A NEW TYPE OF MAGAZINE FOR EVERYBODY

The Thrill Book

Semi-Monthly

10 Cents

MAR. 15, 1919

The Web of Death

by Clare Douglas Stewart

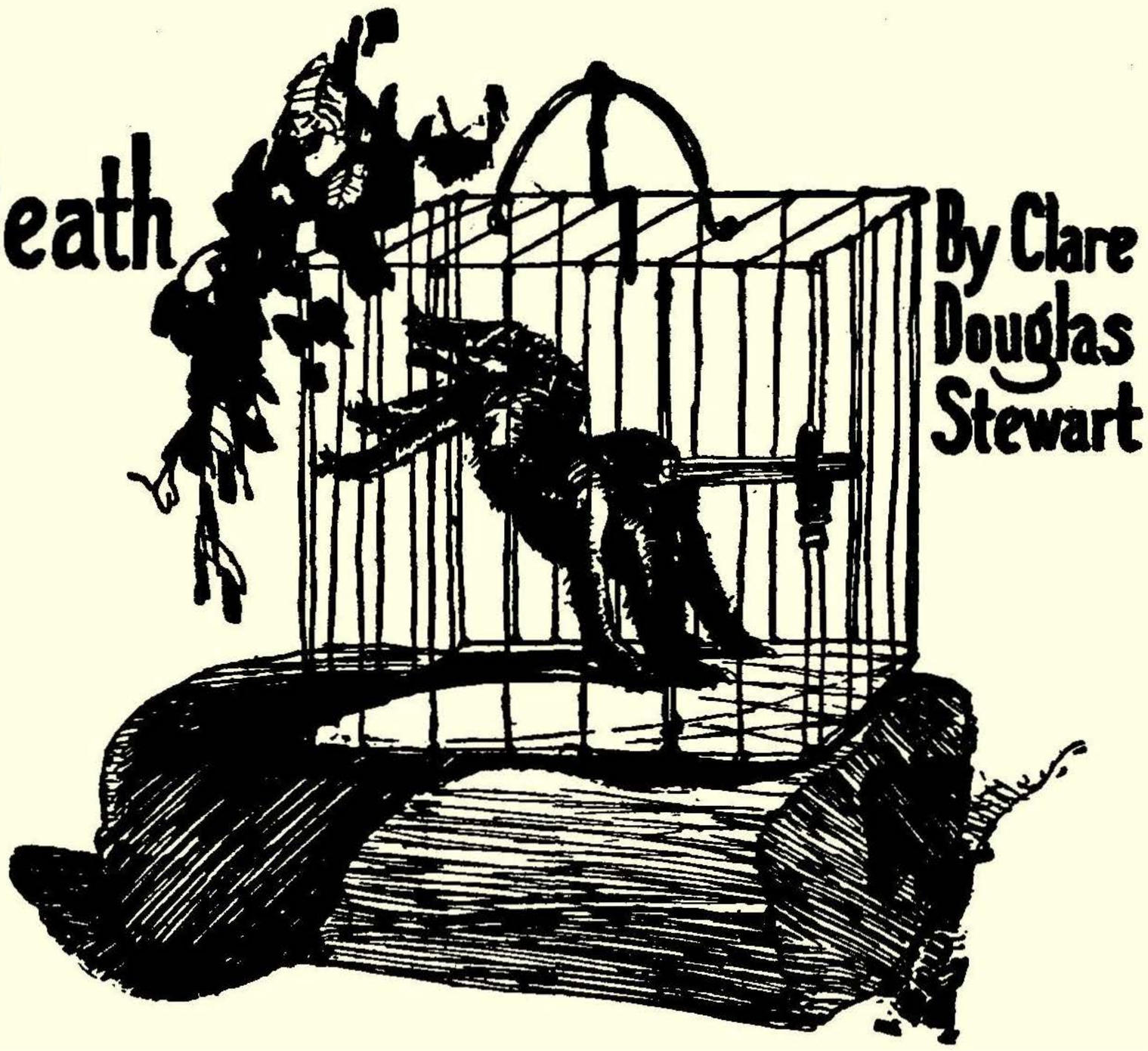
A HOOTING, TOOTING SON-OF-A-GUN

by Howard Dwight Smiley

THE THRILL BOOK

Issued Semimonthly. Application made for entry as Second-class Matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 7th Ave., New York.*
Copyright, 1919, by STREET & SMITH CORPORATION. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $2.00.

Vol. I. No. 2. New York, March 15, 1919. Price Ten Cents.



The Web of Death

By Clare Douglas Stewart

"SPEAKING of death as the most compelling means of attracting human horror," began the doctor, as more wood was thrown upon the fire and a shower of sparks illuminated the somber foliage of the nearest firs, "reminds me of an episode that began when I was a student at Bologna, Italy. At the time I was young enough to feel the awfulness of a violent death, which even my medical experience in the Balkan wars never has been able to entirely remove. Yet a violent ending of life, as it occurs in the heat of conflict, is entirely removed from the ghastliness of even a commonplace, deliberate murder, and when, as in the case of Leona Willard, the attending circumstances are the work of a gifted, though fiendish, mind, the imagination quite refuses to admit the full richness of the horror to enter the mind. It has been said that the greatest crimes are never known because one of the components of a crime's greatness is its secrecy. It is equally true that the greatest crimes are never appreciated, because sympathy is the primary component of appreciation. The tide of horror rises just so high, and the gates of imagination shut like a vise. Automatically the overload of horror is shunted away, or I doubt not that the mind might burn out like the coils of a motor. I have had the fortune, or rather the bad fortune, to reach that point at least twice in a career not uncheckered with adventure, yet this was the first time that it occurred, and also the time when the excess of calamity pushed the hardest at the seats of my reason."

By this time the sparks had subsided and the glow of the flames illuminated the circle of interested and grave faces. The bulky columns of the firs towered aloft to nothingness in the darkness, and their tops soughed faintly in the first breath of a rising night wind. The professor coughed slightly and shifted himself nearer to the fire. The surveyor flicked a spark from his Mackinaw. Several of the party adjusted themselves to more comfortable positions, and the doctor began his story.

"Among the students at Bologna was a Sicilian of remarkable temperament and great brilliancy. He roomed just across the hall from me, and, though we never were what you would call intimate friends, we did become what you might call intimate acquaintances. He was not a very sociable fellow, and the fact that he singled me out from the rest of the students for those little enterprises that call for companionship probably constituted the attraction that he had for me. It was not that he could not have had plenty of company among the students of native birth, but he seemed to detect some pretense to race superiority among the foreign students that made him keep exclusively to their circles in order to beat them at their own games. He led them a merry chase at that. There were few of us who could hold him to our level in the stiff examinations that were periodically held, and in the knowledge of medical chemistry there were none of us that could stay in the same room with him, so to speak. In those departments of the knowledge that most relate to the 'Black Arts' of the Middle Ages he seemed to be fascinated. He knew more about poisons, I presume, than Macchiavelli in his palmiest days. I mention all this, not only to show the peculiar trend of his mind, but also as the probable explanation of his determination to marry an American girl. At least he succeeded in so doing, whatever may have been his determination.

"We were considerably surprised when he married Leona Willard, but we saw that it was by no means impossible. He could speak English as well as you or I, and, as for personality, he fairly radiated that

magnetism that only deep brunettes seem to have. In this case it was well-nigh mesmeric, and more than one of the fellows said that Leona, who was one of these delicate, clinging-vine sort of girls, could have no more resisted him than a rabbit could have resisted a serpent. Would to God that she could!"

The doctor paused. The slight hoarseness in his voice told a few of his hearers that he had been more than a disinterested observer of Miss Willard. In fact, the professor read therein the cause of the doctor's multifarious wanderings.

"It was not that Leona was not a spirited, intellectual girl," the doctor continued; "it was her spirit that enabled her to marry him in spite of her parents and friends, to go and live with him at his villa; he was some sort of count in southern Italy. She had studied art so long in Rome that she could speak Italian passably well, and the love of 'The Masters' quite reconciled her to living where they were of ready access. After the marriage I did not see her or her husband until a year had passed. My specialty was the heart, and I had been up to Paris to put on a few finishing touches before coming home to open up a practice. One day I received a telegram from him to come post-haste to his place to diagnose the case of his wife. She had had a number of attacks, apparently of heart trouble, and the count had called me through that strange preference he had always shown for me. I felt sick enough, you may be sure, to go into his house and treat Leona, but I was anxious to have her receive the best of care, so I went. Well, my uneasiness was nothing compared to what it was when I got there.

"My first view of the place brought with it the quick premonition of evil. It was sunset, and the count, who had met me at the train in person, was walking at my side up a winding approach to his villa. We swept around a little curve, and there it was. In the deep shadow at the base of two jutting, brooding crags a low, massive-walled structure shown with the whiteness of a tomb. Beside it, to either side, stood immense, somber poplars, towering almost to the height of the cliff behind. The light came wholly from above, an afterglow beyond the brow of the cliffs, only tinging the treetops with subdued light, leaving the rest in gloom. It reminded me of the Greek conception of Hades, beautiful, God knows, but as uncanny as a tale of Poe's. With a start I realized how near a replica it was of Boecklin's 'Island of the Dead.' I know not what the place might have looked like in the sunshine of a brilliant morning, but the shadow that covered it then descended also upon my spirits and never arose until the place and its contents had passed out of my history.

"The count seemed to take great pleasure in my arrival, but his inscrutable eyes seemed as inscrutable to me as ever. He led the way through a spacious reception hall, a vaulted corridor, and into a magnificent dining hall, such as one reads about in the days of chivalry. I perceived the place to be medieval in design, and, by the heavy, ancient appearance of the furnishings, I concluded that it was probably so in fact. We came to a wide oak door, and the count pushed it back. Immediately that same impression of unrest, of foreboding, came to me in heightened intensity. It was similar to the impression one feels when awakening in the dead of night to look out across the darkness at the red glare of fire against the sky. Yet the impression was not difficult to analyze.

"The walls of the room were entirely black, a soft irradiant black. The hangings were night black, and so also the ceilings. I say that they were entirely black, but there were fine, wriggly gold lines running over the whole thing. Even the soundless carpet was black, black velvet, so it seemed to the foot. Hanging from the ceiling was an immense brazen chandelier. The light came through a row of narrow, high-silled windows, which were heavily leaded in a fantastic, radial design, letting in a pale, amber light that was thrown back in a thousand high lights from the chandelier, and brought out the lustrous curves of the heavy ebony furniture. The stillness was profound, and the ticking of a small ebony clock upon the table came to my ears with inordinate distinctness.

"Then I saw her. She reclined upon a divan at the far her end of the room. Arising, she came toward me. In the faint light, against the dark background, her face had all the pallor of a small Carrara bust of Dante that stood by the wall. Her hair, ordinarily golden enough, seemed transfigured by the yellow light into filaments of the virgin metal. Even her eyes, which naturally had the soft, yielding tenderness of a fawn's, were of unnatural brilliancy.

"I fear that our opening words were rather commonplace, perhaps faltering. The strangeness of her appearance, the room, and the place I could only dismiss in the vague general category of the count's idiosyncrasies.

"That evening I questioned her, and, finding that her symptoms indicated only a mild disorder at the worst, I felt anxious to leave the next day. The count, however, emphatically entreated me to stay, in order to see whe her any new attack might develop and to be certain of the case in general. After having come so far for the express purpose of being of assistance, I could hardly refuse; so, after wiring for a few extras that would come handy in an emergency, among which, I confess, I classified my sturdy thirty-two, I prepared to settle down for an indefinite stay. I say that I prepared because I never did have the feeling that I was permanently installed, even as the guest of a night.

II.

YET the first week, to casual observation, passed well enough. The count did not have any practice, nor did he need one. As the owner of several banana plantations he was kept quite busy attending to his duties of management. I could not help noticing the almost medieval relation that existed between him and his peasants. I remember one direct incident that not only served to emphasize this relation, but also the temper of the count, which, as I had always suspicioned, might arise to the heights of fury upon provocation.

"We were sauntering along, our mounts at a walk, when a field worker, with a large bunch of the luscious fruit upon his shoulders, started to pass us. Somehow the poor devil—he was only a boy—slipped, and, in falling, threw the bunch against the count's legging, smearing it with the crushed fruit. The

count's face flushed angrily, and before the frightened boy could rise he brought down his riding whip upon his back with all the force at his command. He was ready to strike again when I seized his wrist. He stopped, and turned to me with a look of fury upon his face such as I never elsewhere have seen. The sheer malignancy of hate expressed by every curve of his flushed features caused me to recoil inwardly as from a blow. Yet I managed to glare him straight in the eye without visibly flinching, and, with a powerful effort, he mastered himself, and, without a word, rode on. It was a queer little tableau to go through, so absolutely silent, save for the cry of the boy when he was struck, yet I was almighty glad at the moment that I had sent for my gun.

"That evening the count approached me with the greatest air of affability I had ever known him to wear. 'My dear Stillwell,' he began, 'I want to beg your pardon and ask you immediately to forget that execrable, unspeakable affair of this morning. I know what a devil's own temper I have, and sometimes, as this morning, it gets away with me.'

"Of course there was nothing for me to do but to accept his apologies with grace, but as for immediately forgetting the incident the count's subtle change of manner made me feel warranted in carrying my gun around with me when it came. Yet I realized how utterly futile it would prove if the count did entertain any evil designs toward me. I recalled his knowledge of the 'Black Arts,' and it did not reassure me.

"Another little incident occurred at the end of that week which had an invaluable significance in the light of later events. I would have overlooked it altogether had it not been for the hypersensitive state I was in. Coming up the hall one evening, I stopped opposite the open library door. Having just come in from the tennis court, my pliant shoes made no sound. I paused to light a cigarette, and while so doing noticed the count reading a paper in the library. There was nothing unusual about that. It was the paper sent down by steamer from Naples, and we both were accustomed to read it. I was preparing to speak when the count suddenly dove his fist through the center of the sheet.

"'*Gnabolo!*' he muttered under his breath. I drew back into the hall as quietly as possible, and a moment later casually entered the room. The count glanced at me quickly with a covert gleam of the same hatred in his eyes that I had surprised there before. It immediately changed to one of unconcern, however, and he passed out of the room with a brief word of salutation. I did not go to the paper immediately, but quite casually sat down. A few seconds later I heard the count's stealthy tread recede down the hall, and I knew that I had outwitted him. Then only did I walk over to the low stool on which he had flung the paper and look at it. There were the usual columns of foreign news, and I was just giving up the attempt when I noticed, well within the area of the tear, a small account of the discovery of a new process of treating blood poisoning with an obscure chemical compound. The discovery was made by an American doctor at the Rockefeller Institute. Again the count's strange antipathy for America and Americans dawned upon me. Right then I began to feel, rather than to clearly comprehend, the fiendish motive that underlay the entire drama that Leona and myself and the dark room and the entire setting were to play."

III.

THE doctor paused, and relieved his throat by a draft from the canteen at his side. The night breeze had increased in violence, and the dancing flames cast huge, grotesque flickers in among the firs. From out of the darkness above came the refrain of the boughs, dismal as the howl of the wind on an unknown sea. The listeners drew into a still closer knot about the fire, and the doctor continued:

"After that nothing occurred which I then regarded as significant. I was in a very peculiar relation to Leona. I felt at times, knew, in fact, that she had her whole side of the story to tell, but that her pride and the fact that she had married him in defiance of the wishes of her parents and friends kept her silent. I myself felt compelled to broach the subject with her a number of times, but each time the look of dumb horror that came into her eyes as I approached dangerous ground deterred me. It was not that the count did not treat her all right as far as surface appearances at least were concerned. He was the amiable courtier at any time I ever saw them together.

"I remember one morning in the garden, when we were all together. She suddenly threw up her hands in a little gesture of fright. 'Oh!' she gasped, and would have fallen but for the ready arm of the count. He motioned to me with his head.

"'There, kill it!' he exclaimed.

"I looked in the direction he indicated, and after a moment's scrutiny beheld a tiny, almost invisible, spider dangling in mid-air.

"'He's not poisonous,' the count added as I crushed the minute offender between my fingers. 'I've been trying for weeks to get Leona over her fear of them, and, though she succeeds very well when she is prepared beforehand, to come upon them suddenly still affects her adversely.'

"He added some more words of a complimentary nature to her, but I scarcely heard them. It seemed as if I could see through the thin guise of sympathy to the exultant savage beneath, reveling in human torture. I thought of her surroundings, and what they would be if a person really desired her to be happy. She needed sunshine and air and vivacity. In her 'Room of Moods,' as the count called that infamous black hole, one of her temperament would find all the requirements of a torture chamber, but with all the fascination to bind her to it such as the count's own eyes afforded.

"The social calendar at the villa was practically a nonentity. The count had his laboratory where he put in his spare moments, and I was busy a number of times compiling diets and exercises and the kind of entertainment that I thought would better his wife. Yet one grand event arrived that the count's prestige called upon him to attend. It was a masquerade ball to be held at a near-by villa by the cream of the neighboring aristocracy. As the count's guest, I was invited to attend, and, wishing to detect any new developments of the situation, I made arrange-

ments to go. The count, with his inborn aptitude for effects, designed and had made a dress for his wife. I was expecting the unusual, but I was not prepared for what I saw.

"The costume was delivered one day when the three of us were waiting in the dining hall. The count cut the cords of the box, and with eager fingers his wife lifted forth the dress and spread it out at arm's length in front of her. The bodice and skirt were of the same pale gold as her hair, rich and shimmering and pure. In vivid contrast against them hung in filmy, radial webs—spider webs—a heavy overlay of black silk lace, upon which, wonderfully realistic in glossy black silk, were worked huge, hairy spiders.

"The garment dropped from her fingers, and she caught at the table for support. The atmosphere became rigid with silence. For a moment I could have blown his demonish brains into eternity with joy. But with something that was more than steel in her nature she straightened up. The count picked the thing from the floor. The silken folds rustled sibilantly, and the lustrous monsters seemed to writhe and contort like living creatures. It was beautiful, just like the rest of his effects, but equally damnable. He seemed to feel the need for some explanation.

" 'That will most effectively cure you of your fears, will it not, Leona, when you become familiar with it?'

"But he knew, and I believe that he knew that I knew, that it was a psychological lie. If he had wanted her whim to develop into hopeless horror he could not have done better. My vision seemed to stop at the surface of his eyes as at a mask, yet it seemed as though behind it cunning, leering faces chuckled in mockery. But she promised to wear the thing, and so she did. It made quite a sensation at the ball.

"She put the dress away in a chest in the black-walled room, and said nothing more about it. Yet after that I thought I could detect a little strain in the attitude of the two toward each other. She seemed to have gathered some small measure of self-sufficiency, and no doubt was making something of a stand for herself. The count began to take long walks about the place, and a number of times I saw him sitting down upon the wharf from which his banana shipments were sent out. He was in the habit of carrying a little black tin box, such as are used oftimes to gather botanical specimens in. He brought back a few herbs now and then with which I presumed he experimented in the laboratory. I attempted to walk into the laboratory one day, as I had been accustomed to do, but I found the door locked. The count came upon me just as I was turning away, and explained it by saying that he suspected one of the servants of stealing some of his expensive compounds and that he was locking the door as a precaution. He regretted that he had only one key, but if I wished to get in at any time he would be glad to open the door for me. Of course I had no particular reason for making any visits to the place; so, ostensibly, I let the matter drop. But I secretly determined to have a look in the place the next day.

"After the count had left in the morning I tried several of the house keys upon the door. They failed to work. The place, with its medieval construction, seemed impregnable. Yet it had one weak spot—the roof. A modern skylight had been put in, in order to fit the room for the purpose of a laboratory, and, after working a while with the blade of my penknife, I managed to slip the catch and crawl in. Yet the usual aspect of the equipment offered little satisfaction. There were several strong poisons in solution upon the worktable, which was only natural for him. I was attracted by a hypodermic needle I found there also. It was the finest of point and the smallest that I had ever seen. Also I discovered another implement which I couldn't understand. It was a small block of wood about the size of a spring mousetrap, but it was equipped with a series of fine wire bands that locked over it in all directions; that was all. I left the place somewhat mystified, but bore the thing in mind.

IV.

THEN came a few days of halcyon ease and comfort. It could have lulled the conscience of a murderer to rest, but it hardly lulled mine. I resolved to keep a little closer watch upon the count than I had done before, so, one morning, with my gun well oiled and the chambers full, I set out early and hid in a copse of dense foliage above the bay. The servants had all gone to the nearest town to celebrate one of the saints' days that so clutter the Italian calendar. Only the three of us were about the place. Along about ten o'clock the count appeared, but instead of the black box under his arm he had another one of about the same size and utility. Even so slight a circumstance was fit subject for thought. What had he done with the black box? He appeared to be going nowhere, but finally, after a casual survey of the neighborhood, he hurried down to the wharf and disappeared among the banana crates. I swung out of my shelter and stalked him as one would stalk a wild beast. I don't know but what he occupied about the same place in my mind at the time that a wild beast would have occupied. Finally I stepped carefully out upon the dock. The planks were so heavy that I made scarcely a sound, and the lap of the few small waves that were running aided me materially. Then I saw him, crouched down by a crate and peering inside. He had a pair of little wooden tongs in a hand covered with a thick leather glove. He made a quick little jab into a crate with his tongs and brought out something which he dropped into the box.

"Then I exploded. Like a flash I saw through the colossal, fiendish designs of the man. I had no proof, but an intuition that was stronger than reason dominated me. 'You dirty fiend, you!' I yelled. 'Damn you!'

"He understood me all right. It was all the confession I needed. He jumped up and started toward the edge of the dock. My gun was in the air. She cracked just once. He was standing on the stringer, and crumpled over in a distorted, backward dive into the bay. I did not stop to see whether he was done for or not. I thanked goodness that sharks infested the Mediterranean, and started on a run for the house. I dashed into the hall.

" 'Leona!' I yelled. There was no answer. I was sweating from more than exertion. 'Leona!' I heard

nothing but echoes. 'Good God!' and I stumbled down the hall.

"Just then I heard a shriek, the shriek of a woman, piercing and incoherent with the note of mortal fear. I circled through the hall to the door of the one room where I knew that she would be. The door was locked, and its massive planks would succumb to nothing but an ax. I ran for my medicine chest. It was gone. I knew better than to look for it. I ran out back and found an ax. In ten minutes I had the door down and broke in. With a sob I realized that I was too late.

"There, at the end of the room, outflung upon the divan, she lay, the gown drawn from its chest and draped over her. Upon her throat, like a blot against the white, perched a great black hairy spider. As I watched, another one, with vicious-snapping eyes, ran down her limp-hung arm to the floor. I didn't think of the danger. With my own hands I knocked them from her and jerked that yellow-black thing to the floor. Tarantulas! It was alive with them, real ones mixed up with the false. I stamped the thing to rags with my heels. I knocked one brute from my waistcoat that had crawled up me that far. I hunted them out like a crazy man until no more could be found.

"Then I went to her. But it was no use. I backed away, so sick that I could hardly stand. The room seemed to reel and darken. The gold lines upon the wall danced feverishly, and it seemed as though the dark, leaden lines across the windows writhed and contorted like the legs of giant, hairy spiders. I bore myself up with an effort and took my last look at her. God, how still she lay! A thin beam of yellow light fell across the divan and across her head with its royal crown of gold. Her composed face and smooth throat showed white as a Grecian column against the wall beyond. The beam of light lay across the floor and across the overturned chest, inside of which, still lying dim and obscure in the corner, lay a little black tin box."

The doctor paused, and the company remained silent. The fire had died to a bed of glowing coals. The air was chill and the other-worldly wail of the firs again came to their ears. Some one threw some dry boughs upon the coals, and as they blazed up the query came from across the group: "But, doctor, I've heard somewhere that the bite of a tarantula is not fatal to an adult."

The doctor replied with a rush. "Fatal? I broke into his laboratory and found a little cage full of the loathsome things. He caught them in the banana crates on the dock, of course. One of them was wired down to that little block, and beside it stood the hypodermic needle. He had been charging their fangs with a poison strong enough to make their bite kill an ox."

He paused, but the questioner remained silent, and he added: "Of course I didn't stay around there long enough to find out why the count hated Americans or why he would want to marry one in order to torture her. I even had to deduce that he wanted me there for a witness to her death from a heart attack if his plans went well. I took a steamer that very afternoon for Suez, and by coming around by Australia got home."

The doctor arose to his feet, and at the general sign for the breaking up the company he concluded: "For that matter I have never yet been anxious to return."

Miladi

By Charles Kiproy

LET us forget that love is like a song
Life sings to lull the spirit's endless fears . . .
Miladi, echoes fill our willing ears
The lonely gods are jealous of . . . the strong
High inspiration that ignores wrong . . .
For what grim need have we of lovers' tears?
The morning dawns and when the night appears
Love can find refuge hidden in the throng.

The heart awakens and the strength of spring
Lays heavy silence on the old refrain
That lovers sigh about and poets sing . . .
So swift are we to squander what we gain
That when love thrills us with its echoing
We sink all beauty in a world of pain.

A Hooting, Tooting Son-of-a-Gun

By Howard Dwight Smiley

CHAPTER I.

HARD LUCK.

THE Tumbling R outfit of the Routt County Cattle Company was in a serious predicament, but just then only four of the sixty members of that aggregation of nifty punchers were aware that they were facing anything calamitous to the interests of the outfit. "The Rodeo," which is the one big annual festive event of the Routt County district, was just two weeks off, and Buck Miller, our crack roper, buster, buckaroo, and all-round athletic star of every sport of cow-puncherdom, had suddenly been knocked out of the running. It happened thusly:

Pete Doyle, Doc Hinkle, Buck, and myself were cutting hay down on the Little Snake Creek flats, against a hard winter that the weather-bureau company at Washington, D. C., was predicting, and we had knocked off work at two o'clock in the afternoon because Buck had indiscreetly stepped on a slumbering rattlesnake in the tall grass and his snakeship had promptly resented the disturbance by punctuating Buck with two cute little black dots in the calf of his left leg.

This in itself wasn't so bad, providing Buck didn't die of the poison, because he might have sufficiently recovered from the effects of the snake bite in time to participate in the rodeo events, but in side-stepping the rattler on feet that were more familiar with the feel of the stirrup and tapadera than they were with Mother Earth, he had collided with a round bowlder and sprained his right ankle.

That put him out of the running with both feet, and naturally we were all more or less rattled over the occurrence. Not one of us knew what first aid to a snake bite was, outside of copious and frequent doses of red liquor, and there wasn't any such remedy in our outfit, it being against the regulations of the company to tote anything on the hip or under the bunk. Therefore we were all very much up in the air as to what to do.

So we carried Buck back to our wikiup on Little Snake Creek, laid him out on a bunk, and Doc Hinkle whittled open the punctures with his jackknife to make them bleed. Buck expressed a most unchristianly appreciation of that, but it was about the only thing we could do with our limited knowledge of snakeology.

Then the three of us held a consultation, with the patient interjecting profane remarks, which is the usual procedure of M. D.'s when they are up a stump, and it was agreed that one of us should light out for headquarters at once to get information on the subject and help, if possible. Pete was elected to make the run.

Our ponies had been turned loose to graze, and while we were getting our lariats out, preparatory to roping one, a burst of song smote the air in our vicinity and fetched us outside in a hurry:

"Hi, le, hi, lo, hi, le, hi, lo,
I ain't been called to dinner!"

Thus rang the song in very poor sense, but a clear, high tenor, as around the bend of the creek came the singer, riding a piebald pinto, which, judging from the length of its legs, was sired by a giraffe. The rider was a fine, clean, lean-built youngster, not an inch under six feet, with curly brown hair and crinkling blue eyes and a smiling but determined

mouth. He appeared to be somewhere in the vicinity of twenty-one years of age.

He pulled up short in surprise as we came piling out of the shack and down the creek to meet him, and shifted his gun around in front, where it would be handy in case of emergency. Come to think, it must have been some startling to have three wild-eyed and desperate-looking men rush at you suddenly away out there in the wilderness.

"What's all the excitement, boys?" he inquired in a soft, even drawl.

"Excitement aplenty, stranger," answered Dock as we came up. "We are in need of sudden and efficient help. Man back in the shack is down with a rattlesnake bite!"

"Phew!" whistled the other. "That's bad! Is he hard bit?"

"Leg's swelling up like a balloon. We ain't got time to visit about it. We want to know what to do."

The newcomer looked thoughtful for as long as five seconds, and then his face lit up like a sunbeam. "I getcha, amigo," he cried. "The one thing you need most in the world is just two mile back up the creek. You boys go in and hold the patient's hand and I'll have help here in two jerks of a goat's tail." And with that he whirled his mount around on one hoof and dashed off in the direction from which he had come.

He came tearing back again inside of twenty minutes, dragging a perfectly indescribable piece of horseflesh by the halter, and astraddle the horse was old Limping Bear, a renegade Sioux Injun, and behind him sat his little fat squaw. It seems that on his way down the creek our friend had run onto the two gathering roots and herbs against a winter's ailments, and when we told him our troubles it had come to him right away that there was Buck's salvation.

It was, all right. Limping Bear's squaw took one look at Buck's swelling leg, grunted, got out her medicine bag, and went to work stewing up roots and things over a little fire she kindled outside the shack, notwithstanding that Doc offered her the use of our cookstove.

