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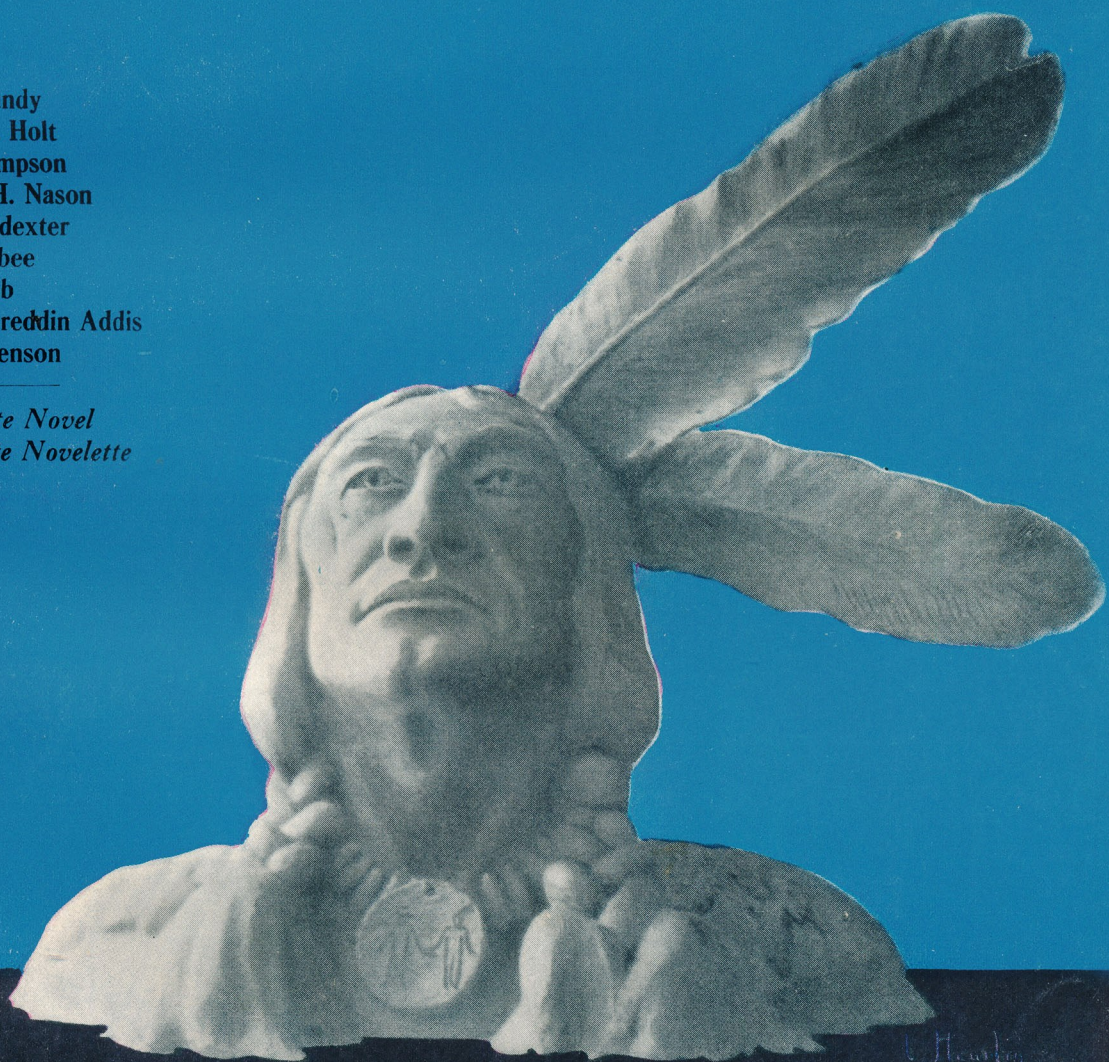

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Contents for October 10th, 1923, Issue

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "off the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

Three Novelettes, Complete

THE Turkish hordes were menacing the Christian borders, and to hold back the threatened attack two Cossacks were dispatched to find a much needed supply of powder. On the banks of the Dnieper they found instead a crucified thief and a woman whose appeal for help could not be evaded. "MEN FROM BELOW," a complete novelette by Harold Lamb, in the next issue.

IN THE dawn of the world *Tavale* gave his people a great ax of polished jade. To obtain this ax rival curio-collectors match their wits against each other and its savage owners. "THE JADE AX," a complete novelette of the South Seas, by J. D. Newsom, in the next issue.

"THE travel directed is necessary in the military service." Flying Tankwings to Texas was simple enough for *Lieutenants John Evans* and *Don Goodhue*, but they could not figure what good a ground flyer like *Aloysius T. Hembrook* was going to be to the party until things began to happen at the New York end of the journey that hinted of intrigue on the ground and great danger in the air. "HAUNTED SKYWAYS," by Thomson Burtis, is a complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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The MARRIAGE of MELDRUM STRANGE

A COMPLETE NOVEL

By Talbot Mundy

Author of "Diana Against Ephesians," "The Gray Mahatma," etc.

"Well met"

THIS is an immoral story. It proves without intending to that the best of us are weak, and the worst have elements of decency that overwhelm them when the gods get ready; none of which, of course, is orthodox. But orthodoxy is missing from the calculations of those Powers that rule us—"whatever gods there be" as Swinburne calls them.

Cottswold Ommony is incorruptible according to report. Report is wrong. They say—the press particularly says it and implies nearly every morning—that Meldrum Strange is a billionaire with brains but no heart; that his heart, if he has one, is made of iron-filings; that his belly is of brass, and his feet of clay; that his friendship is imaginary, but his enmity a bitter and appalling truth; that he lacks remorse, but has insane ambition; and that his superficial outward resemblance to General Ulysses Grant was devised by Satan expressly to bring the memory of that gallant soldier into disrepute.

Unexplainable in the circumstances, Meldrum Strange has friends, and Cottswold Ommony has enemies. We, who view all life accurately, classing this man as a hero, that man as a villain, may wonder; but the fact is so. Ommony stands for nearly all the things that Meldrum Strange objects to, including the heresy that more than enough is too much; Strange never had enough, and loves the power of money, which Ommony despises, although like the rest of us he has to bow to it quite often. Ommony approves of individual

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liberty, whereas Strange believes that all men should be beaten into ploughshares for uplifting use by their betters. They met, and there was no explosion, which is the most remarkable circumstance; but much else happened.

CHARLEY MEARS began it. Charley stepped lively from a first-class compartment (It was labeled, Branch of the Bombay and Southern India Railway. First Class) on the single track that winds among hills and trees until it makes a short cut through the forest where Ommony lives at intervals and is almost king.

Charley smiled at the naked legs of a porter nearly twice as large as himself, and sent up word on the back of a calling-card that he had come, and would Mr. Ommony care to see him. So Ommony, who cares about everything interesting under the sun, sent the *tonga*. Less than an hour later Charley jumped off the back seat of that prehistoric vehicle, pitched his valise on to the lower step of the veranda—having not got used yet to being waited on—and was aware of Ommony taking his time about rising from a chair under the stags' antlers on the veranda. Three dogs came down and made instant friends with Charley, while a fourth stood guard.

"Well met," said Ommony. "Come up."

So Charley climbed the seven steps, shook hands, and sat in a canvas chair, while an enormous staghound sniffed him over carefully and Ommony filled a pipe.

"You like it here?" asked Charley.

"I've liked it for twenty years," said Ommony, observing that Charley stroked the staghound's ears without waiting for introductions—a thing very few strangers dare attempt. "Have you had breakfast?"

"Forgotten what it 'ud feel like! Ate dead goat yesterday afternoon at a junction restaurant."

Ommony sent for the butler, gave orders and turned to his guest again.

"You've come to stay, of course?"

"If that's agreeable. You got my letter?"

"Yes, but you didn't say much. Tell me who you are."

"Nobody important. Strange hired me to travel with him, but I haven't seen him in two weeks. He sends me ahead. Time he gets to a place I'm miles away."

