler from the doorway. "If we could be reachin' the cabins now and set the ladies free, we could do like we done aboard the schooner——"

"Luck never repeats, me lad," and Desmond shook his head. "Still, let's be havin' a try at it. No doubt they're all up for'ard, cleaning out the Chinamen. In that case, we might have a fightin' chance."

Between them they emptied the little flask, and then, leaning upon O'Sullivan, Desmond left the cabin. They had but a few steps to go in order to reach the cabin presumably occupied by Rosemonde and Doña Juliana, but those few steps were an agony of torment for Desmond, who felt the strength ebbing out of him at each moment.

Desmond leaned against the wall, resting, as O'Sullivan stepped forward to open the closed door of the cabin. As he touched it, however, it was suddenly flung open from within, and one of Balderson's men appeared before them. At the same instant Desmond

heard feet on the companion ladder and the rumble of Balderson's voice. Caught—taken in front and rear!

The fiddler flung himself forward bodily; he did not dare to fire because of Rosemonde and Doña Juliana, who appeared tied in chairs beyond the doorway. The man facing them uttered a wild cry at sight of Desmond's terrible figure, then reeled backward as O'Sullivan flung him aside and bore him down. The two men crashed to the floor.

"At 'em, King!" bellowed Balderson furiously.

Desmond gained the cabin doorway, but lacked the strength to get farther and to close the door. He turned, seeing Balderson and King charging down the passage at him. Lifting his automatic, he fired point-blank.

To his dismay, the shot failed to stop Balderson. That huge viking figure came upon him with a roar, and he felt himself gripped in those mighty arms, while Balderson grinned into his face. His weapon was held against his side, useless.

Over Balderson's shoulder he had a terrible vision of King plunging upon O'Sullivan with ready knife, then he heard the fiddler's shrill voice:

"I'll hold 'em, sir! Get the big man now——"

But Balderson, grinning, was crushing the life out of him. Desmond was going limp, when he heard the voice of Rosemonde piercing his darkening senses. What she cried out was lost, but her voice wakened him. He fired downward, and the bullet carried King off his feet—yet not before King's knife had plunged home.

Inch by inch Desmond worked his left arm loose. Balderson's strength seemed to be suddenly weakening. With a burst Desmond freed his left hand and seized that wild yellow beard. A last frightful effort that seemed to call up all the flickering life within him,

and he jerked back Balderson's head. His right hand came free, and he fired.

His last memory was of O'Sullivan coughing terribly.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAIR SAILING.

WHEN Desmond came to himself he was lying upon the deck of the schooner in the morning sunlight, Doña Juliana holding his hand, her hot tears falling on his palm.

He had a brief glimpse of Rosemonde, a weapon in her hand, ordering two frightened yellow men about; then he asked weakly for the fiddler.

"He—he is gone," responded Juliana, sobbing. "His last words—were for you——"

Desmond closed his eyes for a moment, heartsick. Then a shadow fell across his face, and he looked up again to see Rosemonde kneeling beside him.

A strange wonder filled him at sight of her tear-wet face, for in it there was a great tenderness and love, and her fingers that touched his hand were trembling.

"What is it, fairy mistress?" asked Desmond faintly.

"Get those dressings, dear." Rosemonde looked at Juliana, and the latter rose to her feet with a sob. "We'll have to stop the bleeding at once. Don't be afraid of those yellow curs; they'll obey."

Desmond smiled as Rosemonde bent over him.

"Praise be!" he uttered. "It's all right you are, me dear love! And ye'll not be sayin' more about Juliana yonder?"

"Oh, hush, hush!" implored Rosemonde. "And to think that you didn't know all the time. But no wonder you did not, for she only told me that night at the Résidence——"

"Know what, fairy mistress?"

"That she thought you loved her—and pitied you, because she loved a Spaniard there in Manila—and——"

"Thunder o' Finn!" ejaculated Desmond, a sudden light of comprehension flooding upon his brain. "Is it tellin' me the truth you are, Rosemonde? And listen now—ye'll not turn away from me any more——"