The results of her treatment showed right off, and inside of an hour Buck was asleep and the swelling was going down. If I ever mix it with a rattlesnake I hope to goodness that there is an Injun squaw handy; I'll pin my faith on them every time!

While she was getting in her good work the rest of us gathered around the mulligan kettle, over in the corner, and got acquainted.

"This stew just hits the spot," the stranger told us, helping himself to another plateful. "I ain't ate since yesterday noon, and I'm sure plumb empty."

"Fill right up, pardner, and welcome," said Doc hospitably. "Have some of this rye bread; it's a little hard, but it goes good if you soak it in the stew. Have another cup of coffee."

"Thanks," answered the other, accepting everything offered. "It's just like getting back home! I suppose you boys are wondering who I am and are too polite to ask questions, but I ain't got a thing to conceal. Name's Buddy Ruple; been working with the O B outfit up Wyoming way; got fired three days ago on account of laying over a day longer than the boss said I could at the Pancho City fireman's dance. Present destination is a matter of where I strike the next job. You boys know of anybody looking for an a-number-one puncher, roper, buster, and all-round handy man for a cattle outfit?"

"You betcha!" Doc told him enthusiastically. "Ed Bliss, foreman of the Tumbling R outfit, is looking for just such hombres as that. Cracking good man to work for. We boys belong. Good pay, good grub, and good treatment. If you've a mind to look in on him, we'll give you a note with our unqualified indorsement, just for the good turn you've done us in getting Buck fixed up."

"That'll suit me just fine," answered Buddy, getting up. "If you boys will fix up that note and give me the makin's—ain't had a smoke since breakfast, which was yesterday morning—I'll light right out, if it ain't too far to make to-night. I'm anxious to get settled in this new job."

"Headquarters are twenty-three miles due west," Doc told him. "You can make it easy in a coupla hours. We'll give you a fresh cayuse."

"Oh, no you won't, thanking you just the same," grinned Buddy. "This pinto I'm riding would be all bust up over a separation of us two. We're pals, me and Methuselah; wouldn't either of us think of such a thing as parting company."

Ten minutes later he was on his way to headquarters, and we four boneheads back on Little Snake Creek had started Something, with a capital S, although we didn't know it at the time.

CHAPTER II.

A HORNET'S NEST.

DOC, Pete, and I finished up the hay-cutting in good season, with Buck putting in his time on the bunk, which we carried outdoors daytimes so he wouldn't get too lonely waiting for his snake-bit leg to unswell itself and get back to normal, which it did slow but steady under the ministrations of the dope left behind by Limping Bear's squaw. The sprained ankle improved, too, but slower, and we knew that it wasn't going to get well in time for Buck to participate in the doings at the rodeo, which made everybody blue, as he was our one best bet against the riders from the other outfits. It began to look like the Tumbling R would have to take a back seat this year.

Ed Bliss, our foreman, was sitting on the top step of the ranch-house porch as we rode into headquarters, "expectorately" contemplating a dead fly in the dust below him.

"Howdy, boys!" he greeted us as we pulled up beside the porch. "Everything's all tight and cozy out Little Snake Creek flats way, I suppose?"

"Everything hunky-dory" Doc assured him. "Forty stacks sun-cured grass fifteen foot high and railed. Won't nothing go hungry out that-a-way this winter."

"Good work! You boys are entitled to an extra holiday for this. Hear you went one round with a sidewinder, Buck, and took the count?"

"Would of took it if it hadn't been for Buddy Ruple," grinned Buck. "How's that youngster making out, anyhow?"

"Regular hooting, tooting son-of-a-gun!" Ed told us.

"Something doing every minute. Keeps me busy all the time sorting out reasons why I should fire him and why I shouldn't. One minute the balance is on one side, and the next it's on the other. One day he's done enough to lose a dozen men their jobs, and the next he's made himself indispensable to the company. He gets my goat!"

"Is that so?" exclaimed Doc in surprise. "He seemed to be quiet enough from what we saw of him. What's he been doing?"

"What ain't he been doing? Gee whiz! The little bee of busy fame ain't got nothing on Buddy when it comes to action. One thing he's done is to bust old Heels Up!"

"G'wan!" exclaimed Buck incredulously. "Quit your kidding, Ed!"

Old Heels Up was the meanest, ornariest, cussedest outlaw cayuse that ever chewed bunch grass. No puncher had rode him yet for sixty consecutive seconds without biting the dust. That horse was as ingenious as he was cussed, too. He knew all the dips, spurs, angles, and variations of buck jumping, including several that are not in the catalogue; when other means of unseating a rider failed he had been known to lift his hind hoof and scratch him off like a dog scratches a flea off his ear.

For practical purposes Heels Up was no earthly good at all, but Ed kept him as a curiosity and source of amusement, like a phonograph or a two-headed calf. Once a year regular we had herded him down to the rodeo at Escalante to show the boys from the other ranches that we had something alive and kicking out our way, and old Heels Up had never failed to show them. As I have already said, he was considered unridable and unbreakable, and when Ed sprung it on us that Buddy had been straddling this infernal machine we were naturally skeptical.

"I ain't kidding you," Ed assured us. "The boys introduced Buddy to Heels Up the morning after he arrived. As per custom, they made him a present of the horse for an extra mount, and Buddy accepted the gift gratefully. Put on his own saddle and didn't bother about a bridle—just used a halter—and he mounted the hurricane deck without any assistance from the boys.

"Gee willikins, but how they did go it! Smashed a hole through the corral fence, ran over three men, and kicked the smokehouse off its foundations just for a starter, and then for ten minutes they had it nip and tuck, with Heels Up a-kicking and a-bucking and a-squealing and a-whirling like an overgrown Fourth of July pinwheel, and Buddy fanning him over the ears with his hat and raking him with his spurs and yelling, 'Hi, up, there! Hi, up, there! Get a move on you, you old frozen molasses barrel!' and other unkind and cutting remarks.

"When the boys saw how things were going some of them started to take up the horse, but Buddy yanks his shooting iron out of the holster, kicks the wind vane off the bunk-house roof, just to show them that he can shoot, even if he is busy with something else, and then yells at them to keep off or they'll get some of the same. I didn't see how the human system could stand the racket, and I was looking for Heels Up to just naturally jolt him to jelly and scatter—— Hello! Now, what's this?"

A wild, ferocious, and agonized yell coming from the bull pen had interrupted Ed's narrative, and we looked in that direction. There were more yells and vituperations, and then Buddy himself shot out the door at a two-ten clip, his face registering great and joyous delight, and right behind him came old High-water Jenkins, clothed in a blue flannel shirt and a suit of B. D. V.'s, and nothing else to speak of; bare-footed, bald-headed, screeching, and cussing like a riled catamount and doing his darndest to lay hands on the youngster and just naturally rip him to pieces.

It looked for a minute like he was going to succeed, for he kept gaining on Buddy, and as they came abreast the ranch house Hi reached for him. But just as he did so Buddy spun half around and dropped on all fours right in front of his pursuer. Hi hit him below the knees, going full tilt, turned a complete somersault, lit on his ear and shoulder, and slid three feet before he stopped.

If Hi hadn't been the tough old buckaroo that he is the sill would have broken his neck, but as it was he came up promptly with blood in his eye, boiling and fuming and blistering the air with invectives. Buddy had gone up a young cottonwood tree like a red squirrel, and now sat on the top limb, laughing down at his enraged pursuer.

We had to snicker ourselves when we looked at Hi. He stood out there in the open with his long blue shirt tails flopping in the breeze and his B. D. V.'s reaching to the knees of his old, bowed legs. His voice was husky with emotion as he beseeched Buddy to come down off his high perch and have it out like a man. When Buddy declined, Hi went in search of an ax, with the avowed intention of chopping that cottonwood right out from under his tormentor. He would have done it, too, if Ed hadn't interfered.

"Hold on there, Hi," the foreman protested as the other came bowlegging back with the cook's ax. "I'll stand for almost anything in a playful way, but I draw a line on chopping down the scenery."

Hi heaved the ax at Buddy and turned on Ed. "Here's where that son of a Piute or me quits right here!" he declared at the top of his voice. "I'm done, by gosh!"

"What's he gone and done this time?" asked Ed commiseratingly.

"What's he gone and done!" howled Hi, waving his arms. "He went and put hornets in my pants! That's what he's gone and done!"

And darned if Buddy hadn't. He had fixed up a little bag of mosquito netting, loaded it with half a dozen big white-head hornets, and sewed it on the inside of Hi's trouser leg, just above the knee!

At the time Hi was taking his afternoon snooze before going on night herd, and after Buddy had fixed things according to his humorous lights he had sat down in a corner of the bull pen to await developments.

Hi woke up after a while, and slid out of his bunk, sleepylike, and into his trousers and out of them again like they was a red-hot stovepipe, which no doubt they resembled when those white heads started punching operations.

When he investigated the inside of that trouser leg and discovered the cause of all the conflagation, and saw Buddy snickering over in the corner he just

naturally jumped to conclusions as to what was who, and started annihilation proceedings on the spot.

It was enough to put murder in the heart of any man, and Hi ramped and r'ared and laid his ears back and rolled his eyes around and showed his teeth for quite a spell before he cooled down. But Hi's a good old scout after all, and when he'd got the sting out of his leg with the aid of a quid of tobacco, and had thought it over, darned if he didn't see the joke himself. He looked up at Buddy.

"Son," said he solemnly, "shake hands and forget that I cussed you so scandulous a spell back; I apologize. I'm naturally a tender-hearted ol' maverick, an' don't want no hard feelings with nobody. But, son," and he wagged a long forefinger under Buddy's nose, "if you ever put any more hornets in my pants, may the Almighty help you; I won't!"

"You see how it is," said Ed to us in an aside. "That's the way Buddy's been going it ever since he hit the diggings. I'd ought to fire him for that trick, but, hang it all, he's the best rider in the outfit, if not the county, and I reckon he'll have to take Buck's place at the rodeo and uphold the honor of the ranch. You can't help liking the darned larrup, in spite of all his deviltry!"

CHAPTER III.

THE RODEO.

THINGS were humming in the little town of Escalante when our outfit rode in about nine o'clock of the morning of the big doings. Everything was decorated up with bunting and flags, and old Dutch Arnold's twelve-piece band, imported especial for the occasion from Denver, was blaring away at, "Arrah G'wan, I want to Go Back to Oregon," and the lads from the other ranches were parading around in their Angora chaps, new shirts, and bright kerchiefs and other adornments peculiar to the Great American Cow-puncher.

We rode down the main thoroughfare, following the crowd that was already heading toward the big field at the west end, where the doings were to take place.

Buddy was riding Heels Up, and the boys on the curb were whooping greetings and good-natured banter to the old outlaw and its rider. Everybody recognized Heels Up, of course, he having been a star feature at the previous rodeos, and it must have rasped on some of the old-timers who had been taking high dives from the peek of Heels Up's lifts regular once a year to see this young stranger riding him like he wasn't nothing wilder than an ordinary wooden rocking-horse.

Buddy returned their sallies with good-natured grins and an occasional wave of his hand, and said never a word for as long as five minutes after we entered the town. But, of course, you couldn't expect Buddy to remain silent forever. Not by any means.

"Look at that little jane over there by the barber pole!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Ain't she the little peacherino!"

He was pointing at a girl in a trim, fringed buckskin riding suit, a soft, white, broad-brimmed sombrero pinned back in front, and with two thick braids of golden-yellow hair hanging down her back. She was being escorted toward the rodeo grounds by a slim-built, good-looking young fellow in polished leather chaps with silver studdings. Seeing Buddy pointing at them, the young man flushed up and glared angrily in our direction.

"Hush-a-boy!" cautioned Highwater Jenkins, who was riding close beside Buddy. "That's old man Bradshaw's gal, an' the fellow beside her is Windy Phelps, the crack puncher from the Bar T outfit. He claims first options on that gal, and he's as plumb jealous and irritable as an old house cat, Buddy. Don't let him hear you callin' his best gal a jane or he'll just naturally claw you wide open."

"Ain't she the prettiest little thing that ever was!" exclaimed Buddy, twisting around in his saddle for a better view as we rode past the couple, and paying no attention whatever to Highwater's warnings. "Somebody introduces me to her plumb quick, you bet!"

"When the crash comes just remember that I tried to tell you," Hi told him in an aggrieved tone. "There ain't a puncher in Escalante to-day but what knows enough to keep away from that gal, except you, an' if you're bound to make a fool o' yourself, why, we can't help it. But, remember, I told you!"

Buddy didn't answer, but continued gazing back for as long as he could keep an eye on the couple.

It was early yet, but the boys were already busy on the big field. A bunch of longhorns, brought in especial for this occasion, stamped and bellowed in a high-rail corral at one end, as if cognizant of the coming disaster that awaited them. Down at the other end a score of ponies, the outlaws, show buckers, and wild horses to be used in the bucking contests, paced about a roped-in inclosure, restive and furtive.

Over by the creek in a bunch of cottonwoods were the tepees of a hundred Umcompahgre Ute Indians who had come down from the reservation up Utah way to take part in the doings, and painted and befeathered braves, followed by their fat, squat, papoose-laden squaws and good-looking young daughters, were mingling with the gayly dressed cowboys and cowgirls that already thronged the field.

Half a dozen judges were rustling around shouting orders and instructions through megaphones and announcing that the drawings for the buckaroos' choice of mounts would take place immediately at the judges' stand.

Buddy pushed up with the other punchers who were to take part in the contest, and drew his number from the hat.

"Buddy Ruple, of the Tumbling R, rides Dynamite," shouted the announcer as he read the slip.

"Whoopee, you'll get yours there, cowboy!" shouted several voices in unison. "Old Dynamite can make that cayuse you rode in look like he was standing still!"

"The harder they buck the tighter I stick," Buddy retorted, laughing. "Trot out the worst you've got! I'm game!"

"Atta boy!" cried old Highwater delightedly. "Don't let 'em bluff you, Buddy!"

Windy Phelps, separated from his girl for the moment, pushed up to the stand and drew his number.

"The well-known Windy Phelps, of the Bar T, rides Sam Hill," cried the announcer.

"Wow! wow! wow!" shouted the crowd derisively.

"Show bucker! Show bucker! That nag couldn't jolt a frog off his back!"

Windy looked a little put out at the result of his drawing, as well he might, for Sam Hill was one of the easiest buckers in the bunch to ride. It would be nothing to his credit for Windy to stick on top of that animal for the allotted forty-five seconds.

"Aw, for the love o' Mike, give me something alive!" he shouted at the judges. "I was fixing to ride Dynamite to-day, but that new duck from the Tumbling R cops him out. I want to trade numbers with somebody what drawed something."

"Here you are, Windy," called a tall, lank puncher, also from the Bar T. "I drawed Happy Hooligan; reckon *he* can keep you busy."

"Thanks," cried Windy, pushing over to the other and exchanging tickets. "Happy comes nearer being a live one than that thing I drawed. I'll return the favor, Slim."

He looked around at his girl, and his face went black. Buddy had her corralled off to one side and was talking to her like a house afire. The young lady was looking four ways—interested, nervous, pleased, and scared, but she was twinkling and blushing like a schoolgirl, and it was evident that she was enjoying our boy's persiflage.

It was funny how still everything got as Windy made his way to where they stood. The girl noticed it first and looked around nervously, but Buddy kept right on chinning as if there wasn't another soul but the girl within a thousand miles of him.

"Who introduced *you* to this girl?" Windy inquired in a cold, even tone as he ranged up alongside them.

Buddy shot a glance at him out the corner of his eye, and went right on with the conversation. "As I was saying, Miss Bradshaw, when something uneasy interrupted us, this Galway person says to me——"

The girl saw it coming, and in her excitement dropped her handkerchief. Buddy must have seen it, too, for he stooped suddenly, just as Windy's fist swished through the air where his head had been a second before with a swing that would have felled an ox.

Buddy picked up the girl's handkerchief with his left hand and Windy's foot with his right, both at the same instant. What he did with his right hand was never quite clear to any of us. It was a sort of a jujutsu-prestidigitator-simple-twist-of-your-wrist combination of a move, but the result was astonishing. Windy described a parabola, in which his feet and head changed ends, and the latter smote Mother Earth with a most scandalous thump.

"Here's your handkerchief, Miss Bradshaw," said Buddy as he straightened up, and without even a side glance at the other man.

Well! Things began popping on the minute. The Bar T crowd and their friends surged in from one side, while the Tumbling R's rushed in from the other, and in two seconds everybody was shouting and milling and flying wild generally. Without paying the slightest attention to the row he had started, Buddy took the girl's arm and escorted her out of the mêlée, and of course nobody thought of touching him while he was doing that.

It looked for a minute like our little picnic was going up the flue, but before anything serious happened Highwater Jenkins and some of the older heads jumped in and quieted the youngsters. Several of the Bar T boys got hold of Windy and led him away to cool off, while Ed Bliss and I grabbed Buddy and hustled him around behind the judges' stand.

"Now, looky here, son," Ed expostulated, "you can't go cutting up like that on this man's day. Roughhouses ain't on the program, nohow!"

"I never said a word to that guy!" Buddy protested. "He tried to start something, and I just walked away like a gentleman. I can't see why you should bawl me out!"

"That's all right," Ed assured him grimly. "This Phelps person is one bad actor when somebody starts him, which it's a cinch you have. You can act just as darn innocent as you please, but, you take it from me, you're going to hear from that hombre! I ain't sorry you did it, but it's a holy fact, Bud, that you can't go around standing folks on their heads promiscuous—particularly Windy's breed—without getting into trouble."

"It *has* been done," Buddy told him with a grin. "You quit worrying, Ed. If I can't take care of myself, nobody can."

"You said something there, son! I'd hate to have a steady job looking after you! You'd drive a sober man drunk and a drunken man crazy. Now, for Heaven's sake, keep away from Windy's girl until after the big doings, and see if you can't travel ten consecutive feet without starting something."

"*Windy's* girl?" said Buddy with an inquiring look. "You mean Clara Bradshaw? Say, that reminds me of something. Congratulate me, boys. I am going to marry Clara!"

"You—what!" exploded Ed, scarcely believing his ears. "You ain't asked her to marry you already, have you?"

"No; not yet, but you can bet your bright red necktie that I am going to the first chance I get," Buddy told us solemnly.

CHAPTER IV.

"LET 'ER BUCK!"

IT was a good-natured crowd, after all, and when the hot-heads had had a chance to cool off things quieted down very nicely, and the events began as per schedule at ten o'clock sharp.

The roping contests were the first on the program, and served to warm up the crowd for what was to follow. From a thirty-foot start Windy Phelps, the fifth man up, roped, busted, and hog-tied his steer in thirty-one seconds, coming within ten seconds of the world's record.

Buddy started on Buck's cow pony, which the latter had insisted on lending him for the occasion. In ten seconds flat he had run down and roped his steer with a beautiful throw of the reata. He circled the animal so as to bring the rope from the horns around the hind legs, then a touch on the flank and the well-trained pony made a sudden turn, the rope tautened, and the steer executed a flip-flop and landed with his heels in the air.

Buddy left the saddle as the pony turned, and almost before the steer struck earth he was halfway there with a short piece of rope in his hand. Now it was

the pony's business to hold that rope taut while Buddy caught up three of the steer's legs and hog-tied them together; but the pony overdid his part and tugged so hard that the lariat broke just before Buddy reached the animal.

Well, that was a pretty how-de-do! If there is one thing more than another that get rip'r'aring mad it is a Texas longhorn that has just been stood on his head. As the steer scrambled up Buddy shot a glance over his shoulder to see if he could make the saddle in time, but the distance was too great, and he turned back again just as the steer charged.

"Wow! Wow! Yip! Yip! Yip! Go get him, steer!" yelled the Bar T crowd in a chorus, highly elated over this turn of affairs, which no doubt cinched the roping honors for their ranch. When the rope broke Buddy had fifteen seconds to spare, and ten of these would have sufficed to do the tying and raise his hands as a signal that he had finished, thus beating Windy's record by five seconds.

The steer lunged furiously, and Buddy side-stepped, just missing the rake of the animal's long sharp horn. Quick as a flash he spun around, and as the steer turned he grasped the near horn with both hands, bowing his body so that the horn passed across his chest, the sharp point ripping his shirt.

This brought Buddy face to face with his antagonist, and without an instant's hesitation he threw himself squarely onto the animal's head. His left arm wrapped around the left horn, his right hand sought the other horn and gripped it, and then he settled on his heels and hung there, hugging for dear life, a dead weight on the steer's neck.

The enraged animal plunged and backed and swung in a vain endeavor to shake off its smaller adversary. It bellowed hoarsely as it tried to rear upward in an effort to stamp the man with its forefeet, but the hundred and sixty pounds dead weight on its head made the effort futile.

The crowd was still now. To many of those present this was not a new spectacle, but it was soul stirring, gripping. No one thought of interfering; it was a battle between the man and the beast, in which one or the other must conquer alone by wits and brawn.

Buddy shifted his position slightly, and the steer's nose began slowly to turn up to the right. Higher and higher it rose, while Buddy's face reddened with exertion. Suddenly he dug his left heel into the dirt, his right foot slipped behind the longhorn's right foreleg and in front of its left, the man's knee doubled, twisting the forefeet together, and the animal tripped and rolled over with Buddy lying across its neck.

"Whoope-e-e, cowboy!" yelled the Tumbling R exultantly, and then everybody went still again. Buddy had thrust his head forward, and his teeth closed on the steer's nose. He flung himself off the animal's neck and lay prone on the ground, his arms outstretched, holding down the longhorn by the grip of his jaws alone.

"Bulldogged, by glory!" whooped old Highwater Jenkins, throwing his hat into the air. And then everybody let loose and cheered like wild men. It was an exhibition of nerve, skill, and daring that was worth coming a million miles to see.

A dozen punchers rushed onto the field, roped the steer, and led him away. But Buddy had lost the roping contest, for, notwithstanding his game showing while foot-loose and facing a mad steer, Windy's record stood.

José Hernandez, from up Idaho way, carried off the fancy-roping honors, making his lariat sing and hum as he executed figure eights and hopped in and out of his spinning loops. In the relay race and maverick race and most of the other minor events neither Buddy nor Windy scored firsts.

A diversion was furnished when "Old Hiram," the bucking bull from the Lazy L was led onto the field and its owner announced through the megaphone that a prize of one hundred dollars would be given to the buckeroo who could stick on the bull's broad back for ten short seconds.

Buddy was the first to volunteer. The bull was a whopper, fully four feet across his back, with the saddle cinched on around his middle where the buck was the hardest, and where it was impossible, because of the breadth, to get a leg hold on its barrel. He was a foxy old duffer, too. Buddy made a grab for the saddle horn and picked up a handful of dust. He tried again and made it, landing in the saddle square and straight. The stop watch hasn't yet been made that could time that bull, but from casual observation I should say that Buddy remained in that saddle about three one-millionths of a second, which was, I should judge, fully two one-millionths of a second longer than any other puncher managed to stick. Most of them never paused at all; just went straight up. Windy stayed out of this contest.

Then the Uncomphagre Utes came filing out in their war paint and feathers to the rhythmic thump of the tom-toms and circled the field in their ceremonial war dance, while the old-timers like Highwater and old man Baldwin looked on with misty eyes at this scene that recorded a chapter of the passing of the old West—the West they loved.

Then the field cleared, and the megaphone man began shouting for the buckaroos to get ready for their stunts. That woke up the crowd, for many of whom this was to be the star event of the day.

"Let 'er buck!" came the yell from all sides, which, translated into Eastern parlance, means, "Go to it!"

Our man was the ninth one-up. "Number seven, Buddy Ruple of the Tumbling R, on Dynamite!" shouted the announcer.

"Good-by, cowboy!" shouted fifty voices as Buddy ran out to meet the wranglers leading his mount down the field from the corral. "Here's where the Tumbling R gets showed up!" cried a Bar T lad. Buddy sprang into the saddle without using the stirrup, and settled instantly into place. The wranglers jerked off the blindfold, jumped aside, and the fun began.

Dynamite was all that his name implied. He was an outlaw of the worst order, gifted with enough sagacity and grit for a dozen buckers. He started right in with the determination that if he couldn't unload his rider in one way he would do it in another, and the gyrations that cayuse went through during the forty-five seconds allotted him to put his rider down was a revelation to the audience.

He started with a "straightaway," nose down between forefeet and back bowing like a springboard. When that didn't work he tried the "double O," followed that up with a "corkscrew," made a stab at

"sidewinding," and finished up by going down the field "sunfishing" at every jump; that is, throwing his hind feet alternately from left to right while all four feet are off the ground. The chap who sticks on a sunfisher when he's going full tilt is some buckaroo, I want to tell you!

"Stay with him, Buddy!" shouted old Highwater, swinging his hat around his head. "Scratch him, boy!"

Buddy was riding straight up, like he was glued in the saddle, one hand holding the halter rope and the other raised level with his head to show the crowd that he wasn't "choking the horn" or "pulling leather." When old Hi shouted his injunction to "scratch him," Buddy grinned and began swinging his legs back and forth along the pony's sides, raking its ribs with his dull spurs.

Pulling that kind of a stunt on a critter of Dynamite's well-known characteristics was an exhibition of darn-fool nerve that fetched a wild burst of approval from the crowd, and the judges promptly signaled the wranglers to take up the horse. Buddy had won hands down.

Of course we all crowded up to tender congratulations, and Buck Miller, coming on a hop and a limp, was the first to reach him and grab his hand. "You're a humdinger, boy!" he shouted. "That exhibition makes my riding look like a piker's work."

"Uh-huh," grinned Buddy absently. "Easy stuff. Why ain't they got something to ride here? Uh-huh," and he wandered off into the crowd while the rest of us were still trying to get in a word.

"He's sure one natter-o'-fact hombre," remarked Hi, gazing after him. "Most fellers would 'a' stood around for an hour gettin' patted on the back, an' whinnied for more, but he walks off as unconcerned as if this wa'n't nothin' but a little bustin' bee."

The third man up after Buddy was Windy Phelps on Happy Hooligan. Happy started off with all the enthusiasm of a volcano in full eruption. He had all the tricks of the trade in his little bag, too, and he pulled out one after another with such rapidity that it puzzled the onlookers to keep tab on the variations.

But the worst he could do didn't faze Windy in the least. He stuck to the hurricane deck of that earthquake with all the composure of an old lady knitting in a rocking-chair. He even essayed to roll a cigarette, and might have succeeded if the paper hadn't broke in his hands. At the end of half a minute the crowd went wild.

"Stick to him, cowboy! Fan him! Scratch him!" they shouted.

Windy grinned his appreciation of the cheering. His eyes searched the crowd, and suddenly his grin took a walk. He was looking straight over my head, and naturally I turned to see what it was that had jolted him. Not ten feet behind us stood Buddy with his back to the show and in earnest and confidential conversation with Clara Bradshaw. His talk must have been plumb interesting, for the girl was giving him her undivided attention and seemed to have forgotten all about her bold buckaroo out there in the saddle.

The distraction was fatal to Windy. He stiffened in his saddle, and that is the last thing anybody wants to do when they are riding the business top of a bucking broncho. So long as they ride loose and easy, letting their body swing with the pony's, they are pretty much all right, but the second they start bunching their muscles it is all off. The old cyclone felt Windy stiffen, saw his chance, gave two terrific jumps, and away went the rider, feet over appetite, landing on his back in the dust with a thump that completely knocked the wind out of him.

Highwater Jenkins, Ed Bliss, and I made a simultaneous dash for Buddy, with the idea of rushing him away and getting him started for home before Windy recovered and started another ruckus. We all had the same notion that this time matters might take a serious turn. Before we could get in a word, however, old man Baldwin came horning in with a rush.

"Now, you boys hold on a minute!" he ordered peremptorily. "This here's my gal, an' if she wants to visit with this young feller, by crickets she's agoin' to do it, whether you like it or no! I'll stand back o' her in that!"

"Windy will be coming over here in a minute, and by the looks of the moon he'll come a-shooting. Are you going to stand back of that, too?" Ed asked him pointedly.

"No, I ain't!" the old man averred. "From what I've seen o' this boy I don't reckon I'll have to, either. Anybody what can bulldog a steer like he done ain't agoin' to be scairt o' no breed o' cattle like what Windy Phelps sprung from. He'll take keer o' himself, an' if I know Windy Phelps—an' I reckon I do—he won't bother you none this day!"

And old man Baldwin had it right, for Windy kept away, and there wasn't anything for the rest of us to do but get away ourselves and let Buddy and Clara finish their visit.

For all that Ed was all fussed up over the affair. This Bar T lad was known as an ugly customer when crossed, and a treacherous one at that. Ed jawed as we rode home in the gray dusk.

"You hadn't ought to done it, Buddy," he scolded. "It wasn't nowise sensible, considering Windy's reputation for quick action. Next news you get you'll be shot full of holes or something worse. You keep your eye peeled for this Phelps person from now on, son."

But Buddy's thoughts seemed to be elsewhere. He gazed dreamily ahead into the afterglow of the sunset without appearing to hear Ed's admonishments. Suddenly he lifted his voice in song, and it wasn't any rollicking range ditty, either:

"Such a lovely girl,
With teeth of pearl,
She's an angel without wings!"

CHAPTER V.

AN ALARM.