"I begin to understand," said Ommony without changing his expression. "You're here in advance of Meldrum Strange to——"

"Dope you out? Lord, no! I did that coming up the steps. *You're* o.k."

"Thanks," said Ommony, without a trace of sarcasm, and sat still, smoking, looking at his guest.

They resembled each other as much as a terrier does a grizzly. Ommony's short beard disguises the kindest mouth and the firmest chin in Asia. His shoulders have stood up under responsibility for so long that the stamp of that is on them permanently. He is staunchly built, muscled up, and is exactly in the prime of life—an age that varies with individuals.

Charley Mears, on the other hand, with no more than five feet seven to boast of, and not much more than a hundred pounds of it, shows twenty-three years and weazel alertness on a clean-shaven face. You can't tell what his hand holds, but you know he has played worse ones, and at the first glance you would trust him with your shirt. He looks like a man who has been hit hard, but who invariably won in the last round, if not sooner; nervous, keen, amused, aware of the world's rough edges, and as hard to beat as a royal flush. His steely gray eyes looked straight into Ommony's dark ones, and each in their own way betrayed absorbing interest.

"Strange heard of you from the gang," said Charley. "Say this for him: he has the best string ever. Picks 'em. Knows the trick. James Schuyler Grim's a pippin. Jeff Ramsden, half a ton of he-man, right end up; bet your back teeth on him. Athelstan King—Englishman, but not half-bad—used to be major in the army, but wears no monocle. Says, 'Haw, dontcher-know', like the rest of 'em, but I'll say he's a scrapper if scars mean anything. Olive skin, burnt on from outside. Been to places."

Ommony smiled.

"You know him?" Charley asked.

"Years. He's my friend."

"You're lucky. Strange hired him over the cable and sent Jeff sliding like an elephant on ice to deed him up. Strange keeps you busy—pays good, and has his money's worth. Jeff's sweated off about two hundred, but there's lots left. Grim and King got past the sweating stage before Strange

hired 'em, so they don't show it much, but they kind o' know they've made the team."

"What is Meldrum Strange doing?" asked Ommony.

"Bits of everything. Reorganizing the universe mostly. They say his roll grows faster than he can peel it off; and he's sore with his brother man—thinks we're crashing down to the kyoodles——"

"Which?"

"Dogs. Wants to stop it, and has it all figured out, I guess. He started a kind of detective bureau in New York with branches everywhere, and they tell me it went good until he started sleuthing in the U. S. We have legislators over there, the same as everywhere; but there's more of 'em, and more pork. Strange has his; so he looks back at the barrel and gets disgusted—goes bald-headed after corruption in politics, and sics the gang on.

"Inside three weeks he's foul of the Senate, House o' Representatives, Treasury, and every state legislature in the Union. Foul of all the labor unions, most o' the newspapers, half the courts, and all the banks. They crucified him good between 'em, some just for the fun of it, a few because they were scared, and the rest because they didn't see why Meldrum Strange's millions gave him any right to call names."

"I take it you joined him after this?"

"You bet. I wanted to see the world, but all I'd got was the ambition and an imported camera. I've been studying that for seven years, and I've learned a little—not much, you understand, but more than some of 'em. A picture concern I was working for went fluey, so I thought I'd pick a fat one next time. Strange looked good to me."

"But what would he do with a camera-man?" asked Ommony.

"That's it! He hates 'em. When a man gets money he's always crazy on some point or other. Strange 'ud rather get shaved than have his picture taken, and he's worn foliage since he was old enough to smoke cigars. A man in his office told me Strange was all fed up and going to travel. I began to figure on it."

"It sounds like a difficult sum," said Ommony.

"No. Just like any other sum. You've got to know the formula; then it all works out. None of the papers had Strange's picture. They were crazy to get it, but he was careful. There's an alley behind the office, and he can step out of the back door into a limousine, and straight home. He doesn't golf. He likes yachting, but the crew's hand-picked, and he stays below as long as there's a chance to snap him. Simply nothing doing; but I'm set on making the long trip, and down to borrowing by that time—mighty near taking a job, and praying like a priest to Lady Luck. She shows up at the very last minute."

"Always!" said Ommony, nodding.

"Female, naturally. The papers never did have Strange in a mix-up with a woman. There was a rumor one time,* but Strange has teeth and they were afraid he'd soak them for libel. Couldn't prove a thing; had to be satisfied antagonizing the woman vote by calling him a misogynist—which they did, till further orders.

"I was down to house-to-house canvassing. But I'd a pull with two or three hotel detectives, so I specialized on new arrivals, calling on 'em—camera with me. Funny lights are my long suit. Named a big figure, and agreed to shade it for the privilege of—all that hokum. That's how I met Zelmira."

"Sounds Italian," said Ommony. "Come in to breakfast."

"Greek," said Charley, sitting down in the room where all four walls are draped with tiger-skins and the only other ornament is a case of rifles in a corner. "Believe me, Zelmira Poulakis is the goods," he went on between mouthfulls. "She's a peach—over thirty, for you can't fool me, but good to look at—and class if I know it. Must have money, too, if her jewelry and clothes are paid for. I got mine in advance, top-figure, and she didn't try to beat me down a nickel. I exposed a dozen plates, and we got talking."

CHARLEY poured a whole cupfull of scalding coffee down his throat and signed to the *hamal* for more. Then he looked at Ommony, with that peculiar camera-man's eye that sees effects between the shadow and the edge of sunlight.

"She's like you," he said suddenly. "You don't mind what you tell her. I've heard since she had a past in Egypt or somewhere. Her husband was a crook, but that cuts no ice now she's a widow.

*See "A Secret Society," Aug. 10, 1922 issue.

I fell for her hard, and got telling how I aimed to see the world with Meldrum Strange. She laughed and said she'd rather do that, too, than anything!

"If she'd been real crooked she'd have started in to play me right then, but she didn't. I was the Weisenheimer. I told her how set I was on getting Meldrum's picture, and she laughed. She said that ought to be easy enough. I was wondering just how to play the hand when she suddenly got cold feet and said right out that if I tried to blackmail Meldrum she'd never forgive herself for having as much as encouraged me."

"I was wondering about that, too," said Ommony. "Is Strange that kind of man?"

"You needn't let it *worry* you!" said Charley, putting down his cup.

"All right," said Ommony. "I apologize. It was your own fault, though. You might have made it clearer that——"

"Well, I made it clear to her; but I had the dickens of a time. She's sweet on Meldrum or his money—both maybe; and he might do worse, or buy worse, anyway you look at it. She swore she had no hold on him, but knew him well enough to phone and invite him to call. So after she'd put me through a questionnaire that 'ud make Edison look like Easy Street she agreed to tip me off. I went and lay low near the telephone for two days."

"I should have thought you'd have made the round of newspaper offices," ventured Ommony.

"No need. I knew what *they'd* pay, supposing I was fool enough to spill a good thing. I waited until she phoned me, and you bet I was at the private entrance of that hotel an hour ahead of time. He got there half an hour ahead of time, and made for the door with a flunkey on each side, but I shot him twice and none of 'em saw me. Then I waited another hour and Lady Luck came across. Out comes Strange with Madame Zelmira Poulakis on his arm, both of 'em smiling, and I took one good shot before the flunkeys got wise. They didn't say a word, but came for me to smash the camera; so I stepped into the hotel, where the detective was a friend of mine, and there wasn't a thing they could do about it inside there. I guess they said nothing to Meldrum, for fear of their jobs—or if they did, maybe they said they'd smashed the camera.

"Anyway, I didn't waste any time then. I developed and printed the pictures that night, and believe me, they were good. Next morning I put copies in an envelope with my calling card, and sent 'em up to Meldrum Strange's private office, saying I'd wait for an answer. It wasn't five minutes before he sent for me.

" 'How much d'you want?' he demanded.

"He was scornful, and he had his checkbook on the table. Got to hand it to him; he can eat crow good. I could have taxed him. He was three ways when I pulled out the negatives and broke them—pleased, surprized, and curious to see what card I'd play next.