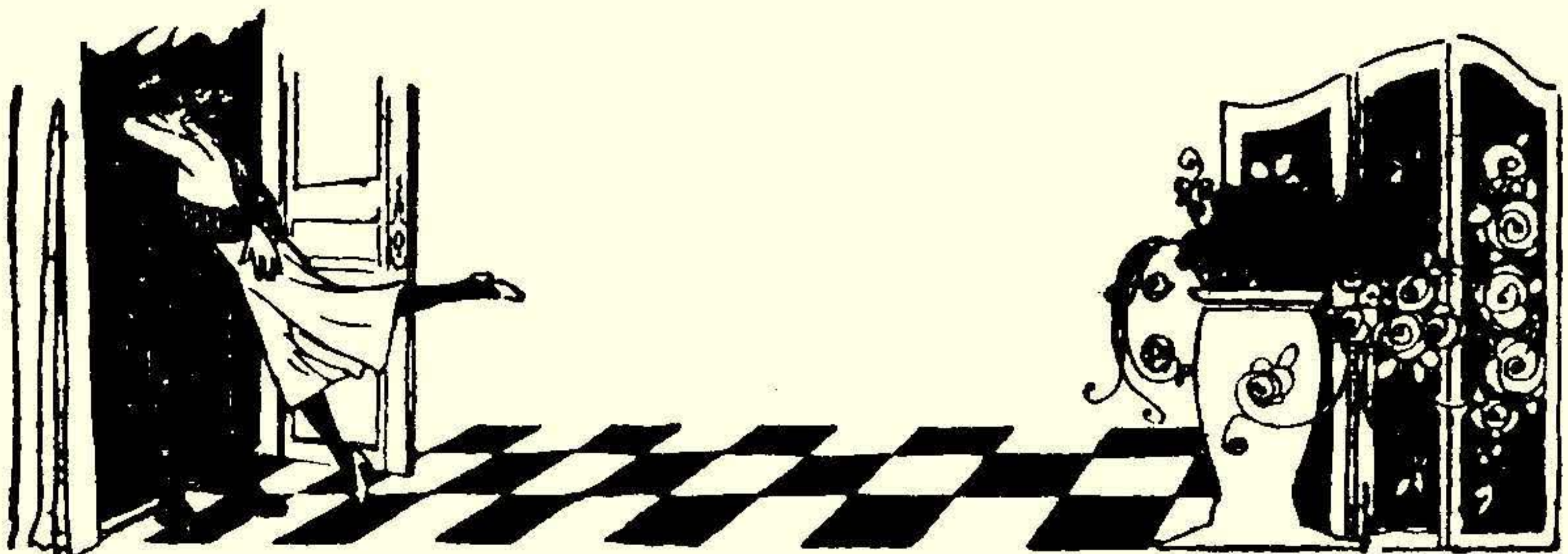
She bent above him, tears upon her cheeks.

"Only live, please live!" she cried, choking. "Oh—I didn't think you would ever come back to yourself long enough for me to tell you all my heart is——"

"Praise be!" said Desmond, folding his fingers upon hers. "Praise be, me dear love! They couldn't kill me—now. And we'll go to America, you and I, and there we'll begin to live, fairy mistress——"

Rosemonde, at the new life in his voice and the glory in his eyes, smiled, and bowed her lips to his.

THE END.





Soldiers and Sailors Personal Relief Section



IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!

DUE to the fact that most of our boys in uniform have secured their discharges or are about to be mustered out, the officer conducting this department has informed us that he believes that it will not be necessary to continue it in **THE THRILL BOOK**. In the future all letters received from our soldier readers will be answered personally, and, although the answers will not be published in the magazine, we wish to state that exactly the same kind of services will be rendered the individual. If you desire to know anything about military or naval matters relating to your personal case, you can still feel at liberty to address a communication to this department, and it will be referred to the former officer, who has conducted it so successfully, and he will take your case in hand and answer it directly.

We wish to call the attention of our soldier and sailor readers to the fact that this department has stood for three things. First of all, it has patiently outlined what it considered was the ideal of every man in uniform, and in a series of articles has pointed out the unwavering sincerity and manliness of every man who gave up all he possessed to defend his country.

Secondly, this department has fought

faithfully to secure an adequate extra payment for the discharged soldier. It has not specified any certain amount, nor has it been contented with the sixty dollars already given. It stands for a common-sense, reasonable, and grateful payment of money on the part of our government when it sends a man out into the world without a position, and often with very little money in his pocket. The amount of unemployment to-day is quite appalling. The government could very easily combat this evil through the medium of its discharged men, and not only stabilize the economic situation, but also bring happiness to their families.

Thirdly, this department has rendered its services to many hundreds of men, both through the publicity of its columns and by personal letters. Our one regret is that we could not print every communication that came into our hands. Over two-thirds of them were confidential and demanded intimate replies. The remaining third we have printed.