THE Sunday following the rodeo, Buddy asked Ed for the day off, and was granted the privilege. He dolled himself up in the best he had, asked the direction to the Baldwin ranch, and rode away on his long-legged pinto. Ed fussed about it a little after he had gone, but Highwater seemed to be easy in his mind.

"Shucks, Ed," he told the boss reassuringly, "that boy's all right. Even if he should meet up with this Phelps person at the ranch, the old man won't stand

for no foolishments. Can't you see that he's fell plumb to the bottom o' the well for Buddy? He thinks he's a regular king-pin!"

"That's all right," Ed retorted. "But this Phelps is one bad hombre. He was mixed up in a couple of shooting affrays before he came to the Bar T, and it ain't in the coroner's records whether Windy's was the body that was interred in lot humpty-four, division six."

"Well, now, when it comes to that," returned Hi, "I reckon Buddy's demonstrated to us that he can ride better, shoot straighter, an' move quicker than any two men on the reservation. Windy ain't fast enough by an hour and a half to catch up with him. Huh! Quit your stewin'."

And there the matter rested. Ed had sized up the case of Buddy pretty well when he said that you couldn't help liking the darn larrup, even if he was raising Ned every fifteen minutes. It was only natural that his friends should feel a little uneasy, knowing that Windy was laying for him, but, as Buddy had put it himself, if he couldn't take care of himself nobody else could.

Along about six o'clock that evening who should come riding in but old man Bradshaw himself, accompanied by Jim Darrow, boss of the Lazy L Ranch. They both wore serious expressions, and the first thought that came to all of us was that Buddy had got hurt.

"Is he dead?" asked Hi apprehensively before they could climb out of their saddles.

"Is who dead?" asked Bradshaw in astonishment.

"Why, Buddy! Ain't he been mixin' with Phelps?"

"Lord, no!" laughed the old man. "What put that notion into your head? Just because he rid over to-day to see my gal? Shucks! Them two are settin' out in the grape arbor, chinning like a couple o' lawyers—or they were when I left. Windy won't bother them none on my place. He come moseyin' round day after the rodeo, an' I kicked him off a-hoppin'. Told him he needn't come round them diggin's any more after the way he embarrassed Clara that day. I told him some more things, an' I don't reckon he'll bother us any more."

It turned out that they had ridden over on a matter of business with Ed, and the three went into the ranch house together, where they could talk in private. About two hours later Ed came to the door and called Highwater and me in. He looked worried over something, and old man Baldwin and Jim Darrow were sitting in the office, looking pretty solemn, too.

"Boys," said Ed sort of slow and reluctant, "have either of you noticed anything queer about our bunch of cattle lately?"

We told him we hadn't, and waited for further particulars.

"Haven't you noticed a scarcity of weaned slick ears and sleepers lately?"

A "slick ear" is a calf that has not yet been branded—usually one running with its mother. Whenever a puncher runs onto a weaned slick ear it is his duty to catch it and notch its ear with his jackknife, thus giving it a mark that will identify it as belonging to the Tumbling R Ranch. These earmarked calves are known as "Sleepers," and are later marked with the company brand at the regular round-up. Now that Ed mentioned it to us, it occurred to both Hi and me that there had been a scarcity of unmarked calves during the past few weeks. I hadn't notched an ear in ten days, and Hi declared that he hadn't either.

"Well, it is sure darn curious," said Ed perplexedly. "Bradshaw and Darrow are both up the same stump that I am. They have noticed a big falling off of slick ears and sleepers, too, which is the reason they came over to see me to-day. My records began to show a dropping off about two months ago, but I have kept still and gumshoed around, trying to find out the reason. Thought maybe it might be inside work."

"You don't think any of our boys are rustlin' them calves?" asked Hi.

"If they are, they are almighty smooth about it," Ed replied. "I have been keeping pretty close tab on our men, but I can't see where any of them are mixed up in a calf-rustling deal. It doesn't seem that any one could get away with that kind of a game around here with the ranches, roads and fences. They couldn't ship the calves out from the railroad station without its being noticed and reported, and it's a cinch they couldn't drive calves overland. They'd peter out inside of ten miles."

"Well, anyway, they're disappearing," said Jim Darrow. "As near as I can make out, I have lost between seventy-five and a hundred in the past ten weeks. Bradshaw, here, says he is shy at least fifty, and the Lord only knows what you've lost, Ed, considering the relative sizes of our ranches."

"I asked you boys in because you have been with the Tumbling R longer than any of the rest, and I know you can keep your mouths shut," Ed told us. "We've got to find out about this thing. Sit down and we will all talk it over."

So we sat down and talked it over for two hours there in Ed's office, and at the end of that time we weren't any nearer a solution than when we started. In the end it was agreed that we should all keep still about the matter, keep our eyes and ears open and see if we couldn't get to the bottom of the mystery before all three ranchers were completely cleaned out of slick ears.

Hi and I went out to the bunk house and rolled in. Hi, the old goat, was asleep and snoring inside of five minutes. There was nothing that could keep him awake, anyhow, in the way of mental problems. But I lay there in my bunk, thinking the thing over and trying to arrive at some sort of a conclusion as to why was what.

I was still studying when Buddy came home, about one o'clock that morning. He came in humming a little tune under his breath and grinning softly, as I could see by the light of the lantern that is always burning at the back end of the bunk house.

He was pretty happy, and I figured that he hadn't been disappointed in love that Sunday. Tiptoeing along to his bunk, he passed Hi's, and paused to listen to the old duffer snoring. He stood there a minute, grinning and studying and not noticing me watching him from my bunk. Then he tiptoed over to Pete Doyle's bunk, took down the old alarm clock Pete kept hanging on the side of it, and returned to Hi.

He carefully muffled the bell with his handkerchief, set it to go off in five minutes, slipped it under

Hi's blankets, down near his feet, and then hopped into his own bunk and went fast asleep with one eye open.

When that alarm went off it sounded like an eighteen-foot rattlesnake giving the come-along signal to a deaf-and-dumb bandmaster. The noise it made didn't in the least resemble that produced by an alarm clock. Hi woke up a little, raised his head, and listened with one ear cocked up and the other down, and landed in the middle of the floor with a yell that lifted every last-day herder onto his feet faster than you could count them coming out of their bunks.

"Now what in thunder's abitin' you, Highwater?" Pete Doyle asked peevishly.

Hi felt himself over from head to foot very carefully, took a long-distance glare at his bunk, which had become suddenly quiet, and retorted: "There ain't nothin' bitin' me, Peter, thanks to my ability to move a leetle bit faster than some other things I knows of; but I want to say to everybody present, an' with all candor, that I can lick the hifaultin' son o' a hop-toad that put that sidewinder in my bunk!"

Then they all got clubs and boots and things and went after the sidewinder. When Hi pulled back his blankets and found Pete's alarm clock, and the boys identified the handkerchief around the bell, he looked over at the bunk where Buddy was slumbering like a young pup dog and snickering in his sleep, and Hi grinned.

"The darn young larrup!" said he, and went back to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

BUDDY JOINS.

WHEN it came to conscientious and persistent wooing you had to hand it to Buddy. He was sure on the job in that capacity first, last, and all the time. When he was on night duty he would come off herd at six o'clock, eat three mouthfuls of breakfast and a cup of coffee, saddle up a fresh cayuse, and be at the Bradshaw ranch at nine o'clock in the morning. He would get back home about three in the afternoon, sleep until six, eat supper, and be ready for the night's grind as if it was nothing more trying than cutting the cook's supper wood. And that was twenty-three miles and repeat in the saddle!

When he was on day herd Clara had a way of dropping over every day or two, just to pass the time o' day with Mrs. Bliss, Ed's wife. She would come loping in on her little buckskin pony, her golden braids flopping and her blue eyes dancing—she was just as full of the dickens as Buddy—prance up on the porch and settle down in a rocking-chair beside Mrs. Ed, like she had come for an all-day visit.

The two women would talk like a house afire for about fifteen minutes, and then Clara would guess that she would take a little pasear out on the range just to see how the cows were coming along, whereat Mrs. Ed would duck her head down and smile to herself like, and say that mebbe it would be a good plan and she reckoned Clara would find her cow down in the north pasture, and then Clara would blush and hop her pony and beat it.

Highwater and I used to watch them riding together over the hills and along the creek; they sure was one handsome pair to draw to. Old Hi would look at them, heave a cyclonic sigh, and say: "Lord, Bill, how it does bring back the old times, don't it? We used to sashay round just that-a-way, hey, Bill? I recollect one gal with braids just like Clara's, only they was black—an'——" And he would go reminiscenting off in his mind, with his old gray eyes blinking and his mouth twitching.

The looked-for clash between Buddy and Windy hadn't materialized, and it began to look like that scare would sizzle out. Word had drifted over our way shortly after the rodeo that Windy had quit the Bar T after a row with the boss and had gone up Wyoming way. Anyhow, he had been missing from the community for some weeks, which made Ed and Hi and me breathe easier. We felt just as well satisfied to have those youngsters in separate States.

But in the meantime Ed was having his troubles—plus. Calves were leaking off the range like water out of a shotgun-riddled tin pail, but to save us we couldn't find out the reason where, why, or how. Old man Baldwin, Jim Darrow, and Perry Lake, the last-named being owner of the Box T and also a heavy calf loser, held frequent conferences with us and compared notes, advanced theories, made Sherlock Holmes deductions, and spilled a lot more medicine talk without arriving at any definite conclusion as to where those calves were disappearing to. Finally Ed threw up his hands in despair and wired headquarters at New York.

That fetched Colonel Watrus, president of the Routt County Cattle Company, out here on a jump. Anything likely to interfere with a steady flow of dividends always made the colonel jump. We had an immediate powwow in Ed's office.

"It is simply ridiculous!" the colonel informed us in exasperation, after Ed had told him all we knew, which was mighty little. "There might have been a time, on the open range, when such things as cattle rustling was possible, but here in a settled community—at least enough so that a thief couldn't drive a bunch of calves ten miles without its being noticed—it is outside of all reason."

"Just the same, it is being done," Ed told him. "My records show that."

And then he got out his book and explained the records to the colonel Whenever a puncher notched the ear of a weaned calf he reported this in when he came off herd duty, and by entering these reports in his record book Ed was able to keep a pretty accurate account of the new sleepers as they were weaned, and in this way keep tab on the increase in the herds.

Going back three or four months, the records showed a steady average week in and week out. Then suddenly they began to skip; one week there would be a drop off of from fifty to seventy-five slick ears, and the next week the record would be back to normal; next week another drop off; next week normal again, and this had been going on with unvarying regularity for sixteen weeks, in which time Ed estimated that we had lost between five hundred and six hundred head of calves.

That was a lot of veal to lose. Unless the leak was stopped it would mean a yearly loss of about sixteen hundred calves, which would be, at the prevailing market prices, worth something in the vicinity of forty thousand dollars. The way the colonel red-

dened up when he got these figures nailed in his mind made it look like Ed was in a fair way to lose his job if he didn't find that leak and stop it almighty quick.

"How does it happen that only every other week shows a loss in this record?" the colonel wanted to know. "Wouldn't that lead one to suspect that whoever is doing this requires about seven days to make the transfer of calves from here to whatever place he is taking them?"

"I thought of that, but decided that it isn't feasible," answered Ed. "It is simply outside the question that a man—or a dozen of them for that matter—could carry off fifty to seventy-five calves in a bunch without somebody seeing them.

"What I suspicion is that this stealing is being engineered by one or more of our outfit, while they are on night duty. That would explain this alternate-week business—providing that the stealing is done at night, which is no doubt the case."

"Now you are getting somewhere!" exclaimed the colonel. "Some of our men are in this thing, are they? Well, it hadn't ought to take long to find out who they are. How many men work on night herd?"

"Thirty. They alternate, one week day herd and one week night herd."

"I see. And when this particular thirty men are on duty nights the stealing takes place; when they go on day herd the stealing stops?"

"You've guessed it the first crack," Ed told him. "But which one, or more, of that thirty are doing the work is what I can't find out."

"Don't you suspicion any of them?" asked the colonel.

"Oh, yes; I suspect the whole night herd—that is, all except one."

"Who is that one?"

"Buddy Ruple. I'll bank on him first, last, and all the time to be absolutely honest, and I reckon Hi and Bill will back me up on that."

"I see. Does this Buddy Ruple know about this calf business?"

"Certainly not. Why should I tell him? I have been trying to keep this matter quiet until I got a clew of some kind, knowing that as soon as it was generally known the stealing would in all probability stop."

"Isn't that what you want it to do?" asked the colonel with a touch of sarcasm.

"C-certainly," stammered Ed. "What I mean is, I want to get a line on the thieves before I let out the news. I am under the impression that they don't even suspect that we are missing the calves, and I have had a feeling that if we just kept still and watched we would be bound to find out something in time."

"And in time we are bound to have every last calf we own carried off right under our noses," the colonel told him pointedly. "We've got to inject a little quick action into this business, Mr. Bliss. Why don't you take a few more of your men into your confidence?"

"If I did I might take in the thieves themselves," Ed replied wortiedly.

"Why don't you tell Buddy about it, Ed?" asked Highwater, speaking for the first time. "Ain't he the best man you've got on the ranch? I'll bet you a darn good five-cent seegar that if you sick Buddy onto this business he'll get to the bottom o' it faster'n than all the rest of us put together."

"Then, by all means, sick him onto it!" exclaimed the colonel emphatically.

"All right; I'll do that," returned Ed, getting up and going to the door.

Buddy was sitting outside the bunk house, polishing up his saddle against to-morrow's trip to the Bradshaw home. Ed called him in.

"Buddy," he began, going straight to the point, "we are under the impression that somebody is running off our calves. We would like to get your opinion."

"I know somebody is running off your calves," Buddy told him bluntly.

"You—what!" yelled Ed, staring.

"Somebody is rustling your calves," Buddy drawled quietly. "I've known that for several weeks."

"Why in blazes didn't you tell me about it, then?" exploded Ed angrily.

"Because you didn't tell me," Buddy retorted. "I ain't boss of this ranch. Why should I go chasing around giving you information that you already know?"

"Why, you impudent young whelp!" shouted Ed, completely taken off his feet by the other's cool impertinence. "What do you mean by talking that way to me?"

"Getting mad, ain't you?" grinned Buddy with a sudden change of manner. "I was just kidding you, boss. I knew you were losing calves, and that some of the other ranchers were, too, but, also knowing that you were aware of what was happening, I didn't feel that I had any business butting in until you said something to me."

"How does it happen that you knew about this?" put in the colonel suddenly.

Buddy contemplated the big boss with an appraising and humorous eye for a moment before replying. "Oh, I got a gift of second-sight," he drawled softly. "I set in my saddle and go into a trance and see the roses blooming all around me and the little birds twittering on the apple boughs, and they twitter little bits of information into my ear. That's how I knew."

"Humph!" snorted the colonel, but tickled for all that. "Tell that to Sweeny, young man! Now, give us the truth; who told you about this calf business?"

"The little bird on the apple bough," insisted Buddy mildly. "He's a bright little bird, that little bird is, he——"

"Piffle!" interrupted the colonel, but laughing in spite of himself, as were all the rest of us, at Buddy's droll way of putting it. "This gentleman here," indicating Hi, "declares that you are some bright yourself and that you can clear up this calf mystery for us. Is he lying, or do you think so yourself?"

"W-e-l-l, now, I ain't the man to brag about my personal attributes none," Buddy returned slowly, "but when you put it that way I'm just bound to admit that I believe I'm the little boy that could get to the bottom of the well if I was pushed hard enough."

"In that case, you get right on the job," the colonel told him. "The quicker this calf leak is stopped and the thieves apprehended, the bigger the reward that will be coming your way. I can assure you that it will be substantial, young man, if you succeed. Now

are there any details or other information that Mr. Bliss can give you?"

"I don't reckon there is," Buddy answered respectfully. "That little bird on the apple bough is right strong on details, boss."

The meeting broke up shortly afterward, and Hi and I went down by the creek to talk it over after our own manner.

"Now, how'n the hotel do you suppose Buddy found out about those calves?" I asked. "It's funny that he would spring that little-bird racket instead of giving us the facts."

Old Hi snorted and looked down at me from the height of superior wisdom. "He didn't lie none about the trance and the little bird, Bill," he chuckled. "He set right there in his saddle an' the trance, an' a little bird with gold braids down her back twitters, 'Now, don't you never tell, honey, an' I'll impart a secret to you,' just like that."

"Do you mean that Clara Bradshaw told him?" I asked in astonishment.

"Sure she did. Ain't him an' her sweethearts, an' ain't old man Bradshaw losin' calves, too? He'd naturally let his daughter in on the secret, an' she'd naturally—— Shucks, Bill, ain't you never been in love?"

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE IN THE DARK.

COLONEL WATRUS was a live wire, if there ever lived one, and the more he realized how the company dividends were being lifted off the premises the more excited he became and the more he pestered Ed with useless suggestions.

"The very first thing we want to do to-morrow is to round up every last animal on the ranch and brand everything that isn't already branded," he told Ed. "Once we get the company trade-mark burned on those slick ears, the thieves won't dare steal them."

"That wouldn't do any but temporary good," Ed told him wearily. "Don't you realize that in a herd of from seventy-five to one hundred thousand critters the calf, like the proverbial fool, is born every minute—almost? It wouldn't be any time at all before there would be a fresh stock of slick ears ready for stealing. We've got to locate the source of all this trouble before we get anywhere—that's all."

"Well, we've got to do something right away!" the colonel declared with much emphasis. "This can't go on. We've *got* to stop it! It is a terrible loss! It will ruin us!"

"I reckon you are right," Ed agreed, staring at his superior with the helpless expression one assumes when he has just about reached the limit of his patience and is ready and willing to chuck the whole job, but feels that he can't.

And that is the way they had it back and forth for the rest of the afternoon and well into the evening, without either of them getting anywhere, which wasn't at all surprising, when you considered that Ed and Hi and I had already done everything conceivable in an effort to clear up the mystery.

Along about ten o'clock that night Hi and I slipped on our moccasins, put electric searchlights in our pockets, and started out for a little pasear around the range. We had formed a habit of doing this every night or two for some time back, hoping that on one of the excursions we would happen onto some clew to this calf business. We always wore moccasins on these trips, so we could move about quietly, and we walked, instead of riding, for the same reason. Thus far our sleuthing had been barren of results. Still, you couldn't expect two foot-loose men to get much of anywhere on forty square miles of rough range.

It was a hot, dark, blustery night, without a star showing, and the heavy black clouds were scudding low and fast overhead, and threatened to break into a downpour at any minute. The wind, which was already almost a gale, kept rising higher and higher, and was whistling a lively tune in the cottonwoods along the creek by the time we reached the north pasture.

This pasture was a fenced-in area of about ten thousand acres, with the creek running through the center. It was closed on three sides by four strands of barb wire, and on the fourth it skirted the Escalante-Ladore wagon road and had a six-strand fence. Hi and I followed the creek until we reached the center of the pasture, and then started to cut across to the wagon road. We stepped along still and careful, keeping our ears open for any unusual sounds, although the steady drone of the wind made this difficult; still, our ears were all we had to depend upon, as the night was as black as the inside of a tar barrel.

"Phew!" whistled Hi softly. "Gosh, Bill, this is a reg'lar ol' humdinger o' a night, ain't it? An' yet I got a sort o' sneakin' idee that we're goin' to bump into some information before we get back home."

"I have, too," I told him in a low voice. "It is sort of in the air, I guess."

We walked right smack into that information about five minutes afterward. The first news I had of it was when Hi stumbled over something and went down all in a heap. At the same instant I collided with something else and brought up short. It took but a second to discover, by the feel, that my obstruction was a cow pony, saddled, but riderless.

Hi was on his feet by this time, jawing softly and wanting to know where I was. When I told him he groped his way to where I stood and felt the pony over. "This is kind o' curious," he remarked. "Here's a hoss without no rider, an' I just stepped on a——"

He didn't complete the sentence, for just then there was a flash in the darkness ahead of us, a gun roared, and old Hi crumpled up and keeled over without a gasp. Immediately following the shot I thought I heard a shout—sounded like two voices, although I couldn't be certain on account of the roar of the wind.

When Hi didn't get up again I stooped down and felt him over. He was lying flat on his back, with his arms outstretched, and didn't answer when I spoke to him. When I touched his head my hand was instantly covered with a gush of warm blood.

"Gad!" thought I, jumping up. "Somebody's shot the top of poor old Hi's head plumb off!" And while I was thinking it that gun blazed away again, and a bullet zipped by my head so close that it made me duck.

That settled it so far as Bill Deveroux was concerned. I am considered a peaceful enough hombre when I am not crowded too far, but in this case I felt that I was being pushed a-plenty, so I unlimbered my gun and let go all six shots for general results as fast as I could fan the hammer. Then I flattened out on the ground beside Hi, while ahead of me two guns blazed away in answer to my shots and the bullets whizzed like wasps over my head.

I gave up trying to reload in the dark, felt Hi over for his gun, and yanked it out of the holster just as a horseman came dashing up and flashed his electric light on me. It was Pete Doyle; he had heard the shooting and had come along on a jump to see what the row was. Inside of two minutes three other punchers came tearing up.

"Somebody's shooting Hi and me up," I told them quickly in answer to their inquiries. "They plugged Hi. Don't know how bad!"

"Which way?" demanded Pete.

"Straight ahead," I told him, pointing into the darkness, and all four punchers tore off on their horses in search of the shooters. Whoever they were, they hadn't lingered after the last shooting, and after a swift circle around the boys came back.

We gave our first attention to Highwater. By the light of three flash lights we saw that the first bullet had struck him in the head, and his face was by now a gory mass.

"By gad, he's dead!" ejaculated Pete in a horrified voice, whereat Hi opened one eye and his mouth and looked up at us dreamily.

"Be I?" he inquired, cocking his old head over to one side in an interested attitude. "'Tain't so awful diffrunt," he added weakly. "Mebbe you're exaggeratin' that, Pete."

The bullet had ripped across the top of his old bald head, tapping the skull just hard enough to knock him out for a short interval. After all, it was only a bad scalp wound, and in five minutes he was on his feet, with his head bound up in our kerchiefs, wanting to know what the "dad-busted" row was all about, anyhow.

That started an investigation to satisfy his curiosity. First off we discovered, with the aid of the flash lights, that the object Hi had stumbled over was a slick ear, lying on its side, with all four feet bound together and a rope around its muzzle to keep it from bawling. This was sure interesting!

Then we turned our attention to the pony, and hanged if it wasn't old Methuselah, Buddy's long-legged pinto, with Buddy's saddle cinched around its middle and Buddy's plaited bridle reins trailing on the ground! It was a startling and disconcerting discovery for Hi and me, considering that hog-tied slick ear!

When we flashed our lights around we discovered another pony standing off to one side and also wearing a saddle and bridle. We identified this one as coming from the Tumbling R *remuda*, but none of us could tell offhand who the puncher was that had ridden it out that night. It begun to look like there was going to be some interesting disclosures in this calf-stealing puzzle, and with that slick ear and Buddy's horse staring us in the face, Highwater and I were getting more uneasy every minute. It looked like the beginning of a hard winter.

What with being first on the grounds, mixed up in the shooting and foot-loose on the range, we were hard put trying to answer the fool questions those punchers were asking without saying something we might be sorry for afterward. So we just stalled them off, hawing and humming and declaring that we didn't know a blessed thing about this, that, or the other, with those boys firing interrogations like a Lewis machine gun talking turkey to the German army. Just about the time they were pushing us the hardest the elements came to our rescue, and the storm that had been threatening all the evening cut loose.

It wasn't any little April shower, either, but a regular old humdinger of a Rocky Mountain cloudburst, with all its dips, spurs, variations, and angles—and the fourth dimension thrown in for good measure. It lasted for fifteen minutes, and rained as many feet of water in that length of time, according to Hi's estimate, flattening out everything on the range like a steam roller, and then it stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

It cooled off the curiosity of those punchers considerably, and when I suggested that we'd better mosey around a bit and see if I hadn't hit something with one or more of the bullets I had let fly, they agreed that maybe we had, and so we all started on a still hunt for lead-riddled remains with the aid of our flash lights. We covered every inch of that rain-soaked ground clear to the wagon-road fence, without discovering so much as a footprint, which wasn't at all strange when you considered the deluge.

On the top wire of the fence I found a bit of wet rag hanging to one of the barbs, and I promptly unhooked this and put it in my pocket without saying anything to the others. It was just the color of Buddy's shirt.

We climbed over the fence and took a look at the road. It was beaten out as flat and smooth as a billiard table, and there wasn't a track of any kind in it. Over at one side Pete discovered and dug out a .45-caliber Colt's revolver, half buried in the wet sand. It was just an ordinary Colt, which none of us could identify, but it gave me a funny feeling way down inside myself when I remembered that Buddy toted a gun of that size, and that his initials had ought to be on the top end of the cylinder. I slipped the gun into my belt, saying that I would hand it over to Ed.

As there didn't seem to be anything else to do around there, and as Pete's curiosity was getting the best of him again, Hi and I told them that the best thing to do would be to light out for the ranch house and let Ed and Colonel Watrus know what had happened.

Then we all started for home, with Hi on Methuselah and I on the *remuda* pony. We let the punchers go on to the ranch house and wake up Ed, while we slipped into the bunk house and slid the cylinder out of that gun.

On the top end of it was scratched the initials, "B. R.," and four of the six shells had been exploded.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN AMAZING COMMUNICATON.

THAT let the cat out of the bag, of course, and by next morning every puncher on the ranch had heard the story about the stolen slick ears and sleepers. Colonel Watrus saw to that, although Ed and Hi tried to persuade him to wait until we were certain about just how Buddy was mixed up in the affair before starting something we might be sorry for later on.

"It is as plain as the nose on your face how he is mixed up in it," the colonel told us explosively. "We have virtually caught him with the goods—he and this Stub Wilson. What did they run away for, after shooting your man, Highwater, if they are not guilty?"

"W-e-l-l, hanged if I know," answered Ed, which was all that he could say. On the face of it the evidence seemed to be dead against Buddy.

We had learned from one of the wranglers that the pony we had found with Buddy's was one that had been ridden out the night before by a puncher named Stub Wilson. None of us knew much about this man, except that he had come along about six months before looking for work and Ed had hired him. He was a queer sort of a duck, mainly given to keeping his mouth shut and his ears open, and he never had been a good mixer.

The affair had knocked Ed completely off his feet—and most of the rest of the outfit, for that matter. Everybody liked Buddy, and he was the last man in the world that one would suspect of being mixed up in a crooked deal. We all hated to think it of him, and Hi refused point-blank to believe it right from the start.

"Now, you boys just hang onto yourselves an' wait a little an' you'll find out that Buddy'll come back and explain everything to our entire satisfaction," he kept telling us. "I don't care a continental hang about your evidence, from your hog-tied slick ear to my creased head. They ain't nobody can tell me that Buddy Ruple's a calf rustler—not in a million years! I know that boy like I'd raised him myself."

But Hi's arguments didn't impress the colonel any. He was strong on the prima-facie evidence, and now that he had a string to swing on he wasn't going to be denied his privilege, as president of the company, to raise Ned in every way he could. He got the sheriff on the phone, and had him over to the ranch by six o'clock in the morning, and he ordered Ed to start every man he could spare on a hunt for Buddy and Stub at once.

It is funny how news will travel in the cattle country. Before nine o'clock that morning the yard was full of cow ponies and automobiles and buggies that had come in from everywhere within a radius of thirty miles, and the folks were standing around in groups discussing the affair and swigging in information. They all took a look at the big bulletin board in front of the ranch house on which was chalked the information that five hundred dollars each would be paid for the capture and conviction of the fugitives and a thousand dollars to any one discovering and restoring the stolen calves to their rightful owners.

Old man Bradshaw and Clara came riding in on their ponies about noon, and they were sure a solemn pair, I want to tell you. The girl's face was white and set, and her eyes were snapping. She wouldn't get down; just sat there in the saddle, listening and watching and saying never a word to any of us. Her dad kept pretty still himself until after the colonel had given him the details of the affair, and then he blew up.

"What in the dickens is a-gettin' into these young fellers nowadays?" he wanted to know. "Time was when you could see character in a man an' depend on it, but, by thunder, these days you can't depend on nothin'! After I'd met this here Buddy Ruple, an' had two or three powwows with him, I thinks I, this is the kind o' a young man that I'm right proud to have come a-callin' on my gal. He's clean an' he's honest an' he's sharp as a whip. They ain't nobody goin' to make a fool out o' him, thinks I. If him an' Clara hook up they won't be no cause for me to worry about how she'll be treated. An' now look at him! Why, dawg-gone it, I'd give every last calf I've lost if it wa'n't so. But with all this here evidence starin' a man in the face, what's he goin' to think, I'd like to know?"

Clara winced when she heard the old man say that, and Hi, who had been watching her, slipped over and covered her little brown hand that was resting on the pommel with his old, gnarled paw. "Don't you pay no 'tention, little gal," he told her. "'Tain't so!"

"Of course it isn't so!" she returned indignantly, her blue eyes blinking fast. "Anybody who knows Buddy would know that he isn't a thief. I shan't believe it, even if pa does. Buddy would cut his hand off before he would steal a calf—or anything else."

"You've said something there, gal," Hi averred grimly. "You just stick to them there convictions an' you an' me'll be laughin' at this bunch o' fool boneheads directly."