"So I made no bones about it. I said right out I aimed to travel with him, and all I'd planned for was an interview. So he said:

" 'Well, you've had your interview, and you've smashed your negatives. What if I turn you down now?' And I said:

" 'Go to it. Then I'll know you're not the kind of man I want to travel with.'

"We hit it off good after that. He hired me at the end of fifteen minutes. I went and told Zelmira, and she let me buy the dinner just to celebrate.

"No glad rags, and no money. Had to do something about it. Sooner than bleat to anybody else I told her, and she was tickled—lent me the price and some over.

I paid her out of the first check. Strange had me sworn not to say a word about his movements to any one, so I didn't drop a hint, although I saw Zelmira pretty often. But she understood; she isn't like a Greek at all—downy, I dare bet, and up to her eyes in ambition, but on the level. She found out when he was going, and where; maybe she asked him; I don't know."

"But what did Strange come to India for?" asked Ommony.

"Open an office, I guess—Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Simla—he aims to be a sort of clearing-house for information so's to trip crooks before they get started—card indexes to beat the encyclopædia—everything in 'em from a man's past to what he might do if the game looked good. Poker out of books, I'd call it, but that's his affair. The funny part is this: he'd come away to give the papers and the public time to calm down and forget him, Zelmira Poulakis included. I know about her, because on

the steamer coming out he asked me point-blank whether I'd let on to her about his movements. Well: we hadn't been in Bombay three days before she puts up at the same hotel!"

"Tagged him, eh?"

"No. We came by way of San Francisco and Hongkong. She took the English boat by way of New York and Port Said. But Strange wasn't having any. He swore a blue streak and took the train that night—Delhi like a darned fool; she could go to Delhi. Who's to stop her? She showed up at our hotel in Delhi—never made a move to interfere with Strange, but treated Grim and Jeff Ramsden like old friends. Strange caught me talking to her, so he shipped me off all over the place making dates for him, and I was in a place called Ahmednugger when I got a telegram a yard long telling me to see you and fix up tiger-shooting for him. He wants to hide and have a good time until Zelmira picks on some one else."

"He heard of me, of course, from Athelstan King?"

"Oh, yes, and I'm to say King sends his compliments, and do you mind?"

"Strange will have to rough it here," said Ommony. "I'm no millionaire."

Charley looked about him.

"Seems you've got tigers," he said. "I reckon Strange is killing mad!"

"How old is he?"

" 'Bout fifty — fifty-five — somewhere there. Too much stomach, but totes it himself. Doesn't need a nurse yet. Say—you'll like him, for a while at any rate. He's real good company; there's nothing wrong with him except his point of view," said Charley, almost pleadingly. "King said——"

"I'd have him here for your sake," Ommony interrupted, laughing. "You stay, of course?"

"That's up to him. No orders about that yet. I've got my camera. Say: the gang told me you know animals from A to Izzard."

"And——?"

"I've got special English plates, the best lens out of Jena, and scads o' more plates in Bombay. All that's needed is a dark room——"

"I can fix that up."

"—and the animals."

"Make yourself at home," said Ommony. "When will Strange be here? Better wire him, hadn't I?"

Charley's eyes, sky-bright with a glint of steel in them, met Ommony's again and dwelt there half a second.

"If it's all the same to you I'd sooner wire and you write," he answered. "That'll give us four days extra before he comes."

Ommony laughed again.

"All right. I've only one bathroom, so you mayn't have that; but there's running water, cool enough too, in a shed outside, and I'll lend you two men to cover the shed with tar-paper; there's lots of it in the shed."

"They *told* me you were white!" said Charley, grinning.

CHAPTER II

"I'm thinking."

ART is individual, and knows no limits. Fools are they who sneer at new tools, and processes of giving form to idea. Ommony, an artist in his own way, paid suitable homage to Charley's camera, because the thing of brass and glass and wood was the tool of a true enthusiast.

That forest and its outskirts are a thousand square miles. There are temples in it, not wholly ruinous but older than written history, and in places trees have forced themselves up from between the stones of forgotten cities. Men live there, known now as junglis, naked and afraid, whose ancestors were kings in lost Lemuria if the very ancient books are true. And the animals live where human pride one time adored itself.

Above all, there are spots of sunlight filtered through gaps in the foliage; fire-lanes —Ommony's first charge—along which light flows like a river; clearings where creatures, whose every habit is an open book to Ommony, lie basking, playing with their young; and a look-out rock from which, if the bears aren't there before you, you may view the leagues of jungle spread like a sun-lit sea.

Charley was in his element, and Ommony no less.

"My ——, you know," said Charley, "you can do this stuff early and late, when the raw's left out and the real thing's looking at you! They say you can't, but you can! I know you can!"

"Let's try," said Ommony.

So they slept at noon, and stalked the mysteries of twilight, when two-thirds of the

earth is waking and a third shades into the unknown.

"Any fool can shoot a tiger on the hop!" swore Charley. "Can you shoot him so he'll show on the negative how light ripples off his pelt? I'll bet you!"

"All bets off," said Ommony. "I think you can."

But they needed the *junglis* to show exactly where the tiger lay, and Ommony's low whistle to make the beast look up in such way that his proper aspect faced the lens, while Diana the staghound lay growling in rumbled undertones. And once it was Ommony's rifle that changed death's course, when a leopard rushed the click of the ambushed camera and Charley hugged his one tool, turning his back to protect it better.

"So that's all right," said Ommony, measuring the two strides and a half that death had lacked.

"Hope so, at any rate," Charley answered. "I think I got him before he moved. Half a second, while I slip in another plate. Did you notice the brown of that shadow, and how his 'hind-end seemed afloat in it? If that shows on the negative it's worth the trip to India."

"How much will you get for it?"

"No more than for a punk one. You can't make money at this game."

"Nor at mine. But it's good, isn't it?"

"You betcha!"

THEY seemed to have been friends a year when Jeff turned up, walking from the station because he loved the feel of brown earth underfoot—Jeff with a beard like Ommony's, and a boy's grin, but bigger and heavier than Ommony and Charley both together. The veranda chair creaked under him, but not even the terrier was afraid, and Diana's long tail thumped approval on the floor. Jeff's grin set all the servants grinning. They passed and repassed on imaginary errands, to admire his hugeness and the depth of his bass voice, that is India's measure of a man's heart.

"Strange wanted me along," he said, "so I came to discover if that's convenient. A telegram wouldn't have told you what you want to know——"

"You mean what *you* want to know, don't you?" said Ommony, chuckling.

Jeff laughed aloud.

"You're right. Charley wrote such a glowing account of you that Strange is suspicious. You know, a multi-millionaire is a poor —— who thinks every one is trying to work him for something. Thirty per cent of what he thinks is true. Strange can't escape even in India. There's a lady on his heels. He wants to abuse your hospitality until Venus sets, and he'd like to be sure in advance that you won't work him for anything."

"What will you tell him?" asked Ommony.

"Shall I send for my tent from the station, or have you a spare bed?" Jeff answered.

So Jeff's big tent was pitched, and two of the dogs adopted it forthwith, while Jeff's one servant cleaned his boots alongside in the sun and bragged to Ommony's assembled household about Jeff's prowess.

"As a horse, he is, yet stronger! Lo, with his fist, thus, he slew a man! They say the skull was broken like an egg-shell, but that I saw not. I have seen him lift a boat with two men in it. When the wrestlers from Tirhoot came to Delhi he threw them all, one by one, and he not weary at the end. They say that once, when men of evil purpose locked him behind doors, he broke down a door with nothing but his hands, and smote them with the pieces of it. Yet he laughs, and his heart is as a woman's, but not as a too inquisitive woman's. The *dastari** is good."

So they were now three who trod the jungle-lanes, and laughed until rocks that had known the laughter of four forgotten races re-echoed to the high, the middle and the bass—until the *junglis* brought word of a bear, hurt fighting, whom the flies were driving mad, and Jeff strode off to end that misery. (For Ommony is a prince of hosts, reserving to himself no more than right to judge emergency.)