We wish to thank our readers for their appreciation of our efforts, and if at any time in the future it is necessary to install this department again, rest assured that we will do so.

THE EDITOR.

Cross- Trails



"The searchlight spluttered, and then a long white pencil of light shot out over the water. It wavered, and sank to a point beside the bow of the boat. It showed—nothing. The bow wave rose reluctantly and traveled but a little distance before it subsided into level sea. There were no waves. The water was calm as an inland lake. . . . The movement of the yacht became slower and slower as it gradually checked in its sweep through the water. The throbbing of the engines grew louder as they labored with increasing effort to master the mysterious THING that was holding them back. The boat was barely creeping now. It seemed to be struggling against some invisible force that gripped gently but relentlessly; some infinitely patient force that from the very patience of its operation was the more evidently inexorable. The engines were working in panic-stricken tempo now. The chief engineer had given them all the steam they would take, and the propellers thrashed the water mightily, but the ship slowed, slowed. At last it was still, while the engines seemed to be trying to rack themselves to pieces in their terrific attempt to drive the ship against the THING that held it back. The captain watched with a set face, then ordered the engines reversed. There was an instant's pause, and the propellers took up their thrashing of the water again. For a moment it seemed that they would have some effect. The yacht shivered and moved slightly backward, but then stopped again with the same soft gentleness. . . .

THERE they were, a yacht stalled at sea with no visible cause of it all. Without doubt Murray Leinster wrote one of the most interesting yarns in his whole life when he completed "The Silver Menace," which

will appear in the September 1st issue of THE THRILL BOOK. To those readers who enjoyed his "A Thousand Degrees Below Zero," in the July 15th number, this story will come as a welcome surprise. Murray Leinster is one of the most interesting writers in the game. He is not an old man, either. He is a serious and never-tiring student of science, and you can always feel that what he says is true, no matter how startling or curious he appears at times. He appeals to us for the simple reason that he is utterly unlike any other author whom we have read. His stories are new, invigorating, and absolutely thrilling from beginning to end. He never repeats; he never lags. He works over a plot until he knows it by heart long before he ever puts his pen to paper. The result is that he handles the complex situations which he presents in a manner that defies imitation. Not only were we convinced that his work stood out in a marked fashion

when we first read it, but the many letters we have received since the appearance of "A Thousand Degrees Below Zero" cinched the proposition. Here is a writer who will stand watching. If there is any bit of fiction as unusual and bizarre as "The Silver Menace" we have yet to read it.

AMONG the short stories in the forthcoming issue of THE THRILL BOOK, on the news stands September 1st, we find it difficult to pick the best. Rather than do that we will run over the list, giving you the characteristics of each and let you do the choosing for yourself. "The Wires Are Down," by Lillian Beynon Thomas, is a curious ghost story of a little railroad station, not the least bit in the vein of other ghost stories. "Fragments," by Tod Robbins, is a brief little tale with an odd plot. "The Unexpected Happens," by Junius B. Smith, contains a surprise at the ending that will defy any reader's solution until he has completed it. "The Mystery Downstairs," by Francisco Curtiss—well, to say anything would be to let the cat out of the bag. If you can tell us of any weird yarn that equals this one appearing in any other magazine this year we will be glad to hear of it. "Burnt Bridges," by Clarence L. Andrews, is an out-and-out psychic tale with a surprise ending. "The Ghost of Chaacmol," by Anthony J. Lorenz, is laid in Yucatan. There are two or three more, all unique and curiously different from the average run of fiction in American magazines.

THE "Heads of Cerberus," by Francis Stevens, begins in this issue. If you miss reading it you are going to cut out of your life some of the keenest enjoyment you will ever know. Not only has the author taken a plot that literally smashes all precedents, but in addition has contributed a new ro-

mance to literature which will stand well beside the works of Dumas or any other famous writer of unusual adventures. Write to us and tell us what you think about it.

Work and Play.

TO be able to work and to succeed we must depend upon the physical man. If this fails us at the critical moment what good are any other qualities we possess?

It takes so little time to keep in good health. The most rudimentary exercises if consistently followed produce surprising results. I have found that a good stiff walk in the morning is an excellent thing. I think that a man is wise to have his home conveniently near his place of business so that he can walk to and fro each day.