More folks kept arriving all the time, and among the others Jed Whacker, owner of the Cross Bar Ranch, came rolling in in his big eight-cylinder car that was upholstered like a king's chariot and ran so still that you couldn't hear anything but a sort of a soft kitten pur and the crunching of the sand under the wheels.

Jed was one of those creatures that you take a natural dislike to the minute you see them. He was a big fat toad of a man, with little snaky eyes and a scar running down the left side of his face from the temple to the jaw, where a greaser had knifed him, down Arizona way, several years ago. He had a big bullfrog mouth that never closed, but was always hanging half open in a frozen kind of grin, with the yellow stumps of teeth showing. He hardly ever spoke to anybody—just stood around, listening, listening, and grinning that nasty, insolent bullfrog grin that rasped your nerves so you wanted to push him over a precipice or something with a fence rail.

Whacker was a sort of a standing joke in the community because of the fact that Walt Hyde, the homesteader, had unloaded six hundred and forty acres of grazing land onto him that Walt had homesteaded up on the O-wi-yu-kuts Plateau, about thirty miles north of us. There wasn't a finer piece of grazing land to be found in the county during the summer and fall months. The land was high and completely

surrounded by a range of low mountains, with high, almost perpendicular walls, and when the spring thaws came the plateau would fill up with from two to four feet of water, like a big reservoir, depending on the amount of snow.

The first spring Whacker was there he had a nice little three-room shack, built low, and when high water came it floated his domicile three miles down the plain and ruined everything in it. But that didn't discourage Jed. He built another house with five-foot stone foundations, solid as a rock, close up under the west wall of the plateau, that towered straight up for a hundred feet without a break, and he built his barn flush against this wall and anchored it there with guy wires. Then he bought him a boat and announced that he was ready for any old thing that came along.

He seemed to be pretty well to do, in spite of his bad bargain, and while he didn't raise many cattle he lived alone in his house in fine style and seemed to have about everything that a man could want, even to the fine big car he drove.

He waddled around among the other visitors for a spell, with his big mouth open, but saying not a word to any one, listening and grinning, and then he drove off again.

As the day wore on the visitors left for their various homes one after another, and by six o'clock that evening they were all gone except Clara and her dad, who were still lingering in the hope that some news would come in regarding Buddy. The sheriff and half a dozen of our men had gone away early on a still hunt for the missing men, and punchers from the other outfits had formed themselves into small posses and had gone off on the same errand in hope of winning the reward, and it seemed that with all these scouring the country that news of some sort ought to be coming in pretty soon.

And it did. Along about dusk who should come loping down the road from the direction of Escalante but old Limping Bear, the Sioux Injun, whose squaw had probably saved Buck Miller's life. He wanted the colonel, and when that gentleman stepped out he handed him a note. The colonel read it to himself first, with his face registering every emotion in the catalogue, and when he had finished he let loose a wild and exultant yell.

"I told you so! I told you so!" he shouted excitedly. "I knew he was guilty all along. And here it is, right here in black and white—a written confession from your Buddy!"

"What's that you say?" cried Highwater, bouncing up from his seat on the porch steps. "A confession—from Buddy? You'll have to show me!"

"Yes, sir, a confession—an admission of guilt! He owns up to everything! Listen!" And the excited colonel read aloud from the note:

"DEAR COLONEL AND ED: I will now take my pencil in hand and write you a few lines just to let you know that I am well and prosperous. I have got over twelve hundred head of fine calves corralled where you nor nobody else could ever find them, and I reckon from the way the most of them have grown that they won't stack up a cent less than fifty thousand dollars.

"That is a pretty fine little nest egg, don't you think? We sure put it over pretty smooth on you folks, didn't we? You would never have suspected that I was a calf rustler from personal appearances, would you? How big a reward are you putting up for us, colonel? You want to make it good and strong, because the sheriff that rounds us up will sure have to go some. If you see Clara Bradshaw, tell her to keep her faith strong, because we two are going to meet again under more prosperous circumstances.

"With best regards for your health and peace of mind, I remain, faithfully yours, BUDDY RUPLE.

"P. S.—Stub sends love and regards."

"Where did you get that note?" shouted Ed, pouncing onto Limping Bear.

"Um big tall cowboy, him give um me," the Injun answered.

"Yes, but where? Whereabouts was you when he gave it to you?" Ed demanded.

"Umph!" grounted Limpy, waving his hand vaguely over a radius of about forty-five degrees. "He give um me out there ways somewhere. Me no know for sure."

And that was all they could get out of him, notwithstanding that everybody tried their darndest except me. I was exceedingly anxious to get away from there just then for the reason that while the colonel was reading his note old Limping Bear had edged up alongside of me and slipped a paper into my hand, putting his finger on his lips at the same time in a gesture of silence and winking broadly out the side of his face.

I had shoved the paper into my pocket, and at the first opportunity I nudged Hi, and we slipped away while the others were still trying to pump the Injun, and went down to the creek among the cottonwoods, where I pulled out the note and we read it together:

DEAR BILL AND HI: I am in deep trouble and in need of your assistance. I ain't got any horse or gun or nothing, except something awful big up my sleeve. If you two are friends of mine you will keep this strictly secret and meet me at twelve o'clock to-night on the Ladore Road, just above the forks leading to the Cross Bar Ranch—Whacker's place, you know. Just west of Vermilion Creek, see? Now you be there, sure, and fetch an extra horse for me; Methusaleh, if you can. I have got something important on, and need your help, but, remember, steal away quietly and don't let a soul know where you are going. Your old pal, BUDDY.

"Well, gee willikins!" exclaimed Hi in astonishment. "What in the world ails that young larrup, anyhow? What's he trying to do? What does he mean?"

"You can search me," I answered. "But there is one thing darned certain—I'm going to find out. I start for Vermilion Creek just as quick as I can saddle two horses and sneak them away without being seen."

"Make that three!" growled Hi. "You needn't think you're goin' to leave me out o' this, by glory!"

CHAPTER IX.

ALL STUCK UP!

WE got away without being seen, because everybody left on the ranch was still busy trying to pump information out of the Injun, and at eleven-forty-five we arrived at the fork of the road that leads up to the Cross Bar Ranch, and pulled into some bushes to wait. We were leading Buddy's long-legged pinto, as per instructions.

We had fifteen minutes to spare, and we waited exactly that length of time before Buddy showed up. He came so still that he had his hand on my arm before I knew he was there.

"Shhh!" he whispered as I started to speak. "Don't make a sound. Tie your horses to this bush, quick

we've got to hustle. The gang's all here, and we're going to make a peach of a haul! But we'll have to hustle. Come on!"

He led us up the pass that leads up onto the O-wi-yu-kuts Plateau and along under the shadow of the west wall until we came to the Whacker ranch house. A light was pouring from a side window, and as the night was hot and sultry this window was open. It was fully eight feet from the ground, on account of the unusually high foundations, and while we couldn't see inside the room we could distinctly hear the voices of the occupants. There seemed to be some sort of an altercation on as we arrived, for we recognized Windy Phelps' voice, speaking in a loud, angry tone:

"I tell you, Whacker, you're doing us dirt! Five dollars each ain't a fair price! Considering the risk we boys took in rounding them up, we'd ought to get twenty apiece for 'em!"

"You didn't take as much risk as I did," Whacker's voice retorted. "Ain't I got the critters on my hands, with a chance of getting caught when I ship them? You boys have made a good thing out of this—about a thousand each, and I'm hanged if I can see where you have got a kick coming at five dollars each for the calves!"

"Aw, you make me tired!" returned Windy disgustedly. "You think you have got us where the hair is short, now that the jig is up. If Buddy hadn't come swooping down on me and Stub last night while we were tying up that last slick ear, and seen us plain, Stub and I wouldn't have to be beating it out of the country, but just because we have got to don't think for a minute that you can put the screws on us that way. Twenty's my price, and you take it from me, you piker, that I'll get twenty or I'll start something that will make you wish you had never seen a calf! You can't make a monkey out of me this year!"

There was a general growl of approval from the other men in the room as Windy concluded. It was evident that the whole bunch was against Whacker. He seemed to realize this, and offered a compromise. "I'll give you ten dollars each for the calves if you'll shut up and get out," he told them. "The whole country is full of man-hunters, and they are bound to get up here sooner or later, and when they come I want to be alone, like I am supposed to be. Now this is my last proposition. Take it or leave it."

They took it, after a lot of hot words, and Whacker paid them off on the spot, as we gathered from the conversation. Then there was a scraping of chairs, and Windy spoke:

"I've got one little job before I beat it out of this country for good, and that is to put a chunk of lead through this Buddy Ruple's top piece. He's got it coming two ways now."

Before we realized what was coming Buddy pulled Hi and me up on each side of him, jumped up and grabbed the sill and drew himself up, placing his knees on our shoulders. From this position he stood with his head and shoulders framing the open window.

"I got what you said there, Windy!" he shouted. "You'll never have a better chance than you've got right now to plug me. Come to it, you rat; come to it!"

There were startled exclamations from within, an oath, and then Buddy dropped like a plummet just as a gun roared and a bullet splintered the sill.

"Get that fellow!" yelled Jed Whacker wildly. "He is the only man who can give evidence against Stub and Windy, and if we can slit his throat everything will be all hunky-dory again. Get him, quick! All of you!"

Chairs crashed over and boots pounded the floor boards as the gang made a dash for the exit. Hi and I promptly unlimbered our guns and got ready for the fracas we knew was coming. It did seem like that darn fool Buddy might have kept his trap closed until a time when we were better prepared to tackle those fellows than right then.

"Listen to them come and get me!" chuckled the young larrup gleefully and seemingly not in the least concerned over the seriousness of the situation. "Oh, mamma! They are coming to get *me! Whoop-e-e-e!*" And he jumped for the corner of the house to see them, just as the gang came boiling out the door all in a bunch. Of course Hi and I had to follow him; folks have to stick together in a case like that.

Well, out they came, yelling and cursing, with their hands full of six-shooters and their hearts full of murder, and they went off that porch on the jump and without the slightest reference as to where they were going to land. Coming suddenly out of a brightly lighted room into the night made it worse, I reckon.

As the first of them struck the ground there rose up a series of wild yells that sounded like consternation and warning, but the others jumped right down on top of them—they were coming too fast to stop, and in two seconds there was the darndest mix-up down in front of that porch that you ever did see. At first I thought they were fighting among themselves, for every last man was down, and they were tumbling and rolling and yelling like a Polock rough-house caucus. Then what appeared to be a big animated snowball came rolling along, bumped into my knees, and seemed to embrace me. Anyhow, when I tried to dodge to one side I stuck fast to the ball and went down all in a heap.

Buddy jumped to the rescue, shouting for Hi to help, and they grabbed me by the shoulders and separated me from that ball by main strength. I thought they were going to pull my boots off in the process. When I got onto my feet again the snowballs were rolling in every which direction, with faint and muffled cries for help and mercy oozing out of them. Buddy was jumping up and down and laughing like a kid at a clown circus, but all Hi and I could do was to stand there with our mouths open and wonder what the dickens it was all about.

Pretty soon the balls stopped rolling, and the cries and yells dwindled into moans and groans, and then Buddy decided that it was time to do something. He ran into the house and brought out a large lantern, and by the light of that we saw what had happened.

Those fool bombres were all wrapped up in sticky fly paper, of what is known as the tanglefoot brand! And it was tanglefoot, all right. I had always supposed that fly paper was made to catch flies, and had never had the least suspicion that it could take a full-grown man down and hold him like that. Yet that is exactly what had happened. Buddy had spread about a hundred sheets of the stuff around the front

of that porch, and when it took hold it had sure lived up to its name and had done the job up brown.

When the first of those men landed on it with both feet in the dark, and coming full tilt, and tried to lift said feet in order to maintain their equilibrium, the feet refused to rise to the occasion, and the inevitable result was that the men fell down, and in falling they landed on more paper, and in trying to get loose from that they got into still more. Of course they didn't know, any more than Hi and I, what had grabbed hold of them, and that naturally scared them and made matters all the worse. The harder they fought to get loose the more stuck up they got, and in the end every blessed one was completely wrapped up in from four to six plies of tough, sticky paper and were as helpless as hog-tied slick ears. Yes, and a hundred times more so!

"You're a holy corker!" Hi told Buddy, laughing in spite of himself. "You'll play pranks at your own funeral if you get a chance, you darned larrup! What'd you want to go an' do this fool trick for, anyhow?"

"This isn't any prank," Buddy told him soberly. "I didn't know whether you boys were going to get here or not, and as I had to corral these calf rustlers I didn't have any choice in the matter but to use this fly paper, it being the only weapon I had to hand. It didn't look so awful encouraging, but I took a chance on it, and it sure did do the business!"

CHAPTER X.

A TRIPLE REWARD.

Hi and I wanted to sit down right there and then and ask a lot of questions, but we wasn't to have the chance just then, for it suddenly dawned on us that those wrapped-up yaps were smothering to death, and we had to go right to work pulling them apart.

We sure had one dandy little job on our hands. There isn't any comparison to go by to tell you how absolutely and tenaciously that tanglefoot stuck. Stub had a sheet plastered square across his face, and we pretty near had to haul that man's features right off the front of his head before that paper came away. It was slow work because half the time we were all stuck up ourselves. The stuff seemed determined to stick to something every minute. When we got a piece loose we couldn't let go of it; we would pull it off one hand, and it would stick to the other; then we would put our foot on it and pull that hand loose. Then we would forget about the paper on our foot, step on it with the other foot, and get all tangled up and go down feet over appetite. Oh, that fly paper was well named all right!

As fast as we got a man undone we would truss him up with rope and lay him up on the porch for future reference, and by the time we had finished the last one the sun was an hour high and we were as completely fagged out as if we had been digging trenches all night. We were a sight, too, with fragments of sticky paper sticking all over us, and walking around with our feet spread out and our hands extended to keep them apart and out of the mess. But we weren't a circumstance to the prisoners. When I try to tell how they looked on that occasion I am completely and absolutely at loss for words.

We tried to wash our hands off with soap and water, which didn't work worth a whoop, and then Buddy found a can of gasoline down in the barn, and that acted like magic and we got cleaned up in jig time. Then Hi went after Buddy in dead earnest.

"Now, son, you settle right down and explain yourself," he ordered. "What'd you want to go shootin' me up for t'other night?"

"Shooting you up?" said Buddy wonderingly, "What do you mean by that?"

Hi took off his hat and showed Buddy his bandaged head. "I'll never come closer to getting plugged out than I was when I got this," he told the youngster.

"But I didn't do any shooting!" expostulated Buddy.

"How 'bout that gun o' yourn we found with four exploded shells?"

"Oh, I shot those at a coyote, down by the creek, before dark," Buddy explained.

"Didn't you do no shootin' out there in the north pasture t'other night?"

"Me? No! I was riding along through the dark, and I saw a little light down close to the ground and rode over to see what it was. I was coming up wind, so they didn't hear me until I was right onto them. It was Windy Phelps and Stub Wilson, and they were bending down low, tying up a slick ear, using a little baby flash light, and they never noticed me until I spoke their names. Then the light went out, and they started to run for it, and I hopped off my horse and went after them, figuring that I could follow better in the dark if I was on foot. They headed for the road, with me right behind telling them to halt, and suddenly one of them let go with his gun over his shoulder. That must have been the shot that hit you."

"It must," agreed Hi. "By golly, if we'd been ten seconds sooner, Bill and me would 'a' walked right into them yaps, wouldn't we? We found your horse and the slick ear just before the shot came."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Buddy. "Wish I had known you boys were there. I knew somebody was around when they returned Windy's second shot, which was also meant for me. We had reached the fence by then, and when you started shooting, Windy and Stub turned around and gave it back to you for all they were worth. I was a little to the right of them, but they didn't know it, and I'd got it figured out that there must be something on the other side of that fence that they were making for, and so I skinned over the barb wire, tearing my shirt, and ran out in the road to see if I could find anything.

"Sure enough there was Whacker's big motor car, with the engine purring, and with funny headlights that threw just a thin little stream of green light across the road just in front of the front wheels. Whacker was in the front seat, calling in a low tone for the others to hurry up, and I slid around the back end just as Windy and Stub came tumbling into the car and she started off smooth and noiseless. They came straight here lickety-split, through a whale of a rainstorm and over rocks and bumps and through mud, and when they got here they drove the car right into the barn."

"But where in the deuce were you all this time?" demanded Hi.

"Me? Why, I was stretched out on the running board. You didn't think I was going to stay behind,

did you, in a case like that? I figured that I would find out something interesting before I got through. When the car stopped I just rolled off on the floor and under it, without any of them noticing me at all."

"You darn young larrup!" ejaculated Hi delightedly. "What'd you do then?"

"Just laid there and listened. They had three slick ears in the back of the car—there's room enough for six—and after they had taken care of them they talked matters over right there in the barn. I gathered that Windy had been working for Whacker for some time. They had a real smooth system, those yaps did. Had a man planted on each of the four ranches they were robbing to drive the slick ears up close to the fence after dark, and when Whacker came along in his still-running, funny headlighted car they roped them up and slung them in, and away he went for home and mother. They had selected ranches that were handy to the road and isolated, and, when you come to think of it, the chances for their getting caught were pretty small."

"Well, I'll be dawg-goned!" exclaimed Hi in wonder at the simplicity of it all.

"Windy and Stub were scared because they knew that I had recognized them and that the jig was up. They wanted Whacker to settle up with them right on the spot so they could beat it out of the country, but the old fellow wouldn't do it until he had got the rest of the gang together, so there wouldn't be any misunderstanding. Told them he would get the other boys up here to-night, and he reckoned they could stand it that long. Then they went in the house and I climbed up in the hayloft and took a snooze."

"Ain't you the cool one!" exclaimed Hi with a voice full of admiration. "I suppose that in the mornin' you walked right into the house an' ate breakfast."

"No, I'm not quite so nervy as that," laughed Buddy. "I laid low in the loft until Whacker went off in his machine to notify the other boys, and Windy and Stub dug out into the hills on their ponies so they wouldn't be around the house in case anybody came up here looking for them. After they were gone I crawled out and took a look around. Explored the house for a gun and couldn't find it, but got my breakfast then. The best I could find in the way of weapons was that fly paper; there was a dozen boxes of it. Whacker hates flies, you know, so I just chased that out and hid it under a bush for future reference.

"Then I climbed back up in the loft and laid down, watching through a crack, wishing that you boys were here and that I could get a message to you some way, and pretty soon here come the way. It was old Limping Bear, coming up from his wikiup on Vermilion Creek to borrow some matches of Whacker.

"Gee, I was glad to see him! I gave him four boxes and all the money I had—fourteen dollars—and promised him fifty more if he'd do what I said. Told him it was an all-fired important proposition and that he would have to work it smooth, and when I was sure he had got it right I sent him on his way."

"But what in the world did you send that other note for?" Hi wanted to know. "You raised merry Ned with that! Everybody back home thinks you're a calf rustler."

"Do they?" grinned Buddy delightedly. "That was just what I figured they'd think, anyhow, when I disappeared. I just couldn't resist the temptation to take a dig out of Ed and the colonel."

"Couldn't, hey? Well, I'll tell you two folks you didn't fool a little bit, an' them is me an' your gal. You just wait till she gets her hooks into your scalp lock. She'll take the pranks out o' you, I'll warrant!" grinned Hi.

And just then there was a clatter of hoofs, and here come everybody in the world.

"Put up your hands!" ordered the sheriff and his deputies, covering us with their guns and glaring at us fierce and businesslike.

"I'm surprised at you boys!" cried Ed Bliss reproachfully. "The oldest men on the ranch and calf rustling! Who is a fellow going to trust these days, anyhow?"

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Buddy Rupple?" put in Clara in a voice chock-full of indignation. "I think you've acted just perfectly awful!"

"We used to yank folks for this when I was a boy," old man Bradshaw told us grimly.

"The way of the transgressor is extremely hard," the colonel averred solemnly.

"Now, you folks just hold in a minute!" shouted Hi indignantly. "We three have had enough on our minds without listening to that kind o' palaver. How'd you find out we were here?"

"One of the wranglers picked this note up out by the corral this morning," the colonel told us, holding up a slip of paper. "We came right along."

Darned if it wasn't the note Buddy had written to Hi and me! I had put it into my hip pocket after reading it, and it must have slipped out when I mounted my horse.

Then we got together and explained things, and you never saw a ticklered bunch of folks in your life than they were. The colonel and Ed forgave Buddy on the spot for the joke he had played on them with that note, and everybody got good-natured and happy in jig time.

When they took a look at the prisoners they were spellbound with amazement and admiration at the spectacle, and of course everybody near died with laughter when Buddy told them how we had accomplished the capture.

They were all there, Windy and Stub, Hank Baker from Bradshaw's, Steve Bobbins from the Box T, and Sid Pellum from the Lazy L, and Jed Whacker, with his eyes stuck tight with fly paper and the flies getting stuck all over his face. They sure were a sight for sore eyes, those six hombres!

"But where are them calves?" asked Bradshaw, who had been looking off across the plateau without discovering anything smaller than a few cows grazing here and there.

"In the cutest little place you ever saw in your life," Buddy told him. "I wouldn't have found it myself if I hadn't been under the car when they put those last slick ears away."

And then he led us down to the barn, which was, as I have already stated, built flush against the high perpendicular west wall of the plateau. The rear of

the barn, however, was boarded up on the inside the same as the sides. Buddy lifted out two boards from the rear wall that were set very cleverly in cleats, so you would never have suspected they were loose if you hadn't known it, and behind these was an opening in the rock about four feet wide by six high. We passed through a short tunnel and came out into an open grotto, with a narrow arroyo leading gradually upward to a mesa about fifty feet above. We saw right away that this grotto was an ancient waterway, cut down through the rock by centuries of running water, which had no doubt found egress through the tunnel by which we had entered. At the top of the arroyo we were obliged to climb over a thick stone wall that completely surrounded the entrance to the grotto, like a dam, and which we promptly guessed had been built there for the purpose of preventing water in the spring thaws from flowing down and submerging the barn. It was a very clever arrangement, indeedy.

And there, in a peach of a little meadow, containing about five hundred acres of high rich grass, were our calves, every one of them as fat as butter. The mesa was just a sort of a little shelf on the side of the mountain, inclosed on all sides by high, rocky walls and with a cute little brook running through it and emptying into some underground passage. It sure looked like the one best bet in the Rocky Mountains for hiding stolen calves. Whacker admitted later in his confession that he had discovered the entrance to the grotto and had built his barn against the west wall for the express purpose of concealing it, with the idea of using it for the very purpose he had.

When we looked the calves over we found more evidence of cleverness, if you could call it that. All the outfits that had been robbed earmarked their slick ears in much the same manner—a notch on the outer edge of the right ear. The Tumbling R notch was in the center; Bradshaw's was low, the Lazy L was high, and the Box T medium. Whacker's earmark was a double notch, like a "W," and all he had to do to change our marks was to put an extra notch above or below the old one, and then slap his Cross Bar brand on the hip.

Well, everybody was feeling pretty good, I want to tell you. Old Highwater was strutting around with an "I-told-you-so" expression on his face, the colonel and Ed were beaming and congratulating each other, and Clara and Buddy were standing off to one side telling each other about it all over again with variations and giggles and blushes.

Pretty soon the colonel, who had been in earnest conversation with Ed for some minutes, called Buddy over to where they were.

"Young man," he began, handing the other a slip of paper, "there's a check for one thousand dollars—the reward I offered for the recovery of these calves. Put it some place where you will need it when the time comes. Now, Mr. Bliss and I have about decided that you are altogether too bright and efficient a young man to be merely punching cows. We're going to fire you. The Routt County Company is opening up a new range up in Wyoming, larger than the Tumbling R, and we are putting Mr. Bliss in charge of it. That leaves us short one foreman here. How would you like the job?"

"Who—me?" gasped Buddy, knocked silly for once in his wicked little life. "Why—gee whiz—say, just wait a minute, will you!" And he tore back to where Clara was standing on a dead run.

Of course nobody in the world could guess what Buddy was telling her, nor why it was that her pretty face busted out all over with smiles and blushes, nor why she nodded her little head so hard that her gold braids flopped, but, anyhow, Buddy was back in the minute with his face registering more joy than could ordinarily be squeezed into the hides of a dozen men.

"I'll take that job, colonel, and thank you kindly," he said.

"Then you are hired, and may the Lord have mercy on the peace of mind of the members of the Tumbling R," said the colonel solemnly, like he was pronouncing a benediction.

"Ain't he a corker!" grinned old Hi to Ed, fairly wriggling with delight.

"A regular hooting, tooting son-of-a-gun!" averred Ed explosively.

In the Shadows of Race

By J. Hampton Bishop

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Whiting and McLaughlin, two explorers, go deeper and deeper into the tropic jungles seeking to find out why McLaughlin's father has never returned. A curious notebook had excited their curiosity. They see a strange procession, at the head of which is a litter bearing a large leopard, a monstrosity, and a lovely woman. This disappears in the jungle. That night the two explorers go over the cryptic notebook together. McLaughlin stays up alone by the fire. Suddenly out of the bushes appears a Dahomey woman, who asks him to go with her to see Iluko, Goddess of Fire, the woman he had seen that day.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE FIFTH MORNING.

"Show me the green ground with the daffy-down-dillies,
And cowslips, and king cups, and loved lilies."

THUS quoted Whiting as he threw down his gun and looked around for McLaughlin. "Only don't show me anything more for the present. Never saw such a riot of colors. Blooms—blooms—and butterflies and trees—trees that are nothing but ferns—enormous—Lord help me, I'm glutted on beauty and impossible forest paths! Come on out of there and hear the story of the trail of the Forest Nymph, you quitter."

He reached the door of McLaughlin's tent and looked in; but it was empty—empty, and McLaughlin was nowhere around. Why a queer sensation should begin at the pit of his stomach and reach with one bound a constricted portion of his throat he was unable to say; but that it had done so he could bear evidence from the manner in which he gulped in his endeavor to swallow.

He turned from the tent and beckoned to Mago, cursing at the unreasonable clutch on his throat, which was forcing the moisture to his eyes in tiny, condensed drops. He dashed them aside and strove to appear natural. No "damned native'" should see tears in his eyes!

"Where's McLaughlin?" he demanded brusquely. And Mago, the perfect type of the valuable porter who knows his worth, stood erect with a conscious swagger and showed no concern by so much as a flicker of an eyelash. The greasy black skin glistened in the bright sunlight, and his eyes, heavy-lidded and drooping at the outer corners, showed a small margin of white as he surveyed their surroundings with a nonchalance that was truly maddening. They came back to Whiting finally and halted in their roving, but with an impervious aloofness.

"You were here all the time; where did he go?" Whiting sank the nails of his clenched fingers into the flesh of his palms to satisfy the itching desire to close them upon the fool's neck. "Did he follow me?"

"Not know," confessed the native at last in broken English.

"But you were here all the time," prompted Whiting. "Didn't you see him at all?"

And then something about the man caused Whiting to step nearer him and take a closer look at his face. He took him by the arm suddenly and drew him quite close, after which he let go and stepped back with a feeling of disgust. "You're drunk, Mago, drunk! And you stole that wine those heathens left, you cussed nigger! Where were you when I left?"

Mago stepped back, a look of fear on his face. "No steal," he whined.

"Don't deny it," snapped Whiting, "with your breath reeking with the devilish concoction. You, no doubt, had your eye on it, and the minute you had the chance stole off and filled up. Well, come with me; I'll see that none of the rest of you are made happy."

Mago was one of the products of the French civilization along the west coast and was very proud of his versatility as a linguist; but in the rush of Whiting's words he caught but a portion, among which was the word "come." And because of the type of which he was bred, and from which, because of its fundamental inequality naught else can be bred, the underlying quality of service rose uppermost and—he came.

As Whiting saw the last jar of the sweetly smelling liquid poured out upon the ground, he had a feeling of deep satisfaction as if he were, in a manner, revenged; and it was with a measure of returning cheerfulness that he turned again to his search.

The porters, however, were very half-hearted in their endeavors, for had not the white man's god said it should be so?

A dozen times during the remainder of that trying day Whiting felt that he would make a confidant of Mago; tell him the lie to which he had resorted and ask for his help as man to man. But of what use? The man was still partly drunk, and the smattering crumbs of civilization that he had picked up at the French mission—would they be strong enough to overbalance a belief—a custom—that had been all-powerful in his country even perhaps before the very existence of the white man? No. It were better to play the game. If they chose to take him at his word, then he would stand by it. Yes, if every negro in the whole of Africa disappeared, and he with 'em—so be it! But by the gods it was queer—devilish queer. And what could he do alone without McLaughlin?

He drew his "fetich" from his pocket and stood studying it. He turned it over and over as if for the first time seeing it in its entirety. "You're a little, insignificant bit of useless metal," he confided musingly, "and yet upon you great responsibilities rest; and if upon you, how much greater must there be upon me! And I'm helpless—helpless, you understand—in a land that has time upon time proven its hostility toward me. So if you have any power or influence at-all in this place where such things thrive and fatten, for God's sake put in an oar for me!"

He stopped short and drew back his hand as if to toss the shining bit of gold into the gathering shadows of the early evening, but he hesitated, and it slipped back into the pocket from which it came.