The bear-skin lay pegged out, raw-side upward, in the sun the morning Strange came, and Charley told him how Jeff had to use four bullets and the butt. Jeff's leg was bandaged; it was nothing serious, but he did not walk to the station.

"I hope you didn't shoot all the game before I got here," Strange growled when he met Jeff on the veranda. "Hurt again? You're always in trouble!"

He was suffering from bachelor's spleen, and as fearful for his tracks as a hunted animal.

*"Pickings."

"I think I've given a miss in balk," he said, sitting down at the breakfast-table next to Ommony. "It's in the papers that I'm on my way home. Met your sister—splendid woman! It was she who first suggested my visiting you. What's Charley doing? Shooting game too?"

"Visiting me," said Ommony, meeting no man's eye.

"I meant that you and I and Ramsden——" Strange began.

"I've invited Charley too," said Ommony.

"He has his living to get."

"Charley has lived more and better in these last few days than in all his previous life," said Ommony. "You're entirely welcome here, Strange; but so's he."

"Hurrumm!" Strange nearly exploded, then governed himself. "Where did you get these eggs? They're the best I've had in India."

So Ommony talked poultry for a while, and of the business of keeping leopards from the hen-house, which calls for ingenuity.

"Why don't you shoot 'em all?" Strange asked him.

"I shoot nothing in the jungle as long as it behaves."

"D'you call stealing chickens behavior?"

"It's natural to leopards."

"Then you mean we're to shoot nothing but beasts that have broken through the hen-wire?" Strange asked disgustedly.

"You'll find criminals in the jungle in the same proportion as among humans," Ommony answered.

"How do you tell 'em?"

Strange had decided Ommony was crazy, and made a perfectly obvious effort to humor him. You could almost hear the mental mechanism click as he decided to cut his visit short.

"They're just like other criminals. *They* tell *you*," answered Ommony.

Strange sat there looking like Ulysses Grant without the modesty. His was the only face at table that was legible. He resembled the bear that Jeff killed, hurt and driven nearly crazy by the flies of public criticism, and the servants were afraid of him, hardly daring to hand him things to eat. Jeff and Charley, having experienced his moods, were careful to say nothing, so the brunt of it fell on their host, who was at a loss for the present how to manage the situation. Silence fell, as if the fun of recent days had dried up and blown away along a bitter wind.

"I came to kill a tiger," Strange said suddenly.

"I believe you did. I think you shall," said Ommony.

"Now I wonder what the —— you mean by that remark?" Strange asked him.

One thing was obvious. Strange had looked up Ommony in the *Gazette* and so believed him to be quite a minor personage. He spoke rather as a man might to his game-keeper—a man who deserved neither game nor keeper, but had both. It was in his mind that no man drawing such small salary in the middle-age was of much account, or had much right to dispense the forest privileges. Feudalism, an ancient gas that ever crept along with money, and deluded men, caused him to regard his host as some one who had scant option in the matter. He didn't enjoy being kotowed to, but expected it, and his new great business organization had made him more tyrannous than ever.

Breakfast, that should have struck the key-note for holiday and comradeship, came to an end on B-flat, and Jeff Ramsden tried to corner Strange alone; for Jeff fears nothing except his own slow-wittedness, which he strangely over-estimates.

"Look here," he began; but Ommony interrupted him, sent him and Charley on imaginary business of looking for a leopard's spoor across the vegetable garden, and took Strange off alone to introduce him to the wilderness.

THEY took rifles and walked to the look-out rock—two miles down a fire-lane rutted by the wheels of loaded carts.

Strange's mood backed and veered without improving. He may have been wondering why he, a man with an income in the millions, should have to hide himself in a forest. From hat to shoe-soles, rifles and all, the same two hundred dollar bill would have purchased the entire kit, down to the skin, of either himself or Ommony. It annoyed him that Ommony strode beside him like the owner of the place.

"I've a notion," he said presently, "to buy a tract of desert in Nevada or somewhere, and plant such a forest as this."

"Money won't do it," said Ommony.

"Oh, you can always hire brains."

"But not knowledge. Once a man knows, he's his own man."

"Well, they hired you, didn't they?"

"Who did?"

"The Indian Government."

"Not at all. I offered them my services —years ago—for just so long as I believe I can be useful."

"They pay you."

"No. The forest pays me. When I cease to row my own weight and over, I'll resign.

Strange was piqued, but interested.

"Well! Suppose I offer you double what you're getting here, to come and superintend my forest?"

"You can't. You haven't got it to offer."

Strange began to feel like a patient in one of those rest-cure resorts, where rest consists in humoring the whims of other inmates.

"What do you mean?" he blustered.

"If you'll stay a month, I'll show you."

A month! Strange wondered whether he could endure it a week. It was not the wilderness that got on his nerves; for all his life he had been a solitary man, brooding alone over plans and power. He was used to the "Come, and he cometh; go, and he goeth" of Rome's centurion, with reason neither asked nor given. Difference of opinion was a trumpet-call to battle, in which the strongest will won. There were men, such as Grim and Ramsden, whom he hired to tell the truth to him and to apply their brains. To them he listened, but always of his own free will, with a feeling he was getting something for his money. This man, who did not even own the forest, yet was so visibly unimpressed by the power of invested millions, irritated him.

"This timber's growing to waste here," he said abruptly.

"The next generation will need it," said Ommony.

"The next generation will govern themselves, let's hope."

"Yes, we all hope that."

It was on the tip of Strange's tongue to say something discourteous about the British having not so long to rule in India.

But it filtered vaguely though his mind that Ommony wouldn't care, and he knew better, from experience, than to waste sharp comment on indifference.

"Then why grow trees for them?" he asked.

"Why not?" said Ommony.

Strange could not answer him, or saw the uselessness of answering. He was cheek by jowl with a fanatic, it seemed to him, and he made a praise-worthy effort to change the flow of thought.

"Well, let's shoot a tiger," he said abruptly. "You promised me one at breakfast. Are they as dangerous as they're said to be, or is that another of these——"

"The one I'll let you shoot is," Ommony answered; and Strange looked at him sharply again, aware of a hidden meaning, or a double meaning—something he detested. Yet he couldn't lay his finger on it.

"How so?" he demanded.

"Tigers are like people. Decent tigers are like decent people, only on a lower plane. They only kill for food, and let alone what they can't use. A few of them are greedy, and kill too much. Some are lazy, and kill cattle, which is stealing. Sometimes you can drive those and make them go to work. They've a right to be tigers, just as we've a right to be men; left to themselves, but watched, they work out a destiny that possibly we can't understand. Now and then I think I understand it. They turn criminal at times, though. Man-killers. Nobody's fault but theirs then. Short shrift."

"You're after a man-killer?"

"Yes."

"This morning?"

"Get him within the month," said Ommony.

Strange was more than ever puzzled.

"I should think you'd put your whole force on a man-killer. Go after him, and get him before he can do any more harm. Why not?"

"If you have him where he can't do harm, why hurry?" answered Ommony.

"Oh, you have him rounded up where he can't escape?"

"He might escape, but I hope not. No. I didn't round him up. He wandered out of his territory into an environment that he thinks he understands, but doesn't. We'll have fun with him."

"I should call that dangerous."

"Perhaps. For him. He won't kill men while we have him under observation. This is the look-out rock."

Ommony sent the staghound first up the well worn track that circled to the summit, to make sure there were no bears or leopards

to misinterpret the intrusion. He went next, springing up quickly, leaving Strange to scramble slowly after him. He had talked all the tiger he chose to just then.

For about five minutes, panting on the summit, Strange took in the view of a forest like a raging sea arrested in mid-turmoil. Waves and waves of green, and purple where the shadows were, so shook, and seemed to plunge, in the breath of a light wind that a man could think dead tree-tops were the rigging of sunken ships. There were rocks like islands. On the far horizon was a bank of clouds for shore. Kites wheeled like darkened sea-gulls; and the murmur of the wind among the trees was like the voice of "many-sounding ocean."