It is a simple matter to arrange. This does not mean that we need to live around the corner from our offices. To find homes in business localities is a difficult matter and to live so close means little or no exercise. A common-sense distance is about a mile and a half.

If a man walks double this distance, six times a week at a brisk pace, he covers eighteen miles. It is not the mileage that counts; it is the regularity and energy.

To the person who sits all day at a desk a proportionate amount of exercise is essential if future health is to be considered. The trouble with most of the advice on this subject is the prescribing of idle forms that require immense concentration demanding the maximum of effort.

Exercise is only needed in regular, consistent doses. The early-morning plunge is a form of exercise, if taken regularly. A short moment or two given over to calisthenics before breakfast and the walk afterward is a combination not easily beaten. Of course there are those who need more. Each

individual should adapt these things to his needs. Study yourself.

Your body is perfect during the adolescent years. Isn't it a pity that as age steals upon us the lines appear and we become fleshy?

Especially those of us doomed to spend our days at a cold desk? This can be largely done away with by a little care.

Do not map out for yourself a long system of things to do. Let your exercise become the regular item in the day's routine that sleeping is, for example.

Many of us make the mistake of living beyond our strength. I take it for granted that you are anxious to succeed, otherwise you wouldn't be reading these pages. Are you staying up late at night when you realize that your system will not stand the strain? Are you eating a lot of foolish things that give you headaches and leave you half-hearted on the following morning? Do you indulge in enormous lunches? Do you let your holidays pass without a trip to the country or to the outside world where you can get a contrast to your narrow life, and get some of the fresh air into your lungs? These things, if you do them, are merely habits. They are easy to correct. Stop now. I am not going to waste your time and mine by prescribing a lot of corrections; I am merely pointing the way the wind blows. If you are wise you will come to this issue like a man and conquer your weaknesses.

If you are the average fellow, I know you are slipping into ruts already. As an answer to this I would like to call your attention to some of the clerks in your office. Take the ones around forty. Are they physical specimens of joy?

In order to get ahead we must have energy and health. You can develop both by the simplest methods imagina-

ble. Take the material at hand and go to it. Start to-day by walking home. Come to the office in the same way to-morrow. If you take an early-morning bath, and do not eat too large a breakfast, I will bet all that I own that you will notice the difference at once.

I would be furious myself if some one were to outline a system of exercise for me that took a lot of valuable time and by which I achieved nothing. I make every hour live. A day without something done is a day lost. That is why I am giving you only the simplest forms. If you care to take other forms of exercise, you can attend a gymnasium. I know of a very successful man—a writer—who gives an hour each afternoon to strenuous gymnastic practice. He is splendid. I have found that a simpler form does for me. In all honesty, only a small proportion of us will do this sort of thing. I have, in consequence, adapted my exercise to my personality. That is what you should do.

What I wish to lay stress on here is the danger of taking too little exercise or none at all. Do something with your muscles. Keep your liver in health. Don't crowd your poor overworked stomach beyond its limit.

The life of Roosevelt is one that is a living example of all that a person can do, if he only has a will. I offer in contrast the life of Wilson, where the scholar has kept himself in trim by the simplest exercise in the world. Each is a lamp to guide us by. Each one utterly different from the other. Both conclude my argument. That is, adapt your exercise to your personality.

Often I stand on the corners and watch the crowds trying to get on the cross-town cars. One day I followed them and found the poor, deluded people often waited fifteen minutes for a car that only took them about six blocks. Think of the time wasted in

which they might have been stretching their cramped and tired muscles.

Letters from Our Readers.

To the Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

Why is it that the majority of magazines seem bent on gorging their readers with the same old literary fodder year in, year out? Is it that they do not credit the writers with the brains to do anything else? Are they blind to the hunger of thousands of readers for stories of something beside SEX, twaddling love affairs, adventure, and detective impossibilities? Why is it that most editors seem afraid of death in a tale? Why do they shrink so from a "bad" ending? Why must good always triumph over evil, when in actual existence it is wit and strength that outstrip stupidity and feebleness? Why do editors want stories that conclude with a silly-pretty tinkle of wedding bells; stories that tra-la-la inanely from first line to last? Why can't a poor devil of a writer try to tell things as he sees them? Why all the ding-dinged camouflage? Why—— But O Lord! What's the use?

Is it the fault of the magazine editors?

Are the writers to blame?

Is the GREAT AND INTELLECTUAL AMERICAN PUBLIC guilty?

Are readers, writers, and editors all responsible?