"Egad, my goat's clean out o' sight!" he grinned weakly. "Talkin' to that pocket piece! Who'd believe it?" And the shadows lengthened, became long, slender ghost fingers that spread without warning into an enormous, dusky hand covering up the world, as Whiting turned with a long sigh to the pressing business.

After a miserable attempt at supper he went to his tent attended by something very close to despair. Not that he hadn't known from the moment he looked into the empty tent that they wouldn't find him; he had. Or that the unexplainable second sense which so uncannily prompted this thought was a myth; he felt sure it wasn't. But that he was forced to sit by, and, as it were, look on without lifting a finger to help; that was it. The thought was maddening.

With hands deep in pockets he paced the crowded quarters of his tent and chewed viciously the stem of a cold pipe. He could feel the coils of something tightening around him, and the more he resented the stronger he felt the restraining forces to be. He had an impulse to throw out his arms, to fling himself, to run—run back where life was simple and wholesome and less demanding—where one was not on guard constantly for the very breath one breathed.

Yet he knew he wouldn't. He must see the thing through. McLaughlin had his word, and he was not a cad! No. If, as had happened before, one of them went home an "old-young" man and the other was given what might never be explained, it yet behooved him to be a man.

The netting raised, and Mago came in. His eyes held a hint of self-depreciation, but they came bravely on a level with Whiting's nevertheless. "I called two—three—time," he said simply.

Whiting stopped his promenade. "Yes; what is it?"

"Big storm! Plenty rain. Leaves turn out—always so."

Whiting scowled. "Leaves turn out? As dark as this?"

"But, yes." Mago was insistent. "The small bush he, too, turn out. She come quick!"

Whiting followed the native from the tent. The sky was as if looking into an inverted, cavernous pit, whose enormous maw had been overfilled with a murky, heavy substance beyond the reach of hands, yet whose sickening pressure almost brought one to his knees, while if a leaf were visible in this maddening inferno——

But there was no time to question the veracity of native signs just then, for even as he looked a low, rolling grumble started at the rim of the pit, and, increasing from a grumble to a wrenching, tearing boom, jarred across the center and rocked the very soul of the earth itself. A vivid streak of fire cut a slit across the pit and revealed a foreign world, wherein all colors were unreal—a jumble of whites and reds and greens—and then quick upon the heels of this came a gigantic report which hurled half of them to their knees.

"Quick!" yelled Whiting above the roar that was increasing every minute. "Stake the double canvas over the supplies. It's a wonder you loggerheads couldn't have seen this comin'."

Within the twinkling of an eye the scene changed, and the roar was upon them—a crashing, rending, tearing thing in which all nature seemed to have thrown herself, and beside which all else appeared dwarfed. Flash after flash darted across the heavens until one continual glare of variegated colors lighted the earth and gave it the effect of a highly colored fairy scene. And then quite suddenly came the rain. Sheet after sheet of it dashed with frightful force against whatever came before it, and with its coming the presaged destruction concerning a tempest in the tropics was completely verified.

To Whiting, standing just within his small tent, the universe was a seething caldron wherein all that was movable moved. Enormous limbs crashed to earth, and in the unnatural light appeared as objects alive—stricken down, to lie quivering and neglected in their misery, while smaller missiles—fragments of bush and tree and the unmistakable outline of a huge night bird

—dashed past much as the scenes in a too rapidly moving picture play.

"Worst storm we've ever had," he screamed into the ear of Mago, who stood close beside him.

Mago nodded his bullet head and rolled his heavy eyes speculatively out toward the storm. "She go quick, soon—maybe," he screamed in return. "See cloud; he thin over there."

Whiting nodded, although he could see nothing with any degree of accuracy, and on general principles he was forced to doubt Mago's assertion. If their provisions, along with themselves, were swept off the face of the earth, it would not be surprising, and he couldn't see that it would, under the circumstances, matter much.

Mago, with a soft laugh of triumph, touched him on the arm. "See?" he pointed.

And there, between the ragged edge of the storm cloud and the dark rim of the forest's wall, bright against the dusky beauty of a strip of night sky, swung, serene and untouched on her lofty throne, a sickle of purest silver—the delicate, slender contour of a youthful moon.

Whiting took it as an omen. His spirits rose by leaps and bounds. Somehow, some way, he would see this thing through—and win out. He felt it. He would rise above obstacles in his path, and hold himself above them, as that moon was above this uproar here below. One had only to hold on; the main thing was to keep your grip, and he had come so near losing his.

It was a new, a different, man who stood and watched that dark blanket of cloud roll up as if it were a mighty scroll, leaving a dusky curtain, gold-dotted with points of light, over a world wherein no sound was heard save the drip, drip from the million drooping leaves. His very soul rose up and stood before him—a real, a vital thing.

It imbued him with a subtle and wonderful something men call hope. It filled him with life and offered him courage. He could not hold back the exultant ring in his voice as he turned with words of command to the porters. The goods were to be overhauled to estimate damage, if any, and to save that which needed immediate attention, while comfortable quarters must be arranged for the night. Mago must go at once to McLaughlin's tent for his turn at sleep; later he was to relieve Whiting.

When he did relieve him toward early morning, Whiting handed him a gun and looked him sternly in the eye for a good minute. Then he spoke slowly, carefully, picking his words in Mago's own tongue—the Bangala—that no word might be lost upon him: "You understand, Mago, that no sleep means we will be *here* at daylight; otherwise—you understand?"

Mago signified that he did, and Whiting turned heavy steps toward his own tent.

But the night passed, as did also the following day. Whiting spent most of it tramping, with a half dozen followers, the surrounding forest and searching for any signs that might give them a clew; but they came in at dark, tired and hungry, without success.

Whiting took the first turn at sleep that night and relieved Mago shortly after midnight. But again the night passed without event, and again the day following.

Whiting searched by day, unflagging in his zest, and watched a good half of the night, holding his courage by sheer force of will. It was a monstrous strain as the days and nights passed with no change. He wished that something might happen—anything. Nothing could be half so bad as the intolerable suspense. And then on the fifth morning, as he was sitting over a very late breakfast, he looked up and saw Yuema with a half dozen other negroes—all strange—coming across the small clearing.

A number of the camp negroes saw them at the same time and ran toward them, calling out and gesticulating, but Yuema, scarcely recognizing them, walked straight to where Whiting sat. His heavy face showed signs of great fatigue as he bowed gravely and handed over a crumpled, soiled sheet of folded paper.

Whiting took it and unfolded it with shaking fingers; he had recognized it as a part of McLaughlin's pocket notebook.

Across the page in blue pencil was scrawled a few words in McLaughlin's handwriting:

> I've hit a mystery, Dunk, and I'm interested—enough to wish to stay for a while, anyway, and while I'm dead lonely without you—take my advice and *go back!* If not—this is a queer country; many weird things are everywhere—and I don't wish to feel responsible for the outcome. Do as you please, but my advice is—*go back.* It's all right—that is as right as it *can* be, and you need feel no compunction at leaving me; it is my wish. So long. MACK.

CHAPTER VI.

A PERILOUS MOMENT.

WHITING refolded the note and motioned Yuema to follow him. Inside his tent, he turned to him, a hundred questions burning on the tip of his tongue. McLaughlin, was he safe? Where was he? How had they disappeared so mysteriously, and why the devil didn't Mack come himself?

But Yuema only rolled his eyes and showed his white teeth in something that was meant for a grin. He answered not at all, but instead gave a counter-question: Was it, then, that Misser Whiting should go also along after Misser McLaughlin?

Whiting steadied himself and came down to single issues. "Of course," he snapped.

Then it was that Yuema stepped close. "Don't," he hissed under his breath. "It is to die! Me? I go quick—back—away from *She.*"

He looked out at the clump of strange negroes waiting at the side of the clearing. When his eyes turned again to Whiting the muddy, leaden depths were stirred by small flecks of something hinting of primitive savagery. "Kill 'em, then we go quick," he said.

Whiting knew enough of the native to use care in his dealings with one. It was difficult to restrain a quite primitive impulse to "kill" then and there, but instead he smiled blandly into the hideous, murderous face. "But McLoughlin, Yuema, how then could we get him?"

The native threw out his hands in a hopeless gesture and shook his head. "No come. *She* say not. He smile and say me bring you—maybe. But no, no. It is to die. Big fire! Waddo burn; me, too—when

soul he eat up. Gorilla souls they all eat up; leopard soul he eat up by *She!* Me——"

Whiting lost his patience. "What damned nonsense! Look here now. Where is Mack? I mean how far in is he?"

"Two, three day. Good forest path. Gorilla, he made path for *She. She*——"

But again Whiting interrupted: "And what's this about fire? And Waddo, where's he?"

A gray look spread over the shiny black face, and fear leaped out from the eyes. "Waddo, he cry for Misser McLaughlin first day. Big fire—he burn for Sun Father, and *She* send Waddo. Waddo he scream and scream; then——" The blacks hands swept out, signifying a great silence.

A shuddering, sickening chill swept over Whiting. "Good God! Did they burn that child?"

"*She*—Misser Wh——"

"What does Mack mean staying in there when he knows of this? Where are the other porters; did they see that?"

Yuema bent his head in assent. "Souls, they get eat by big fire. Lay on faces all day—maybe. Me? Bring paper, then go on quick. No soul eat. You go on, huh? Maybe?"

Whiting leaned over with an air of great secrecy. "See here, Yuema, I'm going to leave you here with the other porters, and I'm going on alone. It'll be all right. They understand, and you'll be safe here. Lots of guns, and I'll see that you won't be hurt. Just keep guard over the camp until something turns up. Understand?"

Yuema nodded. To him it was all a very great mystery.

"And listen," said Whiting as they left the tent, "not a word; I do the talking."

The porters acquiesced readily to the proposition. It seemed but a natural following of the prescribed program laid out for them, and therefore unavoidable.

But to Whiting it was a different matter. When an hour later he turned at the edge of the forest he experienced the most acute feeling of utter hopelessness. It swept over him in waves. It swamped him in a sea of despair and doubt. The perspiration poured down his face, while he struggled as never before away from the desire to turn back—back away from all the weird, horrible things impending.

Then he straightened his shoulders and turned again to the trail. Helpless tears flooded his eyes and blurred his vision so that the weaving, swaying line of blacks and their tall cane lances winding before him became a vague, distorted daub of color in the morning sunshine.

He hated himself for a coward. Lord, how he hated himself! He blinked and found himself forcing a clearness of eye that could number the tiny points of light bobbing there ahead, which meant the gold tips on the cane lances.

A sudden, soft touch on the shoulder interrupted his count and brought him right about face with a jerk. Mago stood before him, heavy-eyed, bullet-headed, but with a peculiar half smile changing the nature of his servile face.

"Me go, too, 'long after Misser McLaughlin, huh?" he questioned.

Whiting put out his hand impulsively. "Put 'er there, old man! Egad, this is some world after all, isn't it? And you're sure some sport!"

The native reached out a hand tentatively, amazement written large on his face. But Whiting's tone, as well as his look, were very assuring, and Mago returned the painful grip with a vague touch of understanding.

The two turned again to the trail, with Whiting overflowing in his exuberance of spirits. "We'll fix 'em, eh, Mago? Just let us get hold of 'em once. Egad, I feel like we're goin' in here to *do* somethin'. How about it, Mago?" To all of which Mago nodded a woolly head and gave assent in a wide grin.

As they followed along hour after hour, it came to Whiting that unless one were to know the whereabouts of the path they were traveling it would be impossible to penetrate the heavy forest. He calculated how long it had taken untrained native inhabitants to clear a path such as that and what had been their motive. Habitation would be next to impossible. Every leaf and twig dripped water, and the ground was a spongy mesh.

Toward evening of the second day they came to a large, rough clearing in one of the darkest, gloomiest spots they had yet encountered. Crude platforms of limbs and sticks were to be seen here and there in the wide, roomy crotch of a tree or an interlocking limb, and Whiting put his finger to the trigger of his rifle as he recognized these as the homes of the largest species of the wild men—the gorillas. But no sign of life was visible; nor did the guides take the least notice of their surroundings. All of which Whiting took note of and wondered. That they should invade the wild man's territory was riddle enough, but that his very quarters should be approached with no disastrous results was truly an enigma past understanding.

Early the following morning a change was noticeable in the vegetation. They were gradually climbing, and the tropic trees were giving way to the bracken and giant heath trees. Whiting knew from the topography of the country that they were crossing a divide whose elevation would probably reach an altitude of ten or eleven thousand feet; and he wondered if it bore a name or was but legendary back there in the channels of civilization.

As they neared the top came a zone of bamboo, with mammoth groves of the podocarpus and other large trees which gradually became thinner until, almost without warning, they came out upon the edge of a plateau rolling gently away forty or fifty miles in the distance and clothed with a soft, silky grass, dotted with patches of woodland along the distant watercourses. The air was invigorating, with a tang of spices, and was a blessed relief after the enervating humidity of the lower forests.

As Whiting stood, helmet in hand, gazing out across the vast stretches, he had an impulsive desire to give it a *name*, something tangible whereupon he might fasten his imagination in his thoughts of it. Wonderland—Alice in Wonderland—Dunk in Wonderland; that was it! Sounded fine, and the wild, distorted Wonderland of the myth had nothing on his find; to that he could swear.

It was indeed, a wonderland all the more marvel-

ous because of its impregnable location, and its soft, glorious climate of an English June.

They made camp late that night near a small spring along one of the watercourses, and one of the guides told Whiting they would reach Wuko "nex' day" when sun he "so up."

Whiting measured the distance with his eye and thought it would be long before noon. He hoped so. Now that he was nearing the climax, with none of the horrors referred to by that lying Yuema, he was more than anxious to justify the belief in his own stupidity.

But his sleep was restless, disturbed by weird and horrible dreams. He fancied he had found McLaughlin, but he was no longer a man. His body seemed to have taken on the hideous outline of some repulsive beast, while his eyes twinkled and laughed from a face whose forehead receded into a slight bulge over the neck; and whose nose spread, disgustingly flat, above a mouth where yellow fangs accented the beastly contour of the entire face.

By the side of this apparition appeared another as grotesque, as horrible, with the body of a woman, but with a face as beastly as the one beside it. As he looked the two bodies imperceptibly glided together, until a complete fusion of the two looked from the same eyes, but now with a defiant, ugly glare which brought Whiting straight up in the darkness.

He sat there, staring around dazedly. The thing was too horrible to be put lightly aside, but he wiped his face and grinned at his trembling fingers, nevertheless. "'S all right, but that was some dream," he conceded. "And, Mack, if you ever come to look like that—— Whew! *Lord!* It's me for the tall grasses!"

He was up betimes the next morning. The fact that he was but an hour or so away from McLaughlin and the end of the mystery lent a generous spur to the morning's activities. Mago showed signs of an unwonted nervousness, which Whiting attributed to the peculiarities of the journey and the complete isolation of the country.

The sun was an hour high, and the shadows were beginning to shorten when they came out upon the immense down, where the country became a gently undulating sea of pale pinks, mauves, softest grays, and gorgeous russet sheens with every bend of the flower-stemmed grasses in the soft breezes of early morning. Far in the distance they saw a herd of zebras, while a little nearer one of the hartebeest, their colors interningling until in the face of the bright sunlight it was a changing procession of silver gray and gold. Enormous, jet-black cock ostriches, with their white wings, bob tails, and long, pink necks, came strutting proudly in sight, and Whiting longed for a nearer look at one.

Other animals were thick; from the grotesque wart hog, with its erect tail topped with its drooping tassel, to the red and silver jackals, the species were as unusual as was the country in which they roamed. It was a veritable zoölogical garden, all Nature's own, and one of which even she must have been proud.

Whiting looked at his companions—an assortment probably from a half dozen various tribes—looked at them with an eye from which not one hideous point was hidden and recalled something he had read somewhere. It was true. Africa gave to the world the most sagacious, the most lordly of wild animals, while she had been most cruelly cheated in that she had been given the most abject and degraded specimens of mankind.

He recalled this thought shortly afterward, when they suddenly topped a steep elevation and saw coming to meet them, up the opposite side, a sight which brought his hair on end and gave to the native guides the appearance of almost kingly beauty. It was a procession led by a gigantic negro—a chief of some sort from his numerous and repulsive trappings—but the procession itself was what commanded his attention.

Walking on all fours, their blackish-dun coats a vivid contrast to the delicate tints of the grasses, an army of mammoth gorillas followed along, swishing the grass in a half-sided, swinging trot as they came.

Mago, with the first glance, almost crept under Whiting's arm and whined—a helpless, piteous, hurt-animal whine, so that Whiting turned on him with an oath: "Your gun, man, for God's sake; this is no time to lose your nerve. Maybe we can bluff 'em out."

As he spoke Whiting raised his gun and aimed, but the negro leading the procession screamed out a command in a native gibberish, which Whiting understood, more from his intonation than coherency, meant not to shoot. It was a perilous moment; every human instinct impelled him to press the trigger, and his finger hovered against it, but something stayed his hand.

Not so with Mago. His slick black face was gray with terror, and, seeing Whiting raise his gun, he immediately raised his and fired at random. By some miracle it hit one of the creeping beasts, rolling him flat, and the next second pandemonium broke loose. His companions stood erect, beating their breasts great, resounding blows, and giving vent to roars and screams that jarred the very earth itself. Their faces were hideous parodies, partaking incongruously of the human, yet in their wrath so completely that of the beast as to make their approach a menace which no man would willingly face.

Whiting saw the porters turn and run in a direction at a right angle from where they stood. Mago, in a wild panic, dropped his gun and followed, leaving him in a position from which there was no apparent escape.

The negro chief in command screamed orders at the gorillas, only to be hurled roughly aside in their onslaught toward the objects of their wrath.

Whiting saw one of the hideous beings in pursuit of the flying natives reach a long, hairy arm and catch Mago as he ran. He clasped him against his breast with a scream of rage, and a crushing, grinding tear of bone and muscle told too plainly the end of a splendid porter.

At the sound Whiting went back suddenly thousands of years and became a primitive man, whose delight was to conquer by brute force and whose natural desires were to slay and kill in the same manner. His hands ached to tear and rend, and his eyes shone red; yet he knew his inability to match his strength against even one. No, he must use his gun; he would use it until not one was left.

He coolly raised it to take careful aim at the nearest one, who, seeing his foe stand still, was advancing slowly with high, shrill cries and drumming fists. His eye followed the shining blue barrel, and at the end, in place of the hairy, snarling face of the fighting gorilla, he saw a pair of flashing, angry eyes and then a face, white—white as the soft, creamy petals of a magnolia blossom—the face of a young and beautiful woman.

CHAPTER VII.

BEYOND THE DEPTHS.

SO great was Whiting's astonishment that he lowered his gun automatically and stood staring in open bewilderment. The woman returned his stare angrily, with not so much as the flicker of an eyelash; then, with a sublime gesture of dismissal, she turned to the hostile gorillas, who were standing half crouched, as if uncertain of their next move, and hissed a rapid-fire volley of sounds at them, which could, under no conditions, be interpreted as words.

For a moment they stood still, uncertain, blinking and wondering, and she faced them, quiet, haughty, serene in her unmatchable power, until they turned reluctantly and started down the slope in the direction from which they had come.

Whiting knew he had witnessed a thing most extraordinary—a battle unequal by every law of nature—yet he had no time to marvel. She spoke sharply to the negro leader who was before her, face to earth, and the great, black giant groveled a few inches nearer, but never raised his head.

It was disgusting. Whiting fought down a rising desire to jerk the hulking fool to his feet and put a gun in his hand; but even as he was debating the point the woman stooped and spoke softly, whereupon the negro came to his feet, bowed low in a deep courtesy, and, turning quickly, followed along rapidly after the retreating animals.

She then turned again to Whiting, as if surprised that he was still there. She was so near that the subtle, sweet odor of crushed flowers which came from her body permeated the air and filled his nostrils.

"Fool that you are," she said quite plainly in the Dahomey tongue, "to wish to kill my people. See"—she pointed to the slain Mago—"he can kill no more, but will make food for the prowling jackal. Would you then so die?"

At her reference to the killing of Mago, Whiting again saw red. He half raised his gun as he faced her with an anger matching her own. "Your people?" he threw back at her. "And who are you, a white woman, to be claiming kin with such hellish beasts as that?"

She looked at him uncomprehendingly. It was evident she had not understood his hurried rush of words.

He spoke more slowly, gesturing lavishly as he spoke: "Where are our stolen porters? And where is McLaughlin? And, I say, what do you mean about those beasts? Is it up to you to protect them?"

Now Whiting was young, and he was also exceedingly good to look upon, which facts were not impaired by his recent excitement and his present anger. His lean, young jaw had a defiant tilt, while his whole body proclaimed a rebellious hostility. He leaned closer as he spoke and looked her sharply in the face. She, too, stepped nearer, her eyes burning bright, close to his own. For a minute she stood so, then she gave him a gentle push backward and laughed—a short, weird exclamation entirely devoid of mirth and at which Whiting had a queer, undefinable impression as if baffled by some unknown sources.

Almost could he feel the touch of the mystical influence. He hated her—how he hated her! Because of her devilish sorcery and mysterious witchery things had gone to the devil generally—and she could stand there and laugh at him! He fingered his gun nervously. She certainly deserved death and a worse one than a bullet could administer, but——

"Brother of the White Moon god, he that shall soon return to the Great Father, come," she said quite unexpectedly, turning down the slope. "It is that I return to my people."

Whiting, perforce, followed after her, his brain on fire with curiosity, yet helpless as to how or where to begin.

At the foot of the small elevation, from a cluster of heavy underbrush, came a dozen natives bearing a litter which he at once recognized. At a sign from the woman they lowered it to the ground, and she stepped upon it, motioning him to follow. The natives then lifted it to their shoulders, and the queer party moved off at a rapid rate in the wake of the deserting porters and the banished gorillas.

The two were very near together; the woman reclining gracefully in voluptuous abandonment, and Whiting sitting straight and uncomfortable, his thoughts equally divided between his ludicrous position and the study of his unusual companion.

That she was more than unusual, he was more than ever aware; but he could not define it. It was beyond his depths of perception. The eyes, on close inspection, had a weird, almost wild appearance most baffling. He looked away quickly. What did it mean? And how explain it? He would find McLaughlin and get out while there was time. He would! He would make time; he must.

They came shortly to a scattered fringe of palms which grew denser as they proceeded until the entire character of the surface and its vegetation took on a complete change. Tangled growths of enormous club mosses and gigantic horsetails, together with trees—strange trees—with curiously knotted trunks and wide, frondlike leaves lined their path on either side and shut out the light of the sun.

Whiting looked and wondered anew, but his companion lay quiet, eyes half closed, oblivious of her surroundings and him, offering nothing. Then quite without warning they came to an immense open space in which were scattered huts—a score of varieties—from that of the thatched toadstool in appearance to the more commanding in structure, while in the center, colossal in comparison, was an eminent structure of unique workmanship, unquestionably the home of the goddess herself.

As they came nearer Whiting saw before it dozens of naked savages dancing and pounding great, ungainly native drums, while the frightful yells and falsetto wails that filled the air were enough to chill the blood. But he did not see McLaughlin.

A wild foreboding swept over him, and then as they drew nearer and the dancers dropped, faces to earth, to await their passing, he saw him. He was seated on a tiger-skin mat, watching with listless interest the antics of the swaying natives. On one side lay a leopard contentedly dreaming in the morning's sunshine, while on the other side, back propped against a tree, sat a gorilla—the gorilla he had seen on the litter that day!

Whiting almost fell off in his haste to get down. He made a dash for McLaughlin and grasped him by the hand and felt no shame at the rush of tears to his eyes. "Mack, you old cuss. Lord, but I'm glad to see you!"

"Dunk," gasped McLaughlin, a choke in his voice, "didn't know you were within miles of here. And you came!"

"Surest thing," half caroled Whiting, his spirits soaring. "I'm in to the death. But, man, I'm certainly stuffed with interrogations; you've a lot to explain. I can see you're already on speakin' terms with the lady's domestic pets."

He looked around, but animals, litter, slaves—all were disappearing at a near-by bend of the palm-lined avenue in the rear. McLaughlin looked after them, then told Whiting to follow him. "I have an apartment in the queen's household," he said, smiling. "Sort of an honored guest, you know, and we'll talk there."

Whiting saw that the edifice was composed of three separate compartments of bamboo connected by crude pergolas made of huge elephant tusks set close together. But the interior was totally bare, aside from a profusion of different sorts of furs. McLaughlin seemed unpleasantly at home, and stretched out comfortably full length with his lighted pipe. "Make yourself comfortable, Dunk, if you must hear my tale of woe, and don't worry that we'll be interrupted. Our hostess and her attendants have gone to quiet her wild men, I think. Dekona, the black in charge of them, rushed past here not twenty minutes before you came, and he said they were on the warpath."

"If you mean those gorillas, they were," conceded Whiting, "and I was square in the path."

"Ah! So that accounts for your spectacular arrival, eh? Had a bout with the old boys themselves!"

"And, man, it was some bout," acceded Whiting with a peculiar grin. "Mago shot one of the brutes, and was cruelly slaughtered in return, and just as things were reaching a climax your lady of the jungle fell from the clouds and intervened."

"Yes?" queried McLaughlin laconically.

"Yes," confirmed Whiting with emphasis. "And see here, Mack, out with it! You're human enough to know that chronic curiosity can become monotonous—and mine's sure chronic."

McLaughlin sat up, his brows drawn together. "I don't know where to start, Dunk. I know so little that I'm dining on curiosity myself; that's one of the reasons I'm still here. And its wilder than a tale of the 'Arabian Nights,' and so utterly incongruous as to be ridiculous. But the woman *is* white and, in a way, marvelously feminine, with a keenness of mind at times far beyond that of the native; but why she is here—or how—is still a mystery.

"The natives, who are all her slaves, from a dozen or more tribes, believe her to be the daughter of the sun, which they worship. These slaves have been stolen by the apes. This I learned from an aged Dahomey woman—old Alabie—who, I gather, was one of the fierce Dahomey Amazons, and was the first native brought in. Said she had been wounded in a battle with a neighboring tribe and deserted by her comrades, who had fled for their lives. A gorilla found her later and brought her here, and from what she says it must have taken weeks.

"The girl was three or four years old then, and was mothered by that old gorilla we saw on the litter that day; was the only human being, black or white, among all those apes. Since that time those beasts have prowled and stolen negroes until there's a regular colony of slaves. What prompted them, or how they came to do it, or what her power over them I don't know."

"But I don't understand, Mack. What keeps 'em in here? They don't——"

"Wait ti you see this place, Dunk. Desert to north of us, marsh to south of us, more marsh to east of us, while on the west—well, you know what's there. And these marshes are deep—I think subterranean in places—with animals that are meat-eating monsters lining the banks and filling the muddy waters."

"Can't get out! Well, how about us if they happen to grow too fond of us? And say, Yuema got off a lot of stuff about soul eating and burning. And where is Waddo?"

McLaughlin got to his feet. His face was pale. Whiting saw that he was deeply moved. "Three of the captives, together with Waddo, were sacrificed to the great Sun Father the night before my guides and I got here," he said. "Let's not talk of it, old man. These are savages, and that's one of their sacred rites, but it's a custom I intend to abolish before I leave this place; I owe it to Waddo."

"Well, it's a debt that'll never be paid, and I guess Waddo will never be any the wiser," asserted Whiting heatedly, "for early to-morrow morning we face the back trail. If we can't find our porters we'll make it alone. All I say is: Go while there's time."

"You mean after all this—with the heart of the kernel in your hand—you would turn back?"

"Of what use the kernel or its heart to a couple of dead men? Good men are scarce, and it behooves us to look out for one when we find him."

"I thought I made it plain in that note, Dunk; my intentions. At any rate, I'll do it now. I stay. How long? I don't know. All new undertakings demand volunteers—primordial advance guards—and if good men are scarce, what do you say to going away and leaving a white woman to such a life as this? Rather changes the adjective, don't you think?"

"Can't see that it does. It might, if she *was* a white woman, but she's not! Her skin's white, but she's a savage, nevertheless; worse, she's a monstrosity who lives on a plane with those gorillas she's now gone to pacify and in reality is lower than the fool slaves who worship her."

"You've said enough, Dunk. On that one point we differ, so why waste words over it?"

"See here, Mack; whatever you say is right—un-

derstand? But what are you going to do with her? Take her home and introduce her to your mother?"

The question was brutally put. McLaughlin's teeth worried his under lip as he reviewed it. Then: "I don't know," he said finally.

"Ah, come on home, Mack! Your uncle was right. Whatever happened in here a quarter of a century ago isn't for you to know—doesn't concern you—and if by any chance you should uncover it I have a feeling it would be very disagreeable."

"Nevertheless, I stay," asserted McLaughlin with a bulldog tenacity.

"To dig into the past or civilize your savage queen?"

"Both, perhaps."

"And in time, when she refuses to let you go, to become king to her royal queenship, huh? King o' the Cannibal Islands! Egad, I never expected it of you, Mack."

"You're getting foolish, Dunk."

"But you're going to *stay*, and I feel what's comin'. Well, I'm in for it—children and fools, you know. Thank the Lord for that clause concerning the latter; I'm grateful, if it doesn't concern me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AS IN THE BOOK OF FATE.

WHITING had been there a fortnight. In that time he had learned many things. He had found that the country was indeed impregnable and possessed of a wonderful wealth in ivory and furs and wonderfully wrought articles of gold whose source seemed a matter of mystery and much doubt. He had learned to interpret the weird dance with the firebrands, and so much noise as the prelude to a barbarous sacrifice of life to fire; and to recognize the cunningly devised traps by which the living animal was procured for this purpose. He had also experienced a dulled horror at the wanton sacrifice of a young slave when the traps had failed to fulfill their mission.

Nothing can be quite so satisfyingly convincing as a thing experienced firsthand, and to Whiting, McLaughlin's change of front was more than this. He didn't try to explain this or his assurance that it was entirely wrong from a friend's standpoint; he couldn't. But he knew it, and at the same time recognized the futility of broaching the subject to McLaughlin. But he wondered a very great deal. He wondered at his own great aversion, quite aside from the fact that the woman herself was a mystery, and knew it lay deeper than that; deeper than a trivial question of circumstantial environment, or a difficult personality, and involved the inner researches of nature—of life itself—and found excuse for its existence in that mystical region—the soul.

Time after time he endeavored to struggle back to the old footing, but McLaughlin was impervious, and deftly turned his friendly advances aside, leaving him helpless and impotent as to what course to pursue. McLaughlin seemed to have forgotten that he was on a self-imposed mission or that his conduct in itself was inexcusable; he was enamored, fascinated by the wild, sinister beauty of the woman and had lost sight of all else.

Whiting grew desperate. He knew the imperative necessity for some kind of action, also that it was too late for any half measures. He had been unable to locate the stolen porters or to find any trace of them, and he didn't know where to turn next. He assailed McLaughlin one morning as they were sitting at breakfast with a bald statement of facts, and McLaughlin patiently heard him through.

"You're too impatient, Dunk," he said. "You can't force American push into a place where time has meant nothing since time was."

"But we are doing nothing, Mack, nothing! We've settled down to this fairy-book existence and don't even know what has made it possible. We are so surfeited on the extraordinary and the unusual that we are losing sight of the practical. Have you discovered the source of all this gold or tried to? Think of it! Golden dishes, exquisite in quality and designs, in an African jungle village. We know it isn't found around here; didn't originate here; it couldn't. But where is it all from? It may seem a superfluous accessory in here where intrinsic values are measured in the force of club and brawn, but out in the land of men it flaunts its superiority from the apex of all human achievements and comes into its own. Gold, Mack, gold! For which every crime under the sun has been committed, and we plutocrats of the jungle eat our lotus and wild honey from golden plates, sip ambrosia from golden goblets, and lose ourselves in this elysium that is but a fool's paradise. That's it in a nutshell, and we call ourselves intelligent human beings. Lord!"

"You're mercenary, Dunk, and you've lost sight of the vital issues, I think."

"Mercenary?" Whiting's scorn was withering. "With enough gold lying around loose to overstock the depleted treasuries of the world? While as for vital issues—well, I may understand a different definition for the word, but I imagine I'm not alone in the belief that gold in itself is a vital thing."

"Granted, Dunk. Gold is a vital thing, but does that necessarily imply that it is the vital thing?"

"It doesn't," conceded Whiting with conviction. But it brings me to the point that I do consider vital."

"And that?" McLaughlin's eyebrows elevated the merest fraction in token of his guarded amount of interest in the question.

"The woman," answered Whiting flatly, completely ignoring the danger signals. "At present, to me, at any rate, she is, indeed, a very vital thing—not mentioning the numerous questionable things she stands for. Listen! Do you know she sleeps in the trees, along with that leopard and gorilla? She does; and in a way she resembles the old gorilla who tags at her heels. There's something radically wrong, Mack. I know it, but I can't explain it or understand it. Look at those gorillas. They are nomadic, I tell you, yet they hang around this village and are vitally influenced, as you can see. Leopards instinctively hate gorillas, but this great beast follows along like some domestic cat in daily companionship with one. Can you beat it—or explain it?"

McLaughlin sat quite still through Whiting's discourse, while a dull red suffused his face, then receded, leaving it a dead white. When he spoke his voice was ominous, heavy with a suppressed calm. "It makes no difference what you think of her or how you consider her, and if you value our friend-

ship whatever, no more of your damned inferences concerning her."

A dash of red leaped across Whiting's face, and a stinging pressure of tears filled his eyes, but he held back the overpowering impulse to use his fists.

"I suppose that includes her associates in waiting?" he gibed.

"Any fool could see that leopard has been a pet from infancy and knows no other life," retorted McLaughlin as if that ended the subject.

"But who petted the old gorilla into subjection? I can't just seem to catch the sequence somehow."

"Dunk"—McLaughlin leaned forward impressively—"I'm struggling against the strongest desire of my whole life—a perfectly primitive desire to choke the lying, insinuating tongue out of your fool head. I say I'm struggling against it, but it's a new thing—a sweet, a honeyed inclination—and I may not be strong enough to resist it. Do you get that?"

Whiting leaped to his feet. He was trembling, so that his voice shook as that of an old man. "Don't waste your strength; I, too, have a desire, and I see no necessity in thwarting anything so vital."

The two men stood facing each other, eye measuring eye, while years of association and friendship were swept away and engulfed under a mountain whose origin was the creation of the first woman.

And then a shadow came between them, and following it the woman herself. Both men unconsciously stepped back and looked at her. Her beauty demanded it. Her eyes sought McLaughlin's, and Whiting saw his soften and grow tender as he returned her look. Whiting stood and looked at them, a queer mixture of emotions surging rampant through him; then, as McLaughlin's eyes met his over the woman's head, he capitulated. He smiled a queer, twisted sort of smile. He turned and walked away.

He spent the next few hours maligning the foolhardiness that had betrayed him into his breach with McLaughlin. It had been useless and had made the old, pleasant companionship impossible. He regretted it, while he verified his belief that he had been right. There seemed nothing he could do that would in the least help. It was too late to do anything; had been too late even before the two had met. The outcome had been preordained in the book of fate—and therefore unavoidable.

He wandered about quite aimlessly, sinking deeper with each passing second into the pit his despair had made ready for him, and then as he passed down a narrow palm avenue he saw Alabie in all her hideous regalia leaving the door of her hut. Something about the pitifully grotesque figure struck a responsive chord in him; touched his loneliness, his desolation, and leaped through his voice as he spoke to her. The old woman salaamed as she returned his greeting, her old eyes lighting shrewdly.

Whiting stopped. "Sit here in the shade with me, eh, Alabie? I'm lonely for a parley."

Alabie lowered her frightful old body to the ground obediently, the while she studied his face for an answer to the puzzle.

Whiting laughed. He had an entertaining way with inferiors, when he chose to take the trouble to exert himself, and before long Alabie had forgotten her apprehensions, and with a dexterous hint or so from Whiting was launched upon a sea of confidences, which from their very nature he was forced to doubt.

His incredulity incensed Alabie, who waxed warm in her protestations. But, yes; the village is large—much larger than Wuko, and the streets are of gold! The Great Sun Father had feared because of its terrible brightness that it would become brighter than he, so he had covered it up, hidden it, and it might only be found after much travel and many hardships.

On its dusty streets and within its great walls could be found people whom the Sun Father had so much hated that he had turned them to stone; and in this city it was gloomy, with no light, except at the large rock opening, while through it whistled constantly a terrific wind—the breath of the angry god!

Whiting knew he was a fool, but somehow he half believed the yarn; else whence the exquisite designs whose existence he could not understand. "And this village, Alabie, where could one find it?"

"But, no; it is not for the white people of the White Moon god to know. Iluko, the Goddess of Fire and daughter of the great Sun god, it is but for her. She robs the dead city of its splendors that they might shine for her and the Great Father."

Whiting grew artful. "But the son of the White Moon god—it is that he shall mate with Iluko, perhaps. What then?"

A slow smile pushed the many wrinkles of the old face into pronounced fissures, and a gleam like that of some crafty old bird of prey shone from the narrow eyes. "Ah!" she said, and again, "Ah!" Then impressively: "The daughter of the Great Sun god cannot mate. Her soul burns with a great fire, and, burning so, must not mate with another soul."

She sat silent a minute, thinking deeply. Then: "It is that the son of the White Moon god shall die," she said simply.

Whiting arose hastily, as if in some way the words were an actual prophecy. Forgotten was his late quarrel, his craving for gold, and McLaughlin's blind infatuation; he only knew that in some manner he must save his friend—even against himself.

Alabie arose also, and peered up sharply into his face. —"Alabie's soul no burns the soul of the White Moon god's son. His friend also she would not burn, eh?"

Whiting grinned. "No, I'm sure you wouldn't, Alabie, and thank all your various gods that this is true. I'm sure you're perfectly harmless when it comes to souls. Well, so long."

He nodded curtly to the old woman, and started off toward their quarters. But Alabie overtook him and clutched his arm. "You will come again, yes? Some day, maybe, when your soul is again lonely——"

"What? Oh! Yes, Alabie, when I am again lonely, perhaps. Thanks." And he walked on again thoughtfully, his mind on McLaughlin and scarcely heeding the import of the woman's words. He would find Mack, and by fair means or foul take him away. But how? He smiled grimly. The thought had occupied most of his waking thoughts for days, and now, with everything against him, the fulfillment of this

desire arose until it stood paramount, on a level with life itself; yet he recognized his complete inability to cope with it or to do other than he had already done.

A modern Pandora had beguiled a more reckless Epimetheus into opening another box, and not even hope had been left. Whiting knew this, even as he disputed it by fanning to life a determination strong enough to create the nucleus from which a new hope might be born. The first thing was to find McLaughlin.

But McLaughlin was not to be found. The place was entirely deserted and permeated with the unnamable silences such as obtains with the absence of all things living.

Whiting stood thinking, somewhat at a loss as to his next move, when a familiar, falsetto wail ending in a savage whoop suddenly broke the quiet across the distant stretches of the rapidly lengthening shadows of coming night. Another wail came immediately, followed by another and another, until a chorus of wails and interspersing whoops, while the boom, boom of the enormous native drums, came with the fearful significance of what it accompanied.

The listening man shuddered. Almost could he smell the scorching flesh intermingled with the ever-accompanying, overpowering odor of the smoking incense as it was poured over the burning flesh—an offer of appeasement to their demanding god. He could see the shiny black bodies in their hideous writhings and contortions, the straining of muscle and the utter abandonment of self to the lurid rites of a custom whose import no white man could face. And from such as this he would save his friend!

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Miser's Stratagem

A MISER lay at death's door. His spirit overheard a conversation between a physician and an undertaker, as they discussed his case. Said the first: "If he lives, he will be dependent upon my services for life." Said the other piously: "God forbid that he should be a lifelong invalid!" Much distressed, the miser mourned that they would get him coming or going. At last, with his final ounce of strength, he threw the entire contents of his strong box into the fire. He had outwitted them both!

The Broken Idol

A CERTAIN man carved an idol which he endowed with every imaginable power and virtue.

His neighbor saw that it was of poor material, and that it could not answer the smallest request. He remonstrated with the man, saying: "Behold, this thine idol cannot move, nor can it speak. It is of such ordinary stuff that it can never serve thee, but must always fail thee."

The man's faith being disturbed, he began to implore his idol for a sign. As it remained obdurate, he destroyed the image, because it had shamed him before his neighbor by its impotence. Afterward, he wept bitterly, prostrating himself in the ruins and calling down curses upon his neighbor.

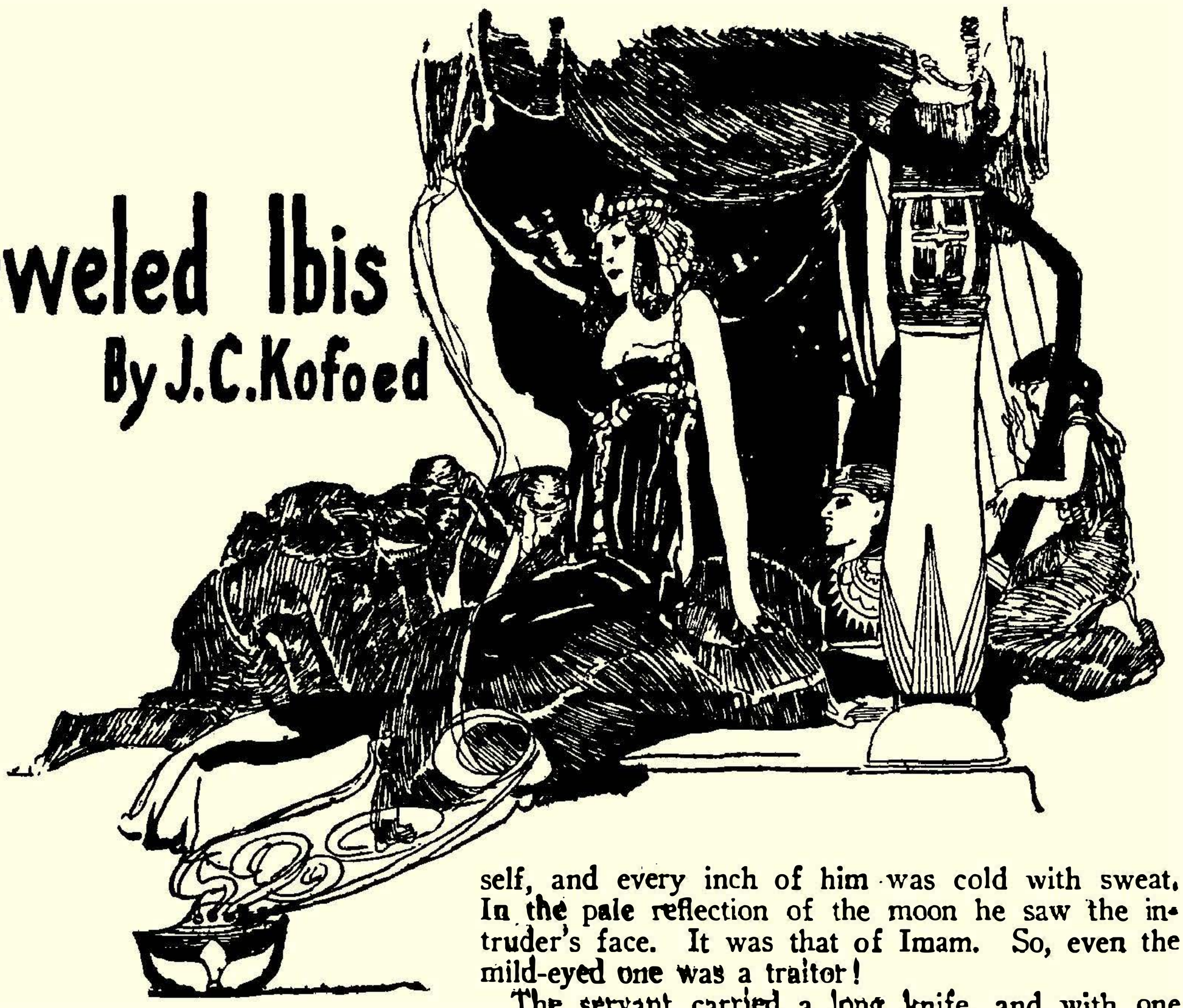
Marveling, the neighbor demanded: "Why weepest thou? Why art thou ungrateful to me, who exposed the worthlessness of thy god?"

More bitterly wept the man. "Thou hast taken from me my god without having given me another. Better for me had I remained a blind worshiper than to be without any god!" And he lowered himself again into the dust.

ISRA PUTNAM.

The Jeweled Ibis

By J.C.Kofoed



SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Dave Hudson, after failing to find a certain deserter from the Sudanese Corps, one Major Halim, embarks on a cruise with a vicious character named Cullen, saving Marian Chandler from an attack, and losing his heart. He escapes from Cullen's ship after a struggle, learns that Marian Chandler is involved in a mystery connected with Cullen. Being intrusted by her with the jeweled ibis, a precious Egyptian thing, he loses it. He listens to a story about Egypt's warrior king, Sesostris, and how the dead king and a senseless girl have lain in a certain temple in Egypt for centuries. As a result, Marian's father is endeavoring to find the fluid that will bring the sleeping girl back to life, but Hudson is interested in the jewels that are reported to be in the temple. They go to Egypt and there meet a priest named Ra, who binds Marian's father up in his desire to locate the jeweled ibis.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE DESERT.

WHEN Chandler awoke, heavy with the sense of impending danger, the moon had risen. Through the porthole he glimpsed the heaving sea, with its silver path to the horizon. God! If he was only free! He writhed and tugged at his bonds.

As he looked a black something blotted out the light in the porthole. With a thrill of horror, Chandler realized that it was a human head. For a moment it was motionless, as though its owner was accustoming his eyes to the gloom. Then it heaved upward. A pair of shoulders followed the head; a body squeezed in, and the man dropped lightly to the floor.

That it was some form of torture devised by his enemies, Chandler had no doubt. As the man slipped soft-footed across the floor the scientist braced himself, and every inch of him was cold with sweat. In the pale reflection of the moon he saw the intruder's face. It was that of Imam. So, even the mild-eyed one was a traitor!

The servant carried a long knife, and with one sweep of the blade he severed Chandler's bonds.

"Silence, effendi," he whispered. "In a moment I will free the lady. Then we will show our heels to the cursed dogs above. Wait!" He darted into Marian's stateroom, and Drexel heard his sister suppress a low-voiced exclamation of astonishment. Hardly had he rubbed some of the stiffness from his limbs than Imam was back, with Marian at his elbow.

"We must be swift as the night wind," the Egyptian whispered. "The deck watch has been silenced, and a boat is swinging from the davits just above this porthole, heaven-born. The coast is but a scant twenty miles away. We should make it ere dawn, and be off on the quest before your enemies leave this ship."

The boat, lowered on carefully greased davits, swung across the porthole, blotting the trio in an ominous shadow. Aided by the two men, Marian crawled into it. Chandler was next, and behind him the Egyptian wormed into place.

Lower and lower swung the boat until it rested uneasily on the water. Then a black shape appeared on the rail above them. It grasped the rope, and slid down with a sailor's practiced skill.

"Who is that?" demanded Chandler, as the figure dangled in the air above them.

"Who?" repeated the Egyptian with his inscrutable smile. "I think you know him, effendi."

As Chandler looked up the man on the rope glanced down, and there, illumined by the white glare of the moon, the scientist saw the keen, weather-tanned face of Dave Hudson.

"Dave!" cried the girl.

"Marian!"

The use of their Christian names came so spon-

taneously that neither marked the unusualness of it. But then danger is a keen spur to love, and that emotion had been fomenting in Hudson's heart since the exciting little rumpus in Port Said. As was natural, Marian's admiration for the big engineer had been aroused. It had been followed by pity at his supposed death, and there is only a short step between pity and love. Dave meant that she should take that step —if she had not already done so.

Hudson and Imam rowed until they were about a mile from the *Sleeping Beauty*. Then the little gas engine was started, and they chugged away over a sea of silver glass. The Egyptian steered, and the three Americans gathered in the stern to talk things over.

"I don't understand it," said Chandler, with a weary shake of his head. "Since we came to London it has been just one mystery on top of another. Now, your disappearance——"

"There was nothing mysterious in that," smiled Hudson. "When we boarded the ship I caught a glimpse of Cullen in a steward's uniform. No doubt Ra had sought him out with the news that speed was needed, and he had come over and bullied poor old Gary into giving him a job. Whatever the cause of his being there I knew my life wouldn't be worth three shakes if he came within knife-thrust of me. Imam here was my main dependence. He assured me that he would do anything I asked——"

The brown man looked up with almost doglike affection in his eyes. "Why not? You saved my life, effendi, there in Alexandria."

"I let Cullen see me, and then ducked down to Imam's cabin. There is a little compartment back of his bunk where it was easy to hide. Every one of the bloodthirsty crew thought one of the others had gotten rid of me, but was too diplomatic to say so. There was only one thing to do, and that was to wait until we came within a reasonable distance of the African coast. So, to-night being the psychological moment, we made things ready. Imam hypnotized the deck watch——"

"Hypnotized!" exclaimed Chandler. "Impossible!"

The Egyptian frowned, and turned from his task of steering. "So you say, effendi, and so say your too-ready-to-laugh countrymen. I had my training from the priests of Zeus. No men have learned better the art of concentration than they. I have seen their Council of Death will that a man should die. And I have seen that man gasp and strangle his life out at their feet, blasted by the power of their minds."

Marian uttered a shocked exclamation, but Chandler laughed skeptically.

"It is true," cried Imam, with a passionate gesture, "though we can only work our hypnosis on the ignorant fellaheen or an unresisting mind. But for proof: how came the jeweled ibis in your pocket the night Hudson effendi came to us?"

"I don't know."

"But I do. When your most sweet sister went to purchase the ibis from the dog who held it I knew she was in danger. El Melik and Abu-l-Kheyr believed me to be one of them, and they confided Ra's plans to me. I could not follow without arousing their suspicion. So I hypnotized you, Chandler effendi, and sent you out to guard your sister. This I did because you had promised not to leave the hotel, and I thought the danger a small one at most."

Chandler flushed.

"You followed out all I told you, except in one instance. It seemed to me, of course, that Ra would get the ibis, and so I directed your subconsciousness to take it from the man who had it and give him, instead, the false one with which I supplied you. Instead of Ra, it was Hudson effendi from whom you took it. When you returned to the rooms I changed your clothes, and when I awakened you you thought you had but dozed in your chair. Do you believe me?"

Incredible as it seemed, Chandler believed it. There was no doubting the man's sincerity. Hudson smiled at Marian. He *knew* such things were possible, for he had seen them done.

Faster and faster sped the motor boat, the exhaust rattling like a machine gun, the spray dashing high from their bows. Overhead sailed the full-orbed African moon. The salt air was in Hudson's nostrils, and the girl he loved was at his side. His heart swelled with happiness. With the wine of life singing through his veins, Dave began to sing in his deep, rich voice, with the distinct enunciation and quavering manner peculiar to the Egyptian:

Kámil el-owsáf fetennee
Wa-l-'oyoon es-sood ramoonee
Min Häwahum sirt aghanee
Wa-l häwá zowwad gunoonee.

A deep color rose in Marian's cheeks. Her brother, whose knowledge of the tongue was very sketchy, clapped his hands in mock applause. "Repeat it in English," he commanded.

"It's an awful foolish little thing," said Hudson, but nevertheless he began to sing:

"The perfect in attributes hath involved me in trouble
And the black eyes have o'erthrown me.
From love of them I began to sing,
And the air—tune—increased my madness."

There was silence after the last note had lingered and died away on the warm air. Hudson began to feel a trifle foolish. He was a quiet man, not given to exhibiting emotion, and he feared that the frankness of the song might have offended Marian. Then he felt her shoulder against his, and saw the eyes he had extolled in song were smiling at him. So all was well with the world again.

They beached their craft in a sandy inlet of the Gulf of Bu-Sheifa just as dawn crept up through the east. About half a mile from shore stood a dirty little village, rather picturesque, from a distance, under the nodding date palms. Imam told them, with a grin, that it was his native town, and he trotted ahead to have breakfast prepared.

As early rising is a custom of Egypt they found plenty of folks astir, and in fact the village was a microcosm of the whole country. There were Arabs, Fellaheen, Turks, Abyssinians rambling about. With unerring instinct, Imam had found the only rich man in town—a merchant to boot—and he led them to his home, where a meal of butter, eggs, bread, clouted cream, and strong black coffee was provided.

Chandler noticed a poster on the wall of the merchant's house, printed in English and Egyptian characters, offering a reward of ten thousand pounds for

the capture of the officer he had read about in the London *Times*. He wondered mildly about the instincts that impel men to treachery until Imam came up with the camels. Then he forgot about the incident entirely.

Hudson had purchased seven of those ungainly beasts, together with three camel men and plenty of supplies. Two of the attendants were Bedwis, lithe, bearded men, with delicately molded features. The third was also slim, but little could be seen of his face, because he kept his turban down over his eyes and his tarboosh up to his chin.

Two hours after they had eaten, the little party mounted their biting, squealing ships of the desert, and turned the animals' supercilious noses toward their quest. It was a good eight days' travel to the plateau where the pyramid of Sesostris was built. So they attempted to conserve their energies, rather than make haste.

On the fourth day the party ran into a *khamsin*, the greatest infliction desert travelers have to face. It is swift, baking wind that carries a cloud of yellow dust in its train. The atmosphere became so dense with sand particles that camels, men, and all were enveloped as in a yellow fog. They literally breathed sand. Marian's skin became parched and tender. They all suffered more or less from thirst.

The wind and heat abated about sunset, and camp was pitched. The day had been fearsomely fatiguing, and Chandler and his sister drooped under it. Even the camel men—their tawny faces glistening with sweat—looked worn and tired. But Hudson, who had slouched all day in his saddle, his cork helmet over his eyes, appeared almost fresh at the end of the march.

When supper had been dispatched all save the engineer rolled in their blankets. Dave lit his pipe, took his gun and binoculars, and sat down to watch. Cullen and Ra must be hot on their heels by this time, and to be surprised meant death.

The silence of the desert is like a tomb, and except for an occasional grunt from a camel there was not a sound to break the stillness. A thousand different impressions flocked into Hudson's mind. Scenes from the sea, the desert, and the veldt were all swallowed up in thoughts of Marian. In his fifteen years of world wandering Hudson had been a man among men. Women were rare enough in his experience, but this one far transcended any he had ever met. He believed that she cared for him, and if there really was treasure in the prophetess' tomb he could ask her to be his wife.

The popular idea of a desert is that it is a uniformly level expanse of land. In reality it is molded into huge elevations and depressions. And it was on the lip of one of these elevations, or *wadis*, that the party had pitched camp. From it Hudson could sweep the desert for a tremendous distance. Just now he was too absorbed in his thoughts for the commonplace to be registered on his brain. Then something moved across his line of vision. It was far away and distorted by impending darkness, but it was enough to wake Hudson once more to an acute interest in the physical. He lifted his field glasses, and instantly there sprang into view a score of men on camels. The big brutes were trotting along at a smart pace.

The riders wore the panoply of Bedouins, but the powerful lenses brought out the faces of Cullen and El Melik and Ra and others whom Hudson knew. Dave had seen enough. He hastily wakened the sleepers. The fire was extinguished and the dunnage loaded. Sleepily, all save Hudson mounted.

"I'll stay here and sheer them off if they get here too quickly," he explained. "I'll catch you again in a couple of hours. You know the way, Imam. Lead."

Without question the little cavalcade padded away through the darkness.

Sheltered by a depression in the *wadis*, Hudson lay, waiting. The moon came up presently, and the desert turned to a shimmering sea of silver. To his intense satisfaction he saw that Ra's men had dismounted and were engaged in making camp. It was safe to go on then.

Overhead the tropic stars blazed. The flames from the distant fires winked and blinked like enormous eyes. They reminded Hudson of Ra's vicious yellow ones.

For a while longer Dave squatted on his heels and waited. Then, as the men settled down to rest, he rose, with a sigh of relief, and walked back to where his camel was tethered.

But now, instead of one camel, there was two, and atop the spare one sat Marian Chandler. Her bronze-tinted hair, in two long braids, hung upon her breast, and exhaustion had limned blue circles beneath her eyes. She smiled wanly at Hudson's astonishment.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "You left with the others, didn't you?"

"Why, you see," she explained naïvely, "every one was so sleepy that—well, they did not notice me leave them. I just couldn't bear to think of you facing conflict alone, so I—I came back to be with you."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE PYRAMID.

IT was an eight-day march to the plateau where Sesostris had constructed his pyramid, and each day was like the other for sheer monotony. The desert seemed like a great, impersonal monster, waiting supinely to swallow them when their resistance was gone. Body and mind drooped in the fierce heat, and even the night's coolness hardly resupplied the wasted vitality.

Attired in a brown flannel shirt, khaki riding breeches, boots, and helmet—a costume that delightfully enhanced her lithe figure—Marian bravely kept up the pace with the others. But it was tiring, and long before their objective was reached she was almost exhausted, though far too game to admit it.

It was wonderfully comforting to have Dave there; to feel his hand on hers; to listen to his encouragement. The girl preferred not to define her emotions, but the impulse that had caused her to go back to him while the others rode on was more than friendly interest. The words of the Egyptian song he had sung echoed in her ears. She wondered if he literally meant that her "black eyes had o'erthrown him."

From the third day on the plateau loomed faintly blue in the distance, disappearing and reappearing in the peculiar atmospheric conditions. At its highest point it towered some eighteen hundred feet, and it

was on the highest point that Sesostris' pyramid thrust its bulky snout into the sky.

"It seems impossible for human beings to have dragged huge blocks of stone up there," Chandler said once. "But for the evidence of my eyes I would swear that it could not be done."

Imam nodded humbly. "It is not well to say a thing is impossible, effendi. None should say that a thing is beyond reach. Many would brand a man as a liar if he told of this pyramid, yet there it has stood more than three thousand years."

The mounts were left at the foot of the plateau in charge of one of the camel men. The rest of the party commenced the ascent. Though fairly steep, it was not particularly difficult to climb, and so, within a few hours, they saw the enormous folly of the dead emperor at close range.

It stood on a level stretch of ground, probably five miles square, and was larger by far than any Egyptian works Marian had ever seen. The queer, angular figures cut by the sculptors of the Nile were in each stone, with the royal cartouche of Sesostris dominating every scene. Though blurred and partly obliterated, the wonderful stone had held those inscriptions against the assault of thirty centuries.

The magnificent scene Nature's lavish hand had spilled before their eyes, and the dignity age conferred on the huge heap of stone brought to each of them a sense of human frailty and insignificance. Who were they to disturb the great silence?

Hudson drew a long breath. "Well, this isn't getting anywhere," he said at last. "I'll take Imam and the boy and hunt for an entrance to those subterranean tunnels. Have supper waiting for us when we come back. To-morrow we can start after the jewels and the prophetess."

Marian said nothing, but she watched them enter the pyramid with a feeling of dread. The slanting rays of the sun spread an unearthly color on the black marble—a color that reflected on the trees and grass in a way almost ghastly.

Though her brother and Imam's big, bearded townsman were with her, the girl felt nervous and excited. It was undoubtedly the reaction after days of tense physi al action. And, too, a sense of impending disaster crushed her. She found it impossible to rest. Her weary feet carried her endlessly through the coarse grass. At length she wandered to the edge of the plateau, and looked down at the yellow rocks and sparse trees that lined the path up which they had traveled.

Then fear drove the color from her lips and started her heart beating like a trip hammer. A face protruded from behind a tree of the lower slope. The visage was flat and dark, with eyes that held the yellow brilliancy of a lion's.

Marian was screened by a thicket of date palms and coarse shrub, so she turned and beckoned frantically to her brother. He caught her meaning instantly, and, with the big camel man at his heels, ran toward her. But now the place fairly crawled with men. There must have been at least a hundred of them.

Even then there would have been a chance for escape had not the fellah jerked up his old-fashioned Snider rifle and fired. That one shot brought their pursuers leaping toward them with added zest. Besides Ra and Cullen and Chandler's two ex-servants there were huge, fierce-faced men in purple turbans, some sailors from the *Sleeping Beauty*, and a number of ragged black men.

They fought hard, though they knew it was useless. The Zeusites swarmed over the edge of the plateau. Marian, her empty revolver still in her hand, shrank back. Rough, sweaty hands seized her, but Ra shouted, "Take them alive!" and they were hustled back to the camp.

Once there, Ra's authority became even more apparent. He was deferred to, waited on, and the men seemed proud even to touch the hem of his purple habit. He gravely ate and drank, without deigning to notice the prisoners.

Though their case was desperate, Marian did not lose hope. Her confidence in Dave Hudson remained unshakable, and just so long as he remained out of the clutches of the priests of Zeus, just so long would she retain her courage.

When his meal was over, Se-hotep-ab-Ra ordered Chandler's camel man to be brought before him. The latter was a chap fully six feet tall, of herculean strength, and in repose a bronze statue of perfect proportions. He held himself sternly erect, and with the fatalistic attitude so characteristic of his breed.

"Your name?" demanded the high priest harshly.

"Kadir."

"Once a servant of our order?"

He nodded carelessly.

"And now a follower of the thrice-cursed——"

Kadir folded his arms across his chest, and laughed contemptuously. "Why all these questions, effendi? You mean to murder me. I know it and you know it, so why this pretence? There is no more to be said. *Allahu Akbar!*"

In the face of what he knew to be inevitable, the man's courage was sublime. Marian stared, fascinated, at the high priest, whose tawny sk n grew dark with wrath. A snarl twisted his brutal face into more malignant lines. He breathed heavily, and then, with an oath, picked up a revolver and fired point-blank into Kadir's face.

After a bit he rose, spurning the dead body with his foot, and turned on Chandler. "Where is the rest of your party?" he asked in a soft voice.

"In the pyramid," answered the scientist. To defy the brown demon would gain nothing. It would merely leave Marian more fully at their mercy. Hudson was wise in the ways of these men, and if he had closed the hidden entrance to the labyrinth the priests of Zeus would never find him.

Se-hotep-ab-Ra did not answer. He made a sign to his followers, who seized their weapons and ran toward the pyramid. Marian and Chandler were dragged along by those in the rear.

Apparently Ra's men were well enough acquainted with the huge pile, but that was explained by the fact that they had ranged it more than once in search for the body of their prophetess.

The transition from the clean, cool air of the plateau to that within the pyramid was startling. There was a dry, musty odor, as though the very atmo phere had stagnated and died since Sesostris

had built this tomb for the virgin prophetess of Zeus. The flames of the torches burned blue. The searchers breathed with difficulty.

They found the hidden entrance to the labyrinth in about five minutes, for Hudson, with apparent carelessness, had failed to close it behind him. Otherwise, short of dynamiting the entire edifice, they would never have found that entrance, so cunningly was it joined in the solid masonry.

When they descended luck was with them again. Hudson had evidently decided to blaze a way to the mystic chamber. To make sure of not losing his way on the return trip, he had tied a heavy cord to an image at the foot of the staircase, and trailed it after him. Because of this Ra and his men found their progress easy. Without it they would have been bewildered a hundred times.

The labyrinth consisted literally of thousands of passages, twisting, turning, cutting into each other—as dazzling as a thousand Coney Island mirror mazes. In many of them were pitfalls, studded with spikes, or awash with water, drained outside wells. Without the guiding string it would have been impossible for Ra's servitors to have found their way. And at every step that brought them nearer the tomb of the Theban prophetess, Chandler cursed Hudson's carelessness, and Marian prayed that *something—anything—might* happen to turn them back.

Nothing happened. At the end of one corridor a light gleamed. Treading with the greatest care, the leaders pushed forward for a first glimpse. And, as they looked, the priests of the Theban Zeus bowed low and made signs of obeisance.

The chamber was in the form of a circle, probably forty feet in diameter, with a dome that stretched quite thirty feet from the floor. The pursuers' glances were not wasted on the size of the sepulchral room or the marvelous carvings or the gems that were scattered prodigally about. They rested immediately on the sacred body of the priestess.

Before an enormous shrine of gold that was supported by emerald pillars stood a life-size image of the cow, sacred to Hathos. One side of the animal was open, disclosing within it a couch. On it lay a beautiful girl. She was clothed in a filmy robe, covered with tarnished gold scales. Her short, thick hair was bound by a band of linked scarabs, with the funerary scarab—a great bloodstone, set in gold—on her forehead. Her belt and sandals were decorated with the same precious metal, and on the third finger of her left hand was a signet ring, bearing the royal cartouche of Sesostris. At head and feet were lamps to burn incense, and votive offerings of priceless jewels.

Her face, flawless in symmetry, was not that of the dead. There was a hint of color in her olive skin; her lips were pale carmine. Here, after thirty centuries of sleep, lay the prophetess who would, once more, guard the fires of the Theban Zeus.

Like panthers Ra's men sprang into the chamber and flung themselves on Hudson and Imam, who were standing beside the couch, staring at the priestess. Then, when the white man and his servant were bound, the Egyptians flung themselves face downward on the floor in adoration and lifted their voices in a pæon of praise.

CHAPTER IX.

LURKING UNSEEN.

WHEN the fanatic enthusiasm of the priests of Zeus had been slightly tempered, Se-hotep-ab-Ra turned to his prisoners with a smile that was more terrible than any frown could be. That the shock of finding what he had sought so long had unnerved him was testified to by his shaking hands and the twitching muscles of his cheeks. Revenge was now the order of the day.

"You four," he said in English, with his Oxford accent, "have sought to deprive us of that which we have long hungered. There is no doubt that we will kill you, of course. But how? I would have you suffer in soul as well as body. To that end I have sworn a *nedr*—vow. Ah, by the sacred crocodile, I have it! The girl—lay her on the sacrificial altar—quick!"

In a trice Marian was seized and laid flat on the stone slab Ra indicated. She bit her lips to stem the cry of horror that rose in her throat. Hudson, white as a sheet, started forward.

"You fiend! What are you going to do?"

"You suffer now, eh? Good! I will tell you, Hudson effendi—you who fought me so hard in Spitalfields Garden. Her lips, man. I will cut them off——"

The callousness with which he made his bloodthirsty declaration cannot be imagined. It even penetrated the brutal hide of Captain Cullen, who, recognizing the high priest as a superior mind, had heretofore kept in the background.

"No, blimey if ye will!" he cried. "Kill 'em if ye want t', an' welcome, but none o' yer cursed heathen tricks while I'm about. 'Arkee to that."

Ra turned slowly, and struck the captain across the mouth with his open palm. Cullen shriveled under the deadly glare in his eyes. "Your interference is unasked for, sir," the Zeusite said. "If I hear another word from you I shall kill you where you stand. You saw what happened to Kadir. Was not that sufficient warning?"

Speechless, Cullen nodded. His bronzed cheeks were pale.

The high priest drew a long, thin knife from somewhere in his silken habit, and stepped toward the helpless girl. Hudson felt the blood pounding in his head. He felt that if he saw Ra achieve his purpose he would go mad with the horror of it. He writhed and tugged at his bonds.

The weapon was raised. With a choking cry, Dave gritted his teeth and sprang forward, interposing his face between the knife and Marian. Before Ra could control his muscles the blade descended. It slashed through skin and flesh, and laid Hudson's cheek open to the bone.

Streaming with blood, Dave drew himself erect. His heroic self-sacrifice could only delay Ra's purpose for a moment or two. He knew it, but he was relying on the unexpected. If that failed mutilation and death awaited them all.

"Your nerve is excellent," smiled the high priest, "but you are a bigger fool than I thought. Your absurd gallantry cannot prevent me from carrying out

what I planned to do. See." He raised the knife again, grinning like an ape.

Leaning against the table, sick and dizzy, a fog before his eyes and a thundering roar in his ears, Hudson tried to pull himself together for another effort. Time—he must have more time! Yet he knew that he had come to the end of his resources. Even a knowledge of what would happen to the girl he loved could not keep him on his feet many minutes longer.

Ra's back was to the altar, and his eyes were fixed on the American. He did not see the sight that stupefied the others, nor did Dave, half blinded by pain and blood. Every follower of Zeus in the sepulchral chamber had flung himself on the floor, beating his forehead on the stone, and crying, "*Aïe, aïe,* witness us, thy children and slaves, O goddess, witness at thy feet, and be thou merciful unto us."

The high priest swung around, and Hudson cleared his eyes with the back of his hand. At their feet groveled the brown men, for the Theban prophetess had risen like a ghost in her white robes.

There was a peculiar, blank stare in the woman's eyes. She lifted her arm and pointed at Se-hotep-ab-Ra. "What would thou do to these people, O priest?" she demanded. "Thou knowest that I loathe hatred and revenge, yet thou seekest to carry out such deeds as this before my very eyes. An oracle am I, yet thou think to deceive me."

All of Ra's bravado and self-sufficiency vanished. He sank on his knees, and lifted the hem of her robe to his lips. "Forgive me, O sky born. They were to be offered up as sacrifices to Zeus—and thee."

The woman laughed scornfully. "Are sacrifices mutilated as thou wouldst have mutilated that helpless girl? Dost think I know naught of thy search for the ibis—a search that led through cities unknown when Memphis and Thebes crumbled under the heel of time. Thou wouldst have assuaged thy bitterness with hurtful deeds, but I will have none of it. Free these people."

Hate struggled with fear in the Egyptian's face—and fear won. At his word of command the prisoner's bonds were cut. The world spun around Dave Hudson. He staggered, and but for Marian's arm would have fallen. The girl eased him gently to the floor, and with a strip from Imam's turban bound up his clotted gash. He saw her sweet face bending over him, grave with concern. The fragrance of her was in his nostrils, and he felt her soothing fingers on his brow. All the pain and bitterness of soul was worth while. He had saved her.

How long his dazed condition lasted Dave did not know. When he came to himself the chamber was clear of the Zeusites. He sat up, with a wry grin, and then got unsteadily to his feet.

The Theban prophetess had leaped from her royal couch, and was busily helping Imam fill several leather bags with the jewels that littered the room. There was nothing mystic in her manner now.

"This is beyond me," said Chandler, with a puzzled shake of his head. "Imam won't talk, and the whole thing remains an inexplicable puzzle."

Hudson smiled wanly. "There is nothing inexplainable about it. But first tell me, where are those brown devils?"

"The prophetess sent them into the adjoining chamber. She told them she wanted two hours alone with us to decide what should be done. Our time of grace depends on how strictly they obey her."

"If she commanded it we'll have the two hours all right. As for the story, there isn't much to it, though the result was rather spectacular. We saw Ra's men capture you before we came in here. Nothing we could do would have saved you. So I decided to draw them into a trap—depending on their awe of the Theban prophetess to save us."

"But I don't see," began Chandler.

By this time the bags had been filled, and the little party slipped out into the labyrinth. Imam led the way, electric torch aloft, with the prophetess gliding lithely at his heels. Behind them came Hudson, with Marian on one side of him and Chandler on the other.

"You see," explained Hudson, "our boyish gun bearer that was, and priestess of Zeus that is, is Imam's wife."

The millionaire uttered an astounded exclamation, but Marian only smiled. Nothing Hudson did could surprise her any more.

"I was not depending on finding the prophetess," Dave continued. "In fact, I did not expect to. All we did find when we entered were two heaps of dust that had once been human beings, and those clothes, which had evidently been treated with some time-defying chemical. So Imam's wife dressed in the queenly robes. Then Imam hypnotized her, and directed her exactly how to act. She is very susceptible to his influence, so that part of it was easy."

"Why did he do it?"

"Well, she is young, and might have failed when failure meant death. Under hypnotic control that was impossible. Besides, though she is beautiful, she has a fellahan's breeding, and—it would never have fooled those fellows. As it was"—he drew a long breath, and touched the bandage on his face—"it was a mighty close shave!"

They traveled more slowly than they had in entering, for their map was gone and also the guiding cord. It was nerve-wearing work this, with possible death lurking unseen in every shadow.

Of a sudden a shout echoed through the subterranean tunnels—a wild medley of Egyptian curses—that sounded faintly but clearly like the mocking of angry djinns.

"I suppose the priests of Zeus came to the conclusion that they could not trust their prophetess," said Hudson with a weak smile. "They will probably lay our escape to Er-Roohanee—high magic—though that won't prevent them from—fixing us—if they get us."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE BALANCE.

IN silence they went stumbling through the appalling blackness. Without torches, or the plan of the only safe path through the maze, their only hope lay in Imam's instinct. And the calm-eyed Egyptian seemed at fault many times.

Hudson's wound throbbed until he was afraid the fever in it would make him delirious. But he gritted his teeth and fought to keep a clear head. They *must* escape. All of life lay before them. Then there were

the jewels, which were worth many thousands of pounds to any London or Amsterdam diamond merchant. They would put him financially on his feet. With them he could aspire to the girl he loved. Without them——

Given time and freedom, they would find the labyrinth a wonderfully interesting study. Originally it had been a cavern, not unlike the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky in size at least. In this immense space Sesostris had built his stone passageways—alleys that crossed and recrossed and lost themselves against blind walls. And every polished slab of marble was carved by a real artist. The gigantic complexity of the work stunned the imagination.

To add to their difficulties Nature, in some strange convulsion, had ripped crevices in the ground and tumbled shattered stone into many of them. In most instances these gaps were narrow and shallow, but others were wide and appeared almost fathomless. These, however, the little party were fortunate enough to miss.

Necessarily they progressed at a snail's pace, for haste might—was almost certain to, in fact—be the cause of their death. The intense darkness, the permeating odor of decay, and the knowledge that they might never leave the place brought a qualm even to the strongest nerves.

Hudson felt Marian shrink against him, and he slipped an arm about her in a sudden surge of passion. "Don't be afraid, little girl. You must not doubt for an instant that we will get out all right. We must, because I love you, Marian. I could not speak before. I was poor, and you——"

Her fingers pressed lightly on his arm. "And I love you, Dave," she said simply.

Happiness comes in the strangest of places. Danger, hopelessness was forgotten. Only the glorious realization of hope was a living fact.

They did not know how long they wandered. Chandler, who had been buried in disappointment at failing to find the real prophetess, began to understand the gravity of their position. He questioned Imam, but the Egyptian admitted that he did not know whether or not they were on the right track. Without food, water, or light they would be the luckiest of mortals to escape with their lives.

The hours dragged on, and Chandler, forgetting his sense of loss, felt the menace of the darkness. It was an actual weight. He understood how men could go mad with fear when entombed in mines. But for the presence of his comrades he, too, would have lost his sense of proportion. In sudden panic he reached out to feel if they were really there. Would the darkness never end?

The passageway they followed, narrowed, then broadened suddenly, and a flare of light struck them like a blow. Light! From what? It could not be, no, it could not be——

"It's daylight," gasped Chandler almost hysterically. "Daylight!"

The others echoed his exultant shout. After hours in darkness that single blade of sunshine made a stunning reaction on their nerves. The light came through an opening at the end of the passageway, and —wonder of wonders!—a series of narrow steps led up to it and freedom. Beside the stairway loomed a statue of Osiris, the shadows twisting his features into a peculiarly sardonic grin.

The millionaire, dazzled by the light, would have sprung forward had not Hudson dragged him back. There was a pit at the foot of the staircase, a deep crevice some twenty feet wide, and evidently of natural formation.

Dave peered downward. Though the sun hurled a piercing blade of light into the pit it lost itself in the shadows long before it plumbed bottom. There were the steps in front of them—almost within reach, yet as far away as though it was a thousand miles distant.

In their terrible disappointment each one acted as his nature dictated. Hudson took out his pipe and filled it slowly. Marian slipped her trembling arm through his, and in spite of her efforts the tears *would* creep from under her lashes. Chandler ground out an oath, and paced up and down, muttering. Imam sat waiting, with a rather wistful trustfulness for Hudson to do something.

The opening was perhaps halfway up the wall of the pyramid, and, from the rising brightness of the sun, it was evidently about ten o'clock in the morning. They had been wandering in the labyrinth for fifteen or sixteen hours without rest, and they were almost exhausted.

"Well," said Dave as cheerfully as he could, "we might as well wait here until we're rested, and then use our brains to find a way across. What do you say, Chandler?"

The millionaire sighed nervously. "I guess there is nothing else to do."

So the wearied little party sank into heavy slumber, while the pink glow turned to yellow, and then became a mere reflection as the sun rose higher. It seemed the most natural thing in the world for Marian to creep into the shelter of Dave's arms, while that almost tireless young man sat propped against the rocky wall, racking his brains for a method of escape.

With the pressure of her cheeks against his shoulder, the fragrance of her hair in his nostrils, and the rapid beat of her heart against his, Hudson wondered more and more that he had been able to win her love. And he was grateful to the bones of him for Chandler's generosity in offering him half of what was found. Without those baubles he was penniless, and for him to marry the girl he loved under those conditions was nothing less than dishonorable. But he had them—and *her*, and he would find a way out!

By and by his head drooped. Exhausted Nature always has her way, and at last Hudson slept as soundly as any of them.

Sleep is an indeterminate thing, and a man, from his own sensations, cannot tell if he has been in the Land of Nod for ten minutes or a thousand years. When Dave awoke, because his subconscious mind had recorded an unusual sound, he wondered drowsily how long he had slept. Then he eased himself cautiously to his feet.

The peculiar acoustics of the narrow passageways carried sound for long distances. Hudson could hear the regular pat, pat of leather shoes and the mumbling accompaniment of voices. The priests of Zeus had followed them! They had only their bare hands to defend themselves. Dave aroused the others, and

they waited with the sort of feeling a condemned man must feel when he hears the tramp of the death watch.

The glare of an electric torch flashed on the little group. A laugh rang out, and then a coarse voice followed. "W'y, 'ere they are. It tykes a bloomin' Britisher to get what 'e wants, don't it?"

"So it's you, is it, Cullen?" asked Hudson coolly, though he could only see the shadowy figures.

"Yus, it's Cullen, and it's 'imself 'e's workin' for now, not them bloody priests. 'And over them jewels, and we'll call the deal square. What d' y' s'y?"

Hudson laughed. The little bar of light wandered over them again before it settled on the bulging leather bags hanging from the belts of Imam and the counterfeit prophetess. When he saw them Cullen made a hissing little sound between his teeth. Apparently the proximity of the jewels had turned him hot with greed. He stooped and hurled himself forward in a tigerish leap, one hand gripping the girl's throat, the other tearing at her bag.

Imam clutched him instantly, and they swayed there, the three bodies close-locked into one. The torch played on them, and their elongated shadows danced and mimicked on the carved walls. Hudson sprang forward almost as quickly as Imam, but even as he stretched out his hand toward them the little group swung backward in the desperation of their struggle and plunged down into the abyss!

Three horrified shrieks, blending into one, beat through the labyrinth with a bloodcurdling intensity that set the teeth on edge. The ultimate essence of horror wailed in the voice, and it echoed up and down the corridors like the scream of a damned thing.

Whoever Cullen's companions were, they possessed none of his courage. His sudden disappearance and the shriek that came so eerily up from the depths unnerved them. They dropped everything they carried, and Hudson heard the walloping of their feet as they rushed blindly away.

The suddenness of the tragedy was stunning. In spite of his color and strange ways, Imam had grown in their estimation from a servant to a friend. He and his quiet little wife had served them to the death, and the tears that came to their eyes was the moisture of genuine grief. But thought, not retrospection, was needed now, unless they, too, were to find the end of all things with freedom in sight.

Hudson stood erect, the light tinting his hair and bringing his features into harsh relief. His muscular, hairy arms were folded on his chest. Though there was turbulent emotion raging in his heart it was not reflected in his face.

Scarcely with the expectation of finding anything that would be of value to them, Dave prowled around to see what Cullen's followers had dropped. With the knives and tobacco pouches and charms he found what he had dared not hope for—two long pieces of light Manila rope. And yet it was the most logical thing in the world for them to have. Hudson carried it back to the edge of the crevice.

"We'll get out now," he said confidently.

Chandler looked at the chasm, yawning redly up at them like an open wound, and shook his head doubtfully. "How?"

Hudson pointed at the image. "Old Osiris has been grinning into the darkness for a good many centuries. Now we'll give him something to grin at. This rope is pliable enough to use as a sort of lariat. We can lasso that statue and fasten our end to this pile of stone. With the other rope we can make a sort of chair, with a guy rope attached. Then I'll go over and haul you two over after me. Unfortunately," he added in a rueful voice, "none of us have had any experience in 'roping,' so that will probably be the hardest thing to do."

It was. Cast after cast was made without success, but at last perseverance won, as it always does. The moose slipped over the ugly, grinning head, and was drawn tight. Hudson tested it by tugging with all his strength, and then fastened it securely.

Marian clung to him a trifle hysterically, but he soothed her, then gripped the rope and swung himself out over the gulf. True, it was only a matter of twenty feet, but to crawl hand over hand across a bottomless pit—even for twenty feet—is no easy matter. To the watchers, whose lives depended on the jerky, swaying advance, the distance seemed ten times what it really was.

It was harder on them than on Hudson. Many times he had swung about in the shrouds of sailing ships ninety feet above the deck or the pounding sea.

Suddenly a thought popped into his head. The shock of Imam's death had prevented him from thinking of it before. Down there, with the bodies of the Egyptians, were the jewels that had guaranteed his early marriage. To earn enough to give Marian a home worthy of her would take years—perhaps—yet there was no other way.

Honor is hard when Love is in the balance.

Hudson reached the other side easily enough, and the rest was easy. Marian seated herself in the improvised sling and shut her eyes tightly while Dave dragged her over. Chandler followed. Then, with a single impulse, they started up the stairs. The darkness and heavy atmosphere of decay suffusing the place had left its mark on them. They literally hungered for the clear tropic sunshine.

Hudson thrust his head through the opening and peered around. A rough series of steps led from the ground apparently to the apex of the pyramid. But scattered about on that part of the plateau directly visible from where he stood were at least threescore followers of the priests of Zeus.

Their escape was cut off.

CHAPTER XI.

AIWA.

HUDSON stood looking down at the camp. He did not want to turn around and meet the despair he knew must be in his companions' eyes. For all their bravery Chandler was a pessimist and Marian a woman—with a woman's nerves. They had overcome some seemingly impassable obstacles, but this was the last straw. If their enemies elected to stay, the Americans would be starved out. That they would stay until they were satisfied that every man in the pyramid was dead Hudson did not doubt for an instant. The Egyptian, by reason of the antiquity of his surroundings, has a sort of contempt for time. In consequence he is the most patient man in the world.

"Well," said Marian in a steady voice, "it seems as though we have come to the end of the path, doesn't it?"

Dave had mentally phrased that thought in almost the same words, but now he repudiated it violently. "We thought that half a dozen times, but we always squeezed through. We'll do it again."

Marian's head drooped. Fatigue and hunger and thirst had worn out her power of resistance. But if her brother's success and Dave's and even their very lives depended on it she felt that she could not spur her exhausted body to another effort.

She looked up at Hudson. His eyes were narrowed, his nostrils dilated, his lips curled back from his teeth. If the Zeusites came he would fight for her as the cave man had fought for his mate under the law of club and claw. The thought contented her. Secure in her belief, she cuddled down on the steps to get what rest she could.

But if Marian and her brother were lulled into a false sense of security by exhaustion, Dave was not. They were offered just two alternatives—that of fighting their way bare-handed through fifty men or of staying where they were and dying of starvation. In every other predicament an opportunity to escape by exercising ingenuity or strength had been presented. Neither was of any avail here. Dave slipped a finger absently across the blade of his knife. Marian's life depended on him. He must do something.

Of a sudden he flattened himself against the wall and took a tight grip on the weapon. A man who had been prowling apart from the others suddenly appeared halfway up the stairs. Hudson, for the first time, noticed the peculiar construction of the staircase. It transversed the face of the pyramid only a comparatively short distance, and then disappeared inside the structure. Doubtless it led to some secret opening which the Zeusites had not previously discovered.

The man advanced slowly, his purple robe making a brilliant splash of color against the black stones. It was the High Priest Ra. He was buried in melancholy, and his dark eyes and sinister face were subtly softened by it. One could imagine this as his last visit to the tomb of the Theban prophetess.

In spite of his knowledge of the man's true character, Hudson felt a momentary flash of pity for him. Brutal, tricky, immoral as he was, he had been true to an ideal, and he was suffering in spirit because he had failed to materialize it. In that abstraction Dave saw a faint glimmer of hope.

Nearer and nearer came Ra. His head was bowed, his feet dragged. Hudson laid the knife on the upper step and crouched with tense muscles. In a moment more the Egyptian's burly form reared above him, and Dave catapulted at his throat. Taken by surprise, Ra lost his balance and toppled over backward. Before Hudson could check the momentum of their fall they rolled down a dozen steps.

Ra's great body was limp when Dave dragged it to the head of the stairway and bound it securely. The priests of Zeus had seen the attack. They came swarming upward, waving their weapons and shouting, a conglomerate mass of color.

They stopped when they saw Hudson's knife, a streak of flame in the sunlight, was but an inch from Ra's bare throat.

"If you come nearer," he said with ominous quiet, "you'll have no high priest, men of Zeus."

An old man, with a white beard that crinkled to his waist, stepped out from the crowd. "We would buy his life, effendi. What would you have?"

"Our own lives. Give us camels, food, and water for three, and your promise that we shall not be harmed and I will free your chief."

The elder stroked his beard, while Hudson waited in the grip of suspense. Their lives depended on the words the old barbarian uttered. He did not know with what awe the high priest was regarded, so he could do no more than hope.

"Our leader's life is worth anything," the bearded one nodded. "We will do all you ask."

"You swear it?"

"By Zeus and Hathos, by the sacred scarab, I——"

"Stop!"

Ra, who had recovered consciousness, flung the word from the corner of his mouth. He twisted his head around, and his yellow cat's eyes bored into his aged follower. "These people must die! They have defied us and defiled our prophetess. My life matters nothing if that be avenged. Come. Take them!"

Though their faces were contorted with hate, not a man moved. Next to Zeus and the fabled priestess, whom they thought they had seen in the sepulchral chamber, they stood most in awe of the head of their order. His European education and military training had brought an added reverence to their worship of him. Not a man doubted that Hudson would kill him, and the subtlest of revenges could not put the breath of life in Ra's carcass once it was gone.

"Do you falter?" grated the Egyptian. "Come!"

A shudder like a wave swept the ranks, and Dave's fingers grew white with the grip on the hilt of his knife. Ra's fanatic courage had wrecked his plan.

So interested were the actors in their own little drama that they had eyes for nothing else. The Zeusites had worked themselves into the pitch of frenzy necessary to do what they feared when there came a rush of feet and the nasty blatt of a firearm.

The white-haired elder fell on his knees, coughing and clutching at his chest. His companions whirled to face a blast of fire from a column of soldiers, who came racing and tumbling up the steps.

Hudson caught a glimpse of eager, dark-faced men with blue puttees around their thin shanks, of smiling, khaki-clad British officers, and the joyous reaction was almost overwhelming. They were men of the Sudan, the same loyal type of men with whom he had crossed the desert in search of the deserting officer, Major Helim.

The battle was brutal, but mercifully short. Outnumbered and outclassed in equipment, the Zeusites were doomed. They fought as fanatics fight, but they had no chance. Many died under the guns of the Sudanese, some leaped from the pyramid, others fled to the labyrinth and met their end in the pit.

Dave dragged Ra to his feet, and with Marian and Chandler behind him advanced to meet the leader of the expedition. Before they reached him a man broke from the cluster of panting soldiery and flung himself at Hudson's feet. It was the fellah they left

with the camels when the plateau had been reached. Hudson mentally kicked himself. He had forgotten the man entirely.

"Oh, effendi, effendi, we came in time, did we not?" he cried jubilantly. "Imam sent me for the troopers. I was off before you climbed the plateau. I—Habbun—your servant."

Hudson touched him approvingly. "You shall be rewarded for your faithfulness, Habbun. Are you satisfied with my promise?"

"*Aiwa.*"

Now that all their dangers were past Dave's spirits drooped at thought of the lost jewels. They had meant so much to him—an early marriage, a home, and now—— But he stiffened his shoulders and advanced with smiling face and outstretched hand.

Apparently the officer failed to see his hand, for he stared past it at Ra with an almost ludicrous expression of astonishment. "Helim!" he gasped. "Major Helim! Now, how the devil——"

The ex-high priest of Zeus bowed mockingly. "It is indeed, my dear Cornwallis," he laughed, "though if it had been left to the British army I would never have been caught."

"So you captured him, eh?" exclaimed the now envious Cornwallis, turning toward Hudson. "By George! I congratulate you. It means ten thousand pounds, y' know——"

The glorious truth burst upon Dave. Ra was the deserting officer he had pursued across the Libyan Desert after the old *Mozambique* went down. Ten thousand pounds——

Captain Cornwallis screwed his monocle into his eye, and, catching sight of Marian, hastily doffed his helmet. "By gad! I beg your pardon. I didn't see you. Ah, Hudson, may I—ah—have the pleasure——"

Dave smiled. "Another of my captives."

"Eh? Your captive? I don't quite understand."

"You will if you attend our wedding in Alexandria. Won't he, dear?"

And Marian, catching the captain's eyes on her, blushed—and nodded.

THE END.

My Lovely

By Albert Owens

YOU'D waste a world to fill a wish of mine
And live on faith in me past all despair,
Then as you drank life's final glass of wine
Laugh at the broken beauty visioned there.

Like trinkets lost in some mad throw of dice
If I but asked you would give each hour
And cast yourself a flaming sacrifice
Beneath my footsteps like a shattered flower.

You would tear every cord of living flesh
With bleeding hands that I might plunder there
New harmonies to keep my vision fresh;
And spend your strength and give me strength to spare.

You'd crush your hopes into the very dust,
Or scorn the splendor of an empire's might
And be content upon a piece of crust
To buy new oil to feed this trembling light.

How many like yourself have stirred the art
That slumbered in a weakling . . . played the game
Unto the finish with despairing heart
Whose courage only fanned a dying flame!

Soldiers' and Sailors' Personal Relief Section

Conducted by a former officer of the Adjutant General's Department, U. S. Army

Already this Department which we announced in our first issue is beginning to fill a long-felt want. It has appealed to many people, and we are starting to receive numer us letters. So many problems face the returning soldier and sailor and also the man who still remains in service that we are going to give more and more time to this section. While we are not handling employment problems, we still feel that personal advice is of great value in that it helps to set a man on his feet and to clear up the fogs which collect in his mind. After all, there are many material hands extended to help the soldier, but not very many spiritual ones. The problem of arranging his future life, settling intimate and vexatious questions, planning what he will do back home, what is the best business to go into, and how soon—these and hundreds of other things need solution. We want the man in uniform both in and ut of the service to come to us. Not only do we feel that the man in uniform should take advantage of this idea, but the civilian as well. He, too, has problems which perhaps older heads and broader experiences might aid. It will be seen that some of the following questions touch broadly a few of the problems that our men are facing.

R. M., U. S. Navy.—Question: How shall I keep up my War Risk Insurance after my discharge?

Answer: When you are discharged a notice of this is sent to the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, Washington, D. C., and you will be given a pamphlet explaining in detail the exact method by which you make payments. It is not difficult, and simply amounts to the fact that you send a money order directly to the Bureau every month in civilian life.

T. L. S., U. S. Army.—Question: How long can I keep up my War Risk Insurance after leaving service?

Answer: The law provides that this is possible for five years after leaving the service at the same rate, at the end of which time or during this period the system will be changed, but the soldier will have the privilege of continuing insurance with the Government all his life. The rates and method of payment will undergo certain transformations somewhat along the lines of private insurance companies. This is being worked out now.

Ex-Soldier.—Question: Should I salute an officer after being discharged while still in uniform?

Answer: This is largely a matter of courtesy, and as long as you are in uniform military formalities should be observed. You should most certainly render the salute. After all, the salute is only the evidence of the friendliness which exists between comrades in uniform. You are not recognizing the superiority of any individual, but merely recognizing his position. A correct and snappy salute is one of the finest things imaginable. The officer must return your salute in exactly the way that regulations prescribe. It doesn't look very well for men in uniform to be passing each other in the street and not fulfilling their obligations.

Interested.—Question: I saw a man the other day wearing two gold service chevrons. He entered service the same time I did, and I know that he is only entitled to one. What should I do?

Answer: You should either report him to the military authorities or have a talk with him at once and warn him that he is sailing under false colors and liable to punishment.

A. D. M.—Question: Before entering service I was a farm hand in the Middle West. I enlisted at the outbreak of the war, and was in France for over a year. I have been discharged, and am undecided as to what course of action to pursue. I know farming well, because I was raised in this work. I can run an automobile or a truck, and have a thorough knowledge of gas engines.

Answer: You absolutely belong on a farm. Naturally you have been through exciting adventures, and the quiet life back in the country doesn't appeal to you, but when you have settled down to your work and go through a little self-discipline you will find that you will be glad that you didn't take some minor position in the city at an unreasonable salary. After all, the boys who are rushing into the better-paid jobs without any future are going to regret this, because in a sense they are mortgaging their older years. The fellow who is wise is the one who goes into the work he understands and sticks to it no matter what it costs him personally. The farm is going to be a much better thing before long. The automobile, the motion picture, and all the other inventions of the century are bringing the country close together, and the so-called lonesomeness of the farm is rapidly disappearing. By all means go back to your home State and get into the life for which you are trained and mentally equipped.

T. A. S.—Question: How much must I pay per month for $10,000 War Risk Insurance at the age of thirty?

Answer: $6.90.

"Around the World"

Decoys Lured Hun U-Boats to Doom.

How mysterious British Q-boats lured piratical German U-boats to their doom is told in a report just made public by the British admiralty. It was a war of wits, in which the British used decoy vessels to trap the Hun sea snakes.

Some incidents in this campaign already have been made known, dealing chiefly with a few of the exploits of Commander Gordon Campbell as master of the decoy vessels; but others in which he and other captains participated now are available. That at least a small fleet was used in this work is evident from the fact that Campbell at different times appears as the master of the *Farnborough*, the *Pargust*, the *Dunraven*, and the Q-5.

The *Prize*, another decoy ship, was commanded by Lieutenant William E. Sanders and the *Stock Force* by Lieutenant Harold Allen.

Stories of the encounters between these ships and the U-boats are filled with deeds of heroism and instances in which the discipline of the British navy was displayed under trying circumstances.

For many months the decoy ships, heavily armed, but with their guns hidden behind false bulwarks, steamed zigzag paths in the seas which were the hunting grounds of the submarine.

In their character of lazy colliers or slow cargo craft they presented to the submarine commander an inviting object of attack, but once he was well within range of the British guns, the false superstructure hiding the guns fell away and the helpless collier suddenly became transformed into a fighting craft, bent on destruction. It was dangerous work, requiring the highest order of courage, for the submarine must be lured near before the guns could safely begin their work. Meantime the Hun frequently had sent his torpedo home and the decoy ship was disabled, sometimes on fire and part of her crew wounded. In that condition the battle was fought, and often the submarine destroyed.

"Panic parties" was one of the ruses practiced by the decoy ship's commander to coax the submarine alongside. When the mystery ship was torpedoed these panic parties took to the boats, apparently abandoning their vessel, but always leaving on board another crew to man the guns and finish the submarine if it came near enough.

The first encounter mentioned by the admiralty took place in March, 1916, when the *Farnborough*, disguised as a collier, was attacked by a submarine. The panic party took to the boats and when the submarine closed in to about eight hundred yards the *Farnborough* opened fire on her. The U-boat submerged, and the *Farnborough* passed over her, dropping depth bombs. The submarine reappeared standing almost on end. Five rounds were fired into her at nearly point-blank range, and she went to the bottom of the sea.

Prior to that action the *Farnborough* had cruised throughout the entire winter without being attacked.

Within a month the *Farnborough* coaxed another submarine near enough to sink her by gunfire. Commander Campbell later was transferred to the command of the Q-5 and in the following February, 1917, his vessel was torpedoed by a submarine which eventually approached so near that a shot from the Q-5 beheaded the U-boat captain as he climbed out of the tower; the submarine was sunk with her conning tower open and her crew pouring out. Destroyers towed the Q-5 in and beached her. For this exploit the Victoria Cross was awarded to Campbell.

The decoy ship *Pargust*, with Campbell in command, was torpedoed June 7, 1917, while disguised as a British merchant vessel. The submarine came within fifty yards of the *Pargust*, which then opened fire on her with all guns. The submarine crew poured out of the conning tower and held up their hands in token of surrender, but the U-boat steamed away, trying to escape in the mist. The *Pargust* again opened fire on her and sank her with one man clinging to her bow as she went down. The decoy vessel was towed back to port by American destroyers. Two Victoria Crosses were awarded for this successful action.

Bonds Stop Clock.

Frank Gottwalles, an old resident of Fostoria, Ohio, tucked away somewhere in his home fifty-four thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds. He could not remember where he had put them, and searched frantically in his home to no avail. When his clock stopped he found that the bonds were hidden away inside the timepiece.

Haig and Beatty to Be Made Earls.

Earldoms will be conferred on Field Marshal Haig and Vice Admiral Beatty in recognition of their services during the war, according to the London *Mail*. It is stated that Generals Horne, Plumer, Byng, Rawlinson, Birdwood, and Allenby also will be elevated to the peerage.

The newspaper says that these honors will probably be accompanied by grants of money.

Immediate announcement of these honors is said by the *Mail* to be improbable, as Field Marshal Haig prefers to remain in command of the British armies until the treaty of peace is signed and the army is reconstructed on a peace basis, a work in which he is taking a deep interest.

It is recalled that Lord Roberts received a Parliamentary grant of one hundred thousand pounds, and that Lord Kitchener received fifty thousand pounds after the South African war. These grants were in addition to the titles conferred upon them.

It is reported that Vice Admiral Beatty will get the rank of full admiral. Since he took over the command of the British fleet from Sir John R. Jellicoe he has borne the title of acting admiral.

The Marquis of Milfordhaven, commanding the Second Cruiser Squadron and former first lord of the admiralty, has been placed on the retired list at his own request.

Kaiser's Letters Burned.

All the correspondence of the former German emperor which was kept at Potsdam has been burned, as well as a number of documents dealing with internal questions, according to a statement made to a correspondent of *The Matin* by Karl Kautsky, who is preparing a White Book dealing with the origin of the war.

Kautsky said that the book would contain all diplomatic documents bearing on the war, from the assassination of Francis Ferdinand to the invasion of Belgium. It will be in three or four volumes, and the first volume will appear very shortly.

The book will contain many papers annotated in pencil in the handwriting of the former emperor. Kautsky said that not one paper was missing from the foreign office.

Kautsky would not say who, in his opinion, appeared to be most compromised, but remarked that in the White Book there would be many letters from Count von Tschirsky, German ambassador in Vienna, and a few from Baron von Schoen, German ambassador in Paris at the outbreak of the war.

French newspaper men have been informed by Kautsky that the report that a German crown council was held on July 5, 1914, to decide finally on the question of making war was incorrect. The emperor, Kautsky said, had a conference on that day with a small number of prominent Germans, and it was decided to support Austria in her demands on Serbia.

Red Cheeks Fade in Grasp of Law.

Every one naturally thought that Police Inspector Corbally, of Newark, N. J., was joking and really didn't mean it when he said that if girls and women didn't remove their artificial bloom, with which they might intend to fascinate soldiers and sailors, that his policewomen actually would scrub their faces with dishcloths.

But he's gone and done it!

A girl of seventeen stepped blithely along the street. In her eye was the gleam of romance. Youth, you know! Well, a buxom woman with rather an irate gleam in her eye stepped before this lass. Mrs. Margaret T. Dugan, a policewoman, she was. She sniffed!

The girl tilted her pretty nose saucily. Mrs. Dugan stroked the damsel's cheek. Really, it must be admitted that the digit of Mrs. Dugan's hand, which had been quite white, returned quite crimson. A pallid mark was left upon the cheek, where the finger had drawn a lane.

"March inside and wash your face!" commanded Policewoman Dugan, and flashed her badge and a menacing finger. The girl obeyed. The change was quite startling. Her own mother would not have known her again.

Down the street another policewoman apprehended a girl of some twenty-two summers by the calendar and about seventeen springs by the paint brush. At first she balked most excitedly. She stamped and raved and cried until she found her tears were marking a zigzag streak down her vermilion cheeks. She, too, eventually agreed to wipe away the bloom from the bottle rather than submit to scrubbing at the hands of a policewoman.

"Back to nature!" commanded Mrs. Dugan to the next girl at Park Place. And the miscreant, this time a lassie of fifteen, meekly obeyed.

But during the day a dozen girls and more had yielded to the decree of Inspector Corbally, none of them through desire to conform to his standards of beauty, but all of them appreciative of the robust statures of the two policewomen he had assigned to do the work.

"He wouldn't dare himself," snapped one girl of eighteen.

When asked how the crusade was going, Inspector Corbally said: "Fine, fine! I do this on the authority of the common law and my own good common sense. These girls go from their homes with wan, pale cheeks. They return home with wan, pale cheeks. But in betwixt and between they smear themselves with paint and powder and grease. They wash it off before they take the trolley home. But during their absence they have used their artificial tints to lure the attention of some sailor or soldier lad."

Lady Traveler Takes Pig Into Parlor Car.

The following story was told by a Northwestern employee, who stated that it actually occurred on one of the Northwestern trains out of Des Moines.

"A fashionably dressed woman was asked by a brakeman what she had in her basket as she boarded the parlor car attached to the train. The "brakie" learned that was none of his business. He followed her into the coach and the passengers were all interested in the contents of the basket, which emitted familiar grunts and squeals. The brakeman again demanded to know what she had, and she showed him a real live hog, a regular sun-kissed, seventeen-dollar Iowa hog. When told she could not keep said porker in the coach she asked the brakeman to take it into the baggage car for her.

"When she reached her destination she asked the brakeman to get her hog for her. He did. He is also under the impression that the woman is much obliged for his trouble."

Teeth Replanted by Sailors' Dentist.

Sympathize with Sam Cohen, seaman of the Signal School at Great Lakes, Ill., who couldn't chew a steak if the cooks had offered him one. For Sam woke up one night on his face, with two front teeth completely gone and his hammock in its proper place, six feet above him.

Sam thought that nothing could be done about it, so he went on a light diet and carried the teeth that had been detached from active duty around in his pocket. But he reckoned without the wonders of modern dental surgery, as practiced in the navy. "Replantation" was unknown a while ago, but science has made great strides since then.

When he went to dental headquarters to have the

vacancies looked at, Lieutenant Edwin Q. Heely, Dental Corps, said that he could replace the missing teeth. Surely Luther Burbank must take a back seat for Lieutenant Heely!

The sockets in the gums were filled with gutta percha, to reopen them to admit the teeth. A week later the filling was removed and the cavities cleaned. Bands of Chinese silver attached the loose teeth to the adjacent firm ones, and the entire device put in place and supported by a lingual band, cemented to the teeth.

Some four weeks later, the bands were removed, and Sam Cohen has two more perfect teeth than he thought he had, which have taken root as if they had never left home.

So you need no longer sympathize with him because he couldn't eat a steak if the cooks offered it to him, which they didn't anyway.

Turtle Drops from Clouds.

During a heavy shower in Otter, W. Va., several men sought shelter on the porch of Joe Hyer's store, as well as inside. Those outside were remarking about the storm when—kersplash—down dropped a good-sized turtle in the middle of the road.

"Slim" Johnson rushed out and picked it up. It was alive and not a scratch on it. It could not have come from anywhere else but from the clouds. Its shell was nearly as large around as the top of a water pail.

It was the unanimous opinion of the men that the turtle was drawn into the clouds by the hot sun of the previous afternoon and dropped back to terra firma by the drenching rain storm.

Loan Dodger Gets Iron Cross.

A citizen of Conyngham, a farming district in Pennsylvania, has received through the mail an Iron Cross for "distinguished service" in the Fourth Liberty Loan drive. On the cross are these words: "Gott Helf Uns" ("God Help Us"). Where the emblem came from no one knows, but it was sent in recognition of the failure of the recipient to take any bonds.

Take Seventeen Bullheads from Log.

Charles Bishop, foreman of the Van Duzee sawmills at Black River Junction, N. Y., relates an amazing story which is vouched for by his fellow workers.

Charley, as he is generally called, had started to saw a large hemlock log, and the saw had but fairly entered the end of the log when a small stream of water struck him in the face and a sharp sliver of wood, carried by the force of the water, reached his nose and cut a gash in that member about an inch long and quite deep. His assistant washed out the wound, and after applying some liquid plaster bound a handkerchief across the injured man's face.

The saw was again started, when more water flowed from the log, and it soon became apparent that the log was more or less hollow. It was finally decided to continue sawing the slab from its side. The slab, three inches thick at the middle and fourteen feet long, was removed and the log found to be hollow nearly from end to end.

As they were about to remove the log from the runway the men heard something flopping around in the water. The "something" proved to be a fish—a bullhead weighing about a pound and a half. After dumping the water from the log a large pailful of bullheads, seventeen in number, all alive and full of fight, were taken from the log's interior.

Mr. van Duzee, the proprietor of the mill, says the log had been lying in the mill pond for several years. He is of the opinion that the fish entered the log through a knothole, and, once inside, could not find their way out.

Parrot Telephones for the Doctor.

Doctor Murray Adams, of Plum Valley, N. Y., says he can take a practical joke as well as the next man, but he insists that the joke must be clean, harmless, and smart. He is not willing to stand for idiotic jokes or for anything that might interfere with his duties to his patients, for that would be carrying a joke too far, he says.

Just now, however, the popular doctor is laughing over an incident the like of which probably never came to another physician in the entire history of the medical profession—and it's a good story, too.

Doctor Adams was called the other day to the home of Melville Hardwick, who lives eight miles east of Plum Valley. When he arrived and entered the Hardwick abode the family appeared to be somewhat surprised, the doctor states. He explained to the members that he had been called on the phone, and some one kept saying, "We are sick, doctor," and "Come quick, doctor," and when he asked central if they could inform him who was talking they had told him the message came from the Hardwicks and that they desired his services, evidently without delay.

The Hardwicks were greatly puzzled and wondered who could have sent the message. Not being able to solve the mystery, and none of the Hardwicks being sick, the doctor returned to his home, considerably vexed in mind, he admits.

Shortly after the doctor's departure Mrs. Hardwick was seated in the parlor and heard her parrot talking. She went into the hall, and there was the bird perched upon a stool, shouting, "We are sick, doctor," and repeating the words over and over. She then noticed that the receiver was down, and hanging just above polly's head.

Mrs. Hardwick lost no time in calling up Doctor Adams and explaining about polly's mischief and apologizing for it.

The parrot has now been denied use of the hall when at liberty from its cage.

Plenty of False Czars.

Nearly a score of "doubles" of Nicholas II. have made their appearance in Russia since the execution of the former czar by the Bolsheviki last summer, according to a report in the Paris *Journal*, reprinted in the German press. These individuals assert that they escaped through a miracle from the Bolshevik executioners, and most of them are said to be preaching a holy war against the Soviet government.

The report says that immense crowds of ignorant peasants are listening to these doubles, in the belief that Nicholas II. is really talking to them and that their activities are making a great deal of trouble for the Bolshevist government. The most important of

these preachers is a man who made his appearance a few months ago near Nichninovgorod, and who soon rallied about a hundred priests and monks to his standard. He travels through the country, assembles the peasants in the churches, and predicts the speedy restoration of the Romanoff dynasty. The Central Soviet is alleged to have offered a reward of one hundred thousand rubles for him, dead or alive.

There's a Tide in Affairs of a Hog.

In addition to being used for floating ships, carrying sewage, drainage, irrigation, flood control, and for drinking purposes, the Sacramento River is now used to determine the proper time for killing hogs.

Local United States Weather Observer N. R. Taylor was visited by a farmer who inquired concerning the rise and fall of the tides on the river, and enlightened the weather sage by telling him that he wanted to get in on the next cold spell, and to be sure he was on the safe side he wanted to get the correct reading.

The theory of the farmer in coupling hog killing with the river tides was thus explained by the visitor. If the swine is slaughtered on falling, or ebb tide, the bacon all runs to grease in the frying pan; but, if the porker is butchered at flood tide, the meat will be firm and retain the delicious breakfast odor coming from the streaked sides and from the aroma of the sweet ham and rich gravy.

Finds Sack of Gold in Ash Pile.

Can you imagine the sort of sensation that would shoot through your body if the thought of kicking a sack of gold from beneath an ash pile could ever become realistic? And if you did, what would you do with it—pocket it or return it to the owner?

Recently that very sensation and problem faced F. N. Weiss, driver for a feed store of Rock Island, Ill., while driving through an alley between Third and Fourth Avenues.

Coming to a pile of ashes, he noticed something that attracted his attention. But he passed by, and not until his conscience dictated to him to go back did he return to the pile and investigate. And, lo! a two-hundred-dollar sack of gold!

Weiss turned the money over to a banker, who placed a "found adlet" in a local paper. A day later, an eighty-year-old man, an old sailor, claimed the money. He said he had always carried the money with him, thinking it would be safer than in a bank, and while emptying the ashes it must have dropped from his pocket.

Cow as a Motor Boat.

J. H. Burns, a farmer near Palmer, W. Va., went after his cows one evening recently, leaving two children alone in his home, his wife being temporarily absent. He had to cross Elk River and the river was rising. He soon found his cows, the animals evidently having crossed the stream at a ford.

Returning to his boat, he discovered that it had been washed away by the rapid rise of the water. It was now growing dark, but he drove his cows into the river, believing they would swim across. They did, and Burns, not being so sure of his own ability to make the other shore, seized hold of the last cow's tail, and she carried him safely over, enabling him to get his herd back to his home and himself back to his children.

Mr. Johnson is a truthful man, and none of his neighbors doubt his remarkable story.

Big Money in River Fishing.

George Holzhammer and Roy Miller, of La Crosse, Wis., made two thousand dollars before breakfast one morning. One haul of a four-hundred-foot sein between two wing dams on the upper Mississippi River netted them more than sixteen thousand pounds of carp and buffalo. Buyers eagerly bid in the fish at from ten to fifteen cents a pound. The same men last winter landed thirty-two thousand pounds of fish in a haul near Brownsville, Minn.

Propaganda by the department of commerce to increase the consumption of fish has been a factor in raising prices. Fishermen who fail to earn more than three hundred dollars a week consider themselves out of luck, while hauls worth one thousand dollars to two thousand dollars cause no excitement.

Rough fish, iced and packed in boxes and barrels for shipment to Eastern markets, command from twenty to thirty cents a pound retail.

Tobacco-Fed Turkeys Eatable.

Strangers sojourning in Sandusky, Ohio, need not be surprised if they find their turkey flavored slightly with tobacco, but natives will make no comment should such be their experience, as they have long since learned the "why" of the matter.

The lake steamer *Pelee* recently arrived at Sandusky on her last trip of the season, bringing her annual cargo of turkeys from Point Pelee Island.

Hundreds of turkeys are raised each spring by the inhabitants of the island. When they are big enough they are turned into the tobacco fields on the island to fatten on the insects which prey on the tobacco crop, and also are known to eat some of the plant in its early stages of growth.

At times the meat of these turkeys has a slight "tobaccoish" flavor, which is never marked enough, however, to make it undesirable. In fact, there are some who find delight in the peculiar flavor of the Point Pelee turkeys.

Guards Halt All Who Would See Ex-Kaiser.

Since the recent illness of William Hohenzollern, the former German emperor, guards maintain a close watch around the castle at Amerongen. All arrivals in the village are interrogated by detectives.

When Herr Hohenzollern took advantage of a sudden burst of sunshine one day to walk in the rose garden with an aid, the apertures in the walls, which had been open, were covered with the thick straw curtains to prevent any one from looking in.

Dog's Tail Caught in Shredder.

Corn shredding on the Arthur Springmier farm at Greensburg, Ind., was held up for some time when the tail of a collie dog was caught in the machinery. The fact that a belt slipped probably saved the animal from death. The shredder was not damaged. The dog became caught in the shredder during a fight with several other dogs.

The New Reader.

The reader of to-day is far more discriminating than the reader of yesterday. Not only has he undergone a natural change through the past four years of unparalleled and savage warfare, but he has come to resent mawkishness and cheap sentiment. He cannot bear any longer the innocuous, milk-and-water fiction of a generation ago. He wants the truth. He wants it straight from the shoulder without any namby-pamby mollycoddling or lecturing. The collections of short stories, for example, which appear in American magazines do not all show that this fact is appreciated. This may explain certain things. Either the average magazine stoops to silly femininity, or it runs to an extreme and publishes impossible tales of illogical people in illogical plots. The normal person revolts at such a hurly-burly of ideas. The modern mind, especially, demands at least an exact portraiture of human character, and it does not want these characters to go through the same monotonous chain of events. We want new situations. We cannot bear the ancient lack of reality. The terrors of war have opened to us all the unseen, the previously unbelievable. We recognize at last that there are things in the darkened worlds of feeling that are worth our exploration and study. There is not one of us who is unprepared to face any conclusion, any fact, any situation, as long as we know that it is based on human motives. One might say that the last four years have proven that the human race is capable of anything. It can suffer, starve, die, without complaint and for ideals which hold out no hope of personal reward. Is this not a proof that the people of the earth are anxious to have their thinkers take up these problems and attempt to shed some light upon the sources of feeling which drove men to perish for their dreams? Even the most casual soul has awakened to the realization that life contains mysteries capable of solution, but which have lain neglected these many years because of a false attitude toward the occult, the mysterious, the unseen. One difficulty has been that so much dishonesty has paraded beneath the banners of the occult. The word itself has been stolen for evil ends. Yet

> "The dread of something after death,
> The undiscovered country from whose bourn
> No traveler returns, puzzles the will."

To the thousands and thousands who have lost beloved ones in this titanic struggle, this problem which "puzzles the will" has come as a great burden. They have rightfully sought an outlet, and an explanation. Not only is this just, it is natural. To these people the superficial, the silly, the ordinary, are things to be ignored. To appeal to them it is vitally necessary that we plunge to the very springs of truth. If we are to understand or endeavor to appreciate some of the old manifestations of life, we shall have to study the subject from every angle. The philosopher will devote himself to the exposition of spiritual motives. The artist will create his art with these questions burning in every turn of his imagination. The dramatist will weave his plays out of mysterious threads accompanied by this new mystic music which is springing up out of the night. To the fiction writer will come the greatest task because he has the widest appeal. It will be necessary for him to go straight to the question with a high heart. His stories will naturally become involved in this movement of mankind. And rightly so. It is what we need. We want our writers to help us solve our problems, to make life a simpler matter. In the forthcoming issues of THE THRILL BOOK you will find that unconsciously many of our writers have already assayed to grapple with these subjects. We admire the courage with which they have torn aside the veils of reason and opened up amazingly interesting channels of thought. There is no doubt but what the stories are going to raise questions which our readers will seek to solve. In the weird, the bizarre, the fantastic type of story we go straight to the fundamentals whether we will or no. The story may remain gripping and interesting as a pure example of what a crashingly alive piece of fiction ought to be, but this new trend in human thought shakes our imagination down to the roots. There is no magazine to-day which so whole-heartedly assumes this duty of supplying the demands of the people. You cannot possibly be intelligent unless you are willing to take up these after-the-war spiritual questions in a sensible fashion. What could be more pleasing than to find a new faith, a new hope, in the stories which are appearing in THE THRILL BOOK? After all, we want to be assured, all of us, but you will find that THE THRILL BOOK as a sort of unofficial semimonthly representative of a great fiction club will become a necessity to you in a few weeks. It will publish the type of material which the conventional magazine of to-day has dreaded. It will stand back of an unknown Poe, a De Maupassant, a Bierce, a Norris, or an O. Henry with all its strength because we believe that such a writer deserves unqualified support not only because he has been so long neglected, but due to the fact that he is thoroughly abreast of the times. We want THE THRILL BOOK to be a silent partner in the firm of each individual's heart and soul. We are particularly at this moment an after-the-war magazine. We are coming to you ready to assist you to the limit. This can be done not only by supplying you the unusual type of fiction by those who know how to write, but it can be done by seeing your outlook on life and working with you to give you what you desire. We have established an institution. You are our reader, and the proof of the pudding will be in the ability of our "honorary editors" to return a helping hand in the form of letters of criticism and advice. We are your representative in fiction. What you most desire we will get if we must go to the ends of the world. Look upon us as your official fiction magazine—the Worldwide Readers Fiction Club, with THE THRILL BOOK as the semimonthly example of what you demand—what you have always wanted. We are putting a small price on your magazine so every one can enjoy it. Therefore, your dues will be ten cents every two weeks, payable to any news dealer, or two dollars a year, payable directly to us for an annual subscription.

THE EDITOR.