Size—all enormousness—was something that appealed to Meldrum Strange. He could think in millions as he stood there, and it pleased him. Sight of all those myriads of living things, governed, as he sensed it, by one man, there for one purpose, under his hand, available, awaiting one word by a man with brains, to be swept into the jaws of Titan-industry and pulped, sawed, planed, bent into profitable use by folk who couldn't grow a tree or even buy a whole one—thrilled him.

"How many of these were here when you came?" he demanded.

"Very few. Just scattered copses."

"Grew them all, eh?"

"No, they grew themselves. Nature attends to all that, if you coax her."

"This 'ud be a good place to start an industry. This interests me. I must interview the Government about it. Cheap labor. A railway. Only a hundred miles or so from the coast. We could ship this stuff. No small proprietors to bother with. It looks like opportunity. What's the Government thinking of, I wonder?"

"The next generation," said Ommony.

"Good Lord, man! The British won't be here. There'll be an Indian government by that time, grafting and playing politics. They'll waste, destroy, ruin——"

"That's their lookout. It won't be cut in my day."

"I'm not so sure."

Strange was himself again. He stood with arms folded on his breast and the old light burning in his eyes—devouring light, that could not see use in unexploited profit. His brain was already figuring in terms of import duties, labor, and exchange—sea-freight—subsidies—and a market where the men who put in number nineteen bolts all day long must have what they can pay for ready-made.

He looked again at Ommony—made a new appraisal. Mad, of course. A fanatic. Yet a man of one idea is like a horse in harness. You can use him. He can be a strong cog in the intricate machine. The punishing grind, that kills or makes a rebel of the fellow who can see both sides of anything, only spurs a fanatic to further effort. He might use Ommony. No doubt flattery——

"A man needs genius at this business, as at everything else, if he's to succeed. You're wasted here now. You've done it. You should go ahead. A man on half your salary could carry on, while you devote yourself to ——"

"That's my ambition," Ommony interrupted. He was tired already of the subject Strange had broached. "I'd like to spend my whole time studying trees. But my plan would cost too much."

"There's no such thing as too much, if it's a sound plan," Strange assured him.

"The Government's hard up. Can't afford experiments. They'd listen to me if they had the money, but India's poor."

"Good Lord! Turn this into money then!"

"Trees have never been studied properly. As you see, they grow themselves, given a chance and the right location. My theory is that all the waste land in the world might be turned into forests at very small expense, if we only took the right precautions first and studied the thing from the beginning. It's the first part—travel, observation, comparative analysis, experiment on a sufficient scale— that would prove too costly."

Strange made a motion with his tongue, almost suggestive of changing a quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other.

"You say the Government would listen to you. Value your advice, eh? Well, advise them to give me a concession to exploit this forest. If it comes off, look to me for help in the other matter. Think what it would mean."

"I'm thinking."

Diana the staghound was growling in a sort of subterranean undertone, not more than loud enough for Ommony to hear. He glanced to his right, where an enormous

teak-tree, mother of the grove around her, reached three-quarters as high as the rock. An almost naked *jungli* in a gap among the lower branches caught his eye and signaled. Ommony's eye followed the line of the *jungli's* arm.

"That *might* be your tiger," he said quietly.

"Where? Show me!"

Strange clutched his rifle that he had leaned against a corner of the rock, and looked over Ommony's shoulder, trying to get the line.

"You see a rock about a hundred yards from the base of this one—shaped roughly like an egg at this end. Carry your eye to the right from that. Now: d'you see a patch of brown leaves with light and shadow playing on them. Part's lighter than the rest—more gold in it. You get that? That's your tiger. He's looking up at us. It's a very difficult shot indeed from here."

"I used to shoot well once. I'll have a crack at him."

Strange aimed, and hesitated. The light played tricks with his unaccustomed eye. It was almost as if the shadow were limpid water, with little patches of sunlight dancing on it. The angle was awkward and the rifle heavy. He stepped back behind the rock and rested the weapon on a projecting corner.

"Now!" he said, and began to aim again. "Is he still there? I've lost sight of him."

"Still there, looking up at you."

"Curse that dog! She'll scare the brute away!"

"Better shoot then."

"He's moving, isn't he?"

"That was his head that moved. He's standing head-on toward you. He's heard us talking. His tail's twitching now. Can you see it? He'll make his mind up in a minute. Better be quick. You'll likely kill him if you hit him at this angle."

Strange fired.

"Too late, and a yard wide—to the right and beyond him," said Ommony. "Well, perhaps he'll take the hint. Some do."

"I wonder if this foresight's any good," said Strange, battling with irritation. "Was that the man-eater?"

"No. One at a time. That was only a greedy brute that kills more than he needs. Too bad you missed, but he gets another chance."

"You don't tell me you can recognize one tiger from another in that light, through the branches! How d'you know he isn't hit, and hiding down there?"

"It's part of my business to know that sort of thing," said Ommony, and glanced at Diana. She was lying down licking herself. "That tiger's a quarter of a mile away by now, and still going."

"I'd like to look," said Strange. "I didn't see him go. I don't believe he did."

"All right. Go down and look. You'll be perfectly safe. I'll sit here and smoke while you hunt for him," said Ommony.

But he made a signal to the *jungli*, who dropped from a lower branch and kept an eye on Meldrum Strange as one would watch a new unusual animal.

CHAPTER III

"Perhaps a hundred years from now——"

OMMONY sat smoking and smiling to himself, but he was dreadfully afraid. The smile was hard at the corners. No woman feared for her child, or fought on occasion more shiftingly for it, than he for that forest. His heart was in it. He would have said his soul was in it, too. Several times he had had to counter-sap and mine against the assault of British capitalists. This American was likely to be more resourceful, that was all. He knew the blindness of the money-giant, and its cruelty; its over-riding tactics, and the almost insignificance of ordinary honesty opposed to it.

He had not told Meldrum Strange that nearly all the mother-trees were teak. He had not dared. But Strange would find that out. And he had a notion that it would be better to inform a wolf that there were lambs in a certain valley.

True, Strange was supposed to have retired from the ranks of industry. But there are said-to-be-tamed wolves. Who trusts them? King, Grim, Ramsden were as good men as there are. But so is fire good, until employed by an incendiary. Strange's eleventh hour resolution to reform the world by the weight of his maneuvered money was only wolf-eat-wolf at best; to judge from Charley's and Jeff Ramsden's accounts, the again-to-be-protected people had preferred to protect themselves in the ancient way from uninvited interference.

Strange was bitter with ingrowing disappointment. Nothing in the circumstances

was likelier, thought Ommony, than that in the twinkling of an eye, his new internationally interwoven system of bureaus of impertinent information should be changed into the thousand fanged heads of an industrial monster. A wolf is a wolf. A man who is afraid imagines things.

In one sense Ommony's mood was mischievous. It amused him to see a "money baron" stripped of his pretensions, naked, as it were, to an observing eye. In less than a month he thought he could have fun with Meldrum Strange—quiet fun, that would do Strange no harm, possibly some good, and certainly amuse himself. But fear for his forest overcame all other emotions.

He knew how sensitive the Government would be to suggestions. Already one of the main planks of the revolutionary agitators' platform was the British Government's alleged neglect of Indian industry. The Western disease of exploitation for exploitation's sake had its spores in, and was spreading. Big Business had its eye on three hundred millions of possible "wage-earners." The first thing to go would be the trees. They always go first.

You may much more safely burn a decent fellow's house and take his money than undo the work he has laid his hand to. Whatever is indecent in him comes to the surface then. There was a change in Ommony's eye. His teeth bit deeper into the notch on the horn mouthpiece of his pipe, and Diana, dumb but all-observing, came closer to lay a shaggy head on his knee and wonder what next?

Ommony did not move when he heard a rifle-shot. He was surprized that Meldrum Strange should have gone so far in so few minutes, but supposed the man's enthusiasm for the chase, or his rage at having missed, was making a fool of him. Now, no doubt, he was shooting at rustling undergrowth. Next, he would lose himself. But there was more than one *jungli* on the job to hunt him back, and it would be rather amusing afterwards to compare Strange's version of it all with theirs. A man who is lost in the jungle, too, imagines things.

Ten minutes later he did not even look up when Diana pricked her ears, and he heard Jeff Ramsden's unmistakable heavy footsteps clambering the look-out rock. He was not afraid of anything Jeff might do, without Strange to persuade him and direct.

"Sorry, old man," said Jeff from behind him, leaning on a rifle, "I've made a bloomer. Charley and I found what we supposed were leopard tracks and followed them to about half a mile from here. I fired at a glimpse in the thicket. Hit a tiger, and he got away into the undergrowth. Charley's watching the place, and I came to make my peace with you."

Ommony got to his feet.

"Did you call the dogs off?"

"Yes. They're tied up beside Charley."

"We'll go get the tiger. Where did you hit him?"

"It looked like a rib-shot."

"Did you see Strange?"

"No."

They strode down the track together, where the wheel-marks came to an end and the fire-lane took advantage of rock on which nothing would grow—then plunged out of that wide opening into a narrow lane made by wild elephants and kept from growing up again by Ommony's patrol; out of that into a maze of criss-cross tracks, along which Jeff led with a hunter's instinct; at last into a natural clearing entered by a dozen trails, near the end of one of which Charley sat on a fallen tree beside the two dogs.

"No sound of him," said Charley. "But the dogs seem to think he's in there."

Something Charley said after that made Jeff laugh, and the deep note boomed along a glade.

"Hey! Where are you?" shouted another voice, and Ommony chuckled.

From about a hundred yards away there came a noise greater than that of ten tigers, as a heavy man thrust his way against dry branches.

"Better rescue him, hadn't I?" asked Jeff.

"He's in safe hands."

"Send Diana."

"No, he'd think she was a wild beast and shoot her. I'll manage it."

Ommony put two fingers to his teeth and whistled. Within the minute a *jungli* appeared in an opening and stood waiting without any visible emotion. Ommony spoke words unintelligible to the others and the *jungli* disappeared.

"Is he in there, Di?" said Ommony, and the staghound began nosing, but not growling, near the edges of the thicket, into which Jeff and Charley agreed the tiger had escaped. Diana barked once, and looked puzzled, but continued not to growl at all.

"He's in there. I think he's dead," said Ommony.

"Shall we try?" asked Charley, from the depths of inexperience.

"No. Wait."

Strange emerged into the opening, pushed by one *jungli*, pulled by another.

"These savages are tearing me to pieces!" he objected. "Why are you *here?* I thought you were to wait for me on the look-out rock."

"We think there's a dead tiger," Charley piped up.

The intention was good. He meant to draw Strange's irritation away from Ommony toward himself. He *did* banish the irritation. Strange's face suddenly shone with triumph. He left off fingering his torn jacket.

"I *told* you I hit him!" he said, thrusting out his chin at Ommony."

"Yes, you did say so."

Ommony turned his back to hide a grin, winked at the other two, and began peering into the undergrowth. Jeff took twenty strides down the track behind him, picked up an empty brass shell, and obliterated traces of his own heels in the leaf-mold. Ommony sent a *jungli* up a sar-tree, to crawl along an overhanging branch and peer downward. The *jungli* said two words. Ommony answered. The *jungli* broke off dead wood and dropped it—spoke again.

"All right," said Ommony. "Dogs in first."

SO DIANA led the way, with the other two yelping at her heels. The *junglis* hacked along behind them with the knives that were their only badge of office. In five minutes Ommony was counting the whiskers and claws of a male tiger, lest the men who would have to take the pelt off should add to their private store of talismans against the devils of the forest.

"There!" said Strange. "You *said* I'd kill him if I hit him from that angle."

That was Strange's measure of concession, magnanimous for sake of the proprieties. His voice was an unrighteous crow, and Ommony, with his finger in the bullet-hole, making note of the angle of impact, said nothing. Jeff gathered up the carcass and carried it out into the clearing, while the *junglis* clucked in amazement, because it takes four of them to carry a grown tiger, on a pole; and only Ommony observed how carefully Jeff laid the carcass down. Strange might otherwise have seen the hole through which the bullet emerged, after tearing straight across from rib to rib, behind the heart—out of a rifle nearly on a level with the tiger, broadside-to.

"Huh! My first tiger! Hu-humm!"

It was meant there should be others to follow this one. Acquisitiveness had its claws in. To Meldrum Strange there was no such thing as enough of anything he liked. Now he would no longer have to be satisfied to smile contemptuously at club-members, who donated big-game trophies to decorate the rooms—with their names underneath on neat brass plates—he would be one of them. After all, he wasn't only a millionaire, he was a human being who had missed a lot of fun he was entitled to.

"You asked me to stay a month, I think?"

"Yes, at least a month," said Ommony.

"I will."

Three faces changed. Jeff's and Charley's fell; they had been confident that Strange would cut his visit short, and had hoped to be left behind him for a few days. Ommony's rose like a barometer. His enemy had delivered himself into his hand.

"The forest is yours," he said delightedly, but added, "for a month then," by way of afterthought.

"It'll suit me," Strange announced pompously. "Do my health good. And I needn't waste time, seeing I've Ramsden with me. Have you horses, Mr. Ommony?"

Jeff's face fell lower yet. He shook his head at Ommony from behind Strange's back. But Ommony could not deny he had three horses in the stable.

"Good. If you'll lend me two horses, and a few of your savages to show the way, I can ride about with Ramsden and we'll have a good look at this forest of yours. Something might come of it."

Ommony did not care. He never did doubt Destiny when Destiny dealt him the joker. He trod homeward with a lighter step, enduring Strange's arrogance without a twinge, indifferent to the fact that the other two were gloomy.

"And as for Charley," Strange said suddenly, "I'll send him home." Perhaps some memory of how Charley had attached himself revived resentment. "You're not cut out for this kind of thing," he said over

his shoulder. "You'd better return to New York on the next ship. I'll give you an order on the New York office for your pay."

"Can you beat that?" asked Charley in an overtone to the world at large.

"Keep you from bumming about India. Go home, and go to work!" Strange snorted.

Jeff's terrific grip on Charley's shoulder saved a hot retort, Jeff having notions of his own, and the rest of the walk home was made in silence, Strange being awkwardly aware of a great storm brewing behind him. But he was set on his purpose now. No argument from Jeff or any one was going to move him one iota. Charley should go home. Jeff and he would ride about the forest, appraising it, and killing big game. He strode up the steps of Ommony's bungalow as if he owned the place, and Jeff intercepted Ommony.

"D'you care if I'm in there alone with him first for a minute or two?" Jeff asked.

"Very much. I object!"

"I want a minute's talk with him. If he answers back, I'll thrash him. He may have the tiger, but he can't treat Charley that way, and keep me. I'm through with the brute."

"One minute," said Ommony. "Just how far are you and I friends?"

Jeff hesitated, looking straight into Ommony's eyes. Each knew the other for a man worth trusting, but the big man's anger had risen until the veins on his forehead swelled.

"This isn't the first time Strange has made a beast of himself in front of me," he said, with that slow, deliberate impressiveness that argues will behind the words. "It's the last!"

"After all, I'm host. Why not leave this job to me?" said Ommony.

"Oh, if you put it that way, I'll go now. You may tell him I'm through and will call on him later."

"Charley's going to stay," said Ommony.

"How can he?"

"He's my guest."

"Then Strange will go."

"Not if you stay."

"What's the use?"

"You see this forest? Strange has made up his mind to cut down every tree in it. I'm alone against him. I want your backing. I want you to help me keep him here occupied, until I have time to upset his plan."

"Hmmm! He won't listen to me if I argue against it," said Jeff. "He's mule-headed."

"Precisely. Then argue for it. Stay here and help me."

"I'm on the brute's pay-roll," Jeff objected.

"All right, give him his money's worth. Show him what the forest would be worth to an exploiter."

"Let me take him by the neck and throw him into the first train leaving for Bombay!"

"The worst thing you could do," said Ommony. "You'd rouse all the monster in him. If he couldn't ruin you——"

"He can't. I'm independent, thank the Lord!"

"—he'd make me deputy and have revenge on me. He'd have to vent his spleen on something, so he'd steal or buy a concession and make this place a howling wilderness."

"I think he would," Jeff answered. "Would it break you?"

"Oh, no. I've saved a competence. But look." He took Jeff's arm and turned him toward the fairest view of nursed and well-loved timber. "Perhaps a hundred years from now——"

Jeff nodded.

"Yes. I've seen him at it. I've exploited for him; but that was gold and silver—you can take them any time. All right, Ommony."

THEY did not shake hands. An understanding that was much too deep and elemental for surface expression had made them partners. Both men were conscious of a pact that might involve immeasurable consequences. The law of hospitality, that says a guest may not be allowed to betray himself; the law of loyalty, that grants the same grace to the employer; Jeff's habit of open dealing, and Ommony's of absolute reliance on a Destiny he trusted, were all in danger and both men knew it.

They had pledged themselves to the lesser of two evils, for lack of an obvious third course, and neither liked it, but both were resolute. Jeff strode away to the stables to let his anger cool, there being something about horses that comforts and restores the self-control of out-door men. Ommony looked for Charley, and found him

packing his camera in the improvised dark-room.

"You'll stay, of course," he said, abruptly, divining instantly that Charley would not.

"You bet! I'll stay away from him. If this wasn't your house——"

"But it is," said Ommony.

"I'd lick him first! Maybe I can't, but I'd treat myself to the attempt."

"I'd have to protect him, of course."

"Sure. I've no quarrel with you."

"What's your plan, then?"

"Nothing. Pull out of here, and then think. Lend me your rig to the station, soon as I get this stuff packed. If I see him again there'll be trouble."

"Have you money?"

"Not much. But I'll take no more of his."

"Let me help out."

"Thanks. No. I've enough to get to Delhi. Zelmira's there. Maybe she'll finance a scheme for——"

Ommony whistled softly, so that Diana, close at heel, became alert for the unforeseen. She knew that signal of her master's changing mood.

"Why, what's up?" asked Charley.

"The flag," said Ommony. "It's nailed up. Any port in a storm, and any friend in——. Tell me: to what extent do you feel beholden to your late employer?"

"From now on? Nix! He's mud for all of me."

"So if Madame Poulakis should ask you for news of Strange's whereabouts, you'd——"

"Tell her he's not fit to run with. Gee! What a woman like her can see in him——"

"Isn't that her affair?" asked Ommony.

"Maybe. It's mine to tell her what I think, and I will if she freezes me for it."

"But you'll tell her where he is?"

"Maybe—if she wants to know, after I'm through knocking him."

"Let me pay your fare to Delhi!"

Charley made a hand-spring to the work-bench, and sat there looking at Ommony with those sky-bright eyes that read vague nuances between the light and shadow.

"What's up?" he asked again. "I'd do a lot to help *you*.

"Is Madame Poulakis clever?"

"As blazes! Only dumb thing about her is she wants Strange. Cave-man stuff, I reckon."

"Well: suppose you warn her against Strange——"

"I'll do that sure, first thing! What then?"

"If she persists after that; would you give her a message from me, as an absolute stranger?"

"I'll tell her anything you say."

"Say this: That Strange contemplates using his money and influence to grab this forest, and she can have me for ally on sole condition that she helps me to prevent that, by using her influence with Strange."

"If, as and when!" said Charley. "Sure. I get you. If that's his game, why don't you go straight to headquarters and spike it?"

"Daren't. If I should leave here Strange would jump to the right conclusion. Knowledge that I was opposing him would only make him keener, and he can beat us all with his money and hidden influence. He could buy some politicians and the native press—pull strings—and have the forest. This fight has got to be personal, between Meldrum Strange and me. I'm looking for allies."

"I'm one," said Charley.

"Let's hope she'll be another."

"Yes. But listen here," said Charley. "I reserve the right to warn her first. I'm going to tell her what I think of Strange, and why."

"Agreed."

"I'll warn her he's no good, and that if she ever gets him she'll regret it from the minute they sign up. I'll rub it in good, with illustrations and a lecture on the side, and give her a day and a night to think it over. After that, if she's still nuts on him, I'll tell her I know she's crazy, and chip in."

"Satisfactory to me," said Ommony.

"What'll I tell her to do, though?"

"Leave that to her. Tell her she can count on me to help her, but on what terms, and say we've only got thirty days to win or lose in. Now, let me provide you with money."

"No. I've enough for the present."

"Have lunch before you go, then. There's no train till two o'clock."

"No. Put up some eats for me. Send 'em to the station. I'll wait there. If I see Strange again I'll hurt him. Say—turn round—look through the door! D'you see that line of light down the edge of a monkey on the big tree over to the left? Look at him move now! Can you beat it?"

CHAPTER IV

AS ESTHER TO AHASUERUS

"Mon ami,
Bon ami,
Je fais mes compliments,
Houp-la-la!
Tr-la-la-la-la!
Je m'enfiche de vos dents!"

OMMONY stepped back into his house humming, and if not devoid of care, inclined to laugh at it. Great-hearted men, forever diving into gloom as the price of greatness, rise and soar the higher for it. Problems lie buried in earth; their hearts are of the empyrean. Ommony again could see his forest enduring for centuries, ripening, reseeding, fulfilling its destiny, as he proposed to fulfill his.

He was more than courteous to Strange; he charmed him. Gone was the feeling of being at the mercy of this invading Visigoth; unnatural restraint went with it, and he made it his business to soften the fall of the tyrant by giving him good entertainment to remember.

If he did have qualms, they had vanished. The means he meant to use were such as Strange provided him. Nor had he any thought of personal gain. At the end of that first day he might have entered the millionaire's employment almost on his own terms; for it was part of Strange's pride that he could pick men, and he began to see the unusual characteristics of his host.

Of all the men in India who can weave tales from the entrails of events Cottswold Ommony stands first. His gift is to see below the surface, and interpret; and he sees so much more than camera or microscope, that what he says has a sound of half-humorous prophecy.

All rich men crave amusement, and enjoy the truth if it is handed to them on such terms as let them laugh at it, that being the old court jesters' secret. And there on the fringe of that forest all the world's news seemed to come, for Ommony to turn over and subject to scrutiny.

It was not for Strange to know that Ommony stands high in the counsels of the ablest secret service in the world; or that men near the throne send him sealed communications, to be returned with his marginal comment. His duty and pleasure are trees, and they, like his natural gifts, are a nation's, to be drawn on in emergency.

So Strange learned things that are only guessed at by the politicians, and the days began to pass superbly—the best, almost the only true vacation Strange had had in all his life. He and Ommony, and Jeff Ramsden with the least decrepit of the horses straining under him, explored the forest in all directions, Ommony diverting attention from the trees by telling of ancient races that had once owned cities there.

Whenever Strange became greedy for a stand of timber, it always seemed that they came to an ancient ruin, or the traces of a road, immediately. There Ommony would dismount, to give Jeff's horse a chance, and would turn imagination loose among such facts as he had garnered, speculating on the ways and manners of nations dead centuries ago.

Strange had about decided to endow a new museum in the West when, on the fifth morning, as Jeff was starting for the stable to take pity on his horse before the day's work, he stopped in the garden face to face with a fat Bengali *babu.*

"Chullunder Ghose!" he exclaimed. "You were fired for good and all. What are *you* doing here?"

The *babu* was resplendent in new cotton clothing and a silk turban of rainbow hue that would have shamed a peacock, but he sat down in the dust and fanned himself with a palm-leaf. The action was apparently impromptu and induced by the heat; but he seemed aware that in that position a bed of flowers no brighter than his turban screened him effectually from the house.

"You were fired," Jeff repeated.

"Yes. In moment of wrath deprived of pittance for support of wife and numerous dependents. Said brutality was highly desperate for brutalee. Am in new employment therefore."

"Oh."

"Yes indeed."

"Who's the unfortunate employer? Mr. Ommony?"

"No *sahib,* no such luck; yet better luck. This *babu* is much blessed."

"Who are you robbing?"

"Immaculate and gorgeous creature, such as queens should envy and the wives of viceroys should imitate, has availed heaven-born self of this *babu's* confidential services."

"What's her name? Satanita? Jezebel?"

"Ah! All glorious name, if only for a while! How fleeting are life's pseudonyms for spiritual facts! *Sahib*, pray desist! I said confidential services!"

"You see my boot?" demanded Ramsden.

"*Sahib*, yes—emphatically; but desist! I must see Mr. Ommony. Instructions are——"

"He's on the veranda."

"Yes, and three dogs. *Krishna!* Here is one of them! *Sahib*, call the brute off!"

Diana came and sniffed at the *babu*, only restraining open enmity on Jeff's account. Chullunder Ghose shrugged himself into the smallest space possible, covering his bare legs with folds of clothing. His toes twitched in his sandals.

"I am fearful! Yow! What evil incarnated into thee?" he demanded, scowling at the dog.

Jeff scratched his chin. Past experience of the *babu* warned him; however, the house and the problems were Ommony's.

"Fetch your master, Di!" he ordered; and Di went off at a bound.

"Oh excellent!" exclaimed the *babu*. "*Sahib*, the embodiment of homage—thus!"

He blew into his right hand and made a gesture as if throwing the result at Jeff, who grinned at him.

"Ah! Smiles! This *babu* makes salaam of much appreciation!"

He bowed to the dust.

"What has Di found?" demanded Ommony, appearing down the path. "Snake? Leopard tracks?" he hazarded. "Oh. No, I can't employ a *babu*. Sorry. You may get food from the servants and sleep one night in the go-down, if that's convenient."

"Am overwhelmed by courtesy! *Sahib*, graciously consent to listen to me! Lend me your ear."

"I'm listening."

"*Sahib*, this *babu* is not Mark Anthony! Publicity, the breath of all things temporal, is very well for politicians, but for me, unopulent and pitiable *babu* that I am——"

"All right. Come up to the veranda."

"And spill beans! *Sahib*, I can say no in seven languages. Will one suffice?"

Ommony glanced sidewise, but Jeff had already taken the hint; he strolled to the veranda to keep Strange occupied.

"None can hear now," said Ommony.

He suspected this man might be of the secret service, that employs the unlikeliest individuals. But there was no signal. The *babu*, having ascertained by peering around the flower-bed on hands and knees that they actually could not be overheard, made ready to enjoy himself. Eyes, gesture, attitude betokened mystery.

"Mellidrum Isstrange ——" he whispered.

"What of him?"

"Is here?"

"What of that?"

"*She* is *there!*" said the *babu*, gesturing, thumb over shoulder.

Ommony looked startled, and corrected that too late to spoil the *babu's* exquisite satisfaction. However, he made an effort to seem ignorant.

"Who is *she?*"

"Most gracious of feminines! Amazing woman! Oh! Ah! Wonderful! This enraptured *babu* brings compliments of Memsahib Zelmira Poulakis to Ommony sahib, who is therefore enviable."

OMMONY turned his back for a moment to consider. The East can read thought fairly accurately if allowed to watch the thinker's eyes and face, and it seldom pays to betray concern.

"Is she at the station?" he demanded, turning again suddenly. He had not quite mastered irritation; Zelmira's move appeared ill-considered, and she a shallow-minded female after all.

The *babu* almost chuckled, but refrained from prudence. Ommony's toe was too near, and the dog was just behind him.

"Self am strategist."

"I asked, where is she?"

"Not so. The *sahib* asked, is she at the station? She arrived at a station, let us hope. This *babu*, not having seen his goddess since Sissoo Junction at hour of midnight, train being belated, can only surmise her ladyship's present whereabouts. Will hazard guess subject to modification by feminine caprice."

"Where is she?" Ommony demanded sternly.

"This *babu*, having changed trains at Sissoo Junction, hazards guess her ladyship may now be at Chota Pegu—in direction as thumb points—across forest—guestess of three-gun raja of same ilk."

Ommony's face resumed its normal cheerfulness. He had fought the Raja of Chota Pegu to a conclusion long ago,

over grazing rights and forest boundary, as victor using his influence afterwards to increase the royal revenue by getting an anachronistic tribute payable by the raja to the central government abolished. In consequence the raja had added an elephant to three that had formed the tripod of royal dignity, and the two men were now as close to being friends as fox might be with badger—mutually tolerant, at least.

"Am intimate in counsels of Raja of Chota Pegu," said the *babu.* His air was less of pride than of possession. Ommony instantly suspected blackmail.

"How did Madame Poulakis come by *your* services?" he demanded.

"Fortunately!" said the *babu.* "Self was as Yankees say up against it, perambulating Delhi in vain search of occupation for support of wife and numerous dependents. Was shabbiness personified, approaching hotels by back way only, much ashamed. Like Romeo beholding vision of radiant loveliness on hotel upper-floor balcony by moonlight—tourist presumably —too well-dressed in view of income-tax for wife of British officer—sought means of approach to offer services as guide, same being gainful, generally. Was spurned forth from hotel back-entrance by officious Punjabi dipty-steward with soul for sale. Returned and purchased same for one rupee eight annas, thus obtaining access to upper-landing, whence to glorious creature's balcony was one step. Climbed over and sat down in deep shadow of potted palm-tree, to meditate."

"You mean to listen?"

"Same thing, *sahib.* Recent arrival addressed as Charley, picturesquely indignant at unknown personage named Mellidrum Isstrange, held forth, she protesting with much amusement. *In vino veritas;* in anger indiscretion, which is better. This *babu* ascertained much that otherwise finding lodgement among thorns or stones, as in Christian parable, might have been unreproductive. Summoning courage to approach expensive suite of rooms by door in corridor, knocked and offered to tell fortunes. *Sahib*—glorious *sahib*—fell, as Yankees have it. Secret of successful fortune-telling is to tell what customer intensely desires to hear. Was omniscient in that respect."

"I suppose you told her she would marry Mr. Meldrum Strange," said Ommony, grinning.

"Nay, *sahib.* I said *he* will have unmerited but enviable destiny to marry *her*, thus disarming indignation of Charley sahib and encouraging her ladyship in one breath, wisdom being two-faced, looking both ways."

"And she engaged you as guide?"

"Nay, *sahib;* as philosopher and friend, same drawing more emolument. Who can treat friend with parsimony, or philosopher with mistrust? Being deep in confidence of Raja of Chota Pegu, knowing your honor's reputation—and aware by meditative process aforesaid of your honor's intention to save this forest from hoppers of Western industry—natural gift for strategy overwhelmed this *babu* with agenda, naturally. No sleep that night. Self made reservations on morning train. Self sent cryptically worded telegram to Raja of Chota Pegu, giving also letter to *sahiba*, same flattering him deeply and explaining nothing. Now am here, awaiting your honor's good will and coagitation."

"What's your plan?"

"Not having one, can't say. Put cat and dog in bag and agitate same. Fight ensues. Pour chemicals together. There is combination. Place parties to problem at strategic intervals. Game begins. It plays itself, with subventitious assistance from all and sundry. Desire, thou seed of Karma, what amusement thou providest for the gods!"

"Where's Mr. Charley Mears now?" Ommony demanded.

"Escort to her loveliness. Amazing individual! He likes; he loves her not; whereas this *babu* loves her, and exceedingly dislikes her restlessness, most discommoding to person of portly configuration. Krishna! You should see them dance together in station waiting-room when trains are late! She carries phonograph as baggage."

"Any message for me?"

"As aforesaid, *sahib*—compliments."

"Nothing else?"

"*Sahib,* compliments are all-embracing. Charley sahib, having sung your honor's praises, *sahiba* sits and waits."

"Um-m-m! Was there nothing about a promise?"

"Much! Am promised old-age competency if affair of heart succeeds."

Ommony's face clouded. Long familiarity had made him alert to the Indian trick of obliging the questioner, by strictly defining what he wants to know, to admit the questioned into confidence. Thereafter follows blackmail, subtle or crude as the case may be, but as inevitable as the day that follows night.

"This is unsatisfactory to me," said Ommony.

Chullunder Ghose, too wise a strategist to fool himself, conceded