I shrug my shoulders Gallically.

Perhaps the shining career of THE THRILL BOOK will tell us. All I can say is, that as a newspaper man and a contributor of short stories and occasional verse to the current periodicals, I know there are scores of writers, old and young, who are more than eager for a chance to create something besides the gush they write so disgustedly. And I am convinced there are thousands of readers who will relish the work of men and women unhampered by the restrictions imposed on writers by the more conservative magazines.

THE THRILL BOOK is not seeking to be freakish, nor does it want to introduce futuristic styles of literature. There are enough radical publications working for such revolutionary ideals now. As I see it, the mission of THE THRILL BOOK is to print good, stout, realistic work, enhanced, mayhap, with a touch of the fanciful or the bizarre. Long live the new periodical!

With so powerful an organization as the Street & Smith people back of it, there is no reason why the new magazine cannot get the best material there is. Who knows? Through its brave policy THE THRILL BOOK may discover another Edgar Allan Poe, another Ambrose Bierce, another Jack London.

Pick up any English or French publication and see how distinctive the work of the authors. Why? Have American writers less originality? It is foolish to think so. Sincerely,

AUGUSTIN LADY.

New York City.

THE THRILL BOOK: I received your THRILL BOOK as per my request, and am forwarding you money in payment for same. I find THE THRILL BOOK a very extraordinary little magazine and in a class all by itself, which I can gladly say makes it worth reading, for there really is a thrill in every little story. I always prefer an exciting story that bears on everyday life. Yours for THE THRILL BOOK. I am yours truly,

PRIVATE EMILE ROUSSEAU.

610 Chelmsford Street, Lowell, Mass.

TO THE EDITOR: Let me say here and now that I think THE THRILL BOOK is the greatest thing of its kind that America has ever known. Not only has it started out to do something in a big, national way, but it has succeeded, even beyond my hopes. I congratulate you. In the July 1st number you had more unusual and startling fiction than I have ever read in all the other magazines put together. Why shouldn't I praise you? I am glad to give credit where credit is due. If you continue at the rate you are going, you are going to produce something that will become a permanent American institution—a real magazine. Sincerely,

A. C. TUENER.

37 Harvard Street, Arlington, Mass.

DEAR SIR: I enjoyed "Down the Coast of Shadows" tip top—but I enjoy the entire magazine, every issue, and feel that it must succeed because of its unusual and thoroughly interesting stand in the way of fiction. Very truly,

J. HAMPTON BISHOP.

Long Pine, Neb.

DEAR MR. EDITOR: Please let me congratulate you on the wonderful success of THE THRILL BOOK, resulting in its increased size.

A FAMOUS LITERARY AGENT.



“Ferd, They are Playing Your Song!”

Imagine the thrill these words gave Mr. Ferdinand Hohnhorst, of Covington, Ky., as he stood on a crowded street, watching the great Peace Parade, when Meyer's Military Band came swinging along playing his song, “Uncle Sam, the Peaceful Fighting Man.” But let him tell his story in his own words:—

Chester Music Company,
Chicago, Ill.

Covington, Ky.
1941 Augustine St.

“Gentlemen:—My song entitled ‘Uncle Sam the Peaceful Fighting Man’ that your Mr. Friedman composed and arranged for me, is making a great hit. In the Peace Parade at Latonia, Ky., Meyer's Military Band played my song three times, and we have now had it arranged for orchestras and quartettes, and it is making a good impression everywhere. The Vocalstyle Music Company, Cincinnati, Ohio, a concern manufacturing Music Rolls for player pianos, has taken up my song, and has already sold over a thousand of these rolls in Cincinnati alone, and are placing them in their bulletin for April, which will go to all the different cities.

“My song also has made a decided hit among school children, and has been introduced into several of the Cincinnati Schools. Thanking you most kindly for the services you have rendered me, I remain, Yours very truly,
(Signed) Ferdinand Hohnhorst.”



Leo Friedman

Leo Friedman, Our Composer whom Mr. Hohnhorst speaks so enthusiastically about, is one of America's most gifted composers and the author of many great song hits. Among his great successes are “Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland,” the sales of which reached the enormous total of more than two million copies. Others that reached into the million class were “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” and “When I Dream of Old Erin”. Mr. Friedman writes music to words, that cause them to fairly throb with feeling and musical charm. He has been styled “America's Favorite Composer,” and properly so, for his melodies have reached the hearts of millions of the American people, and made them sing.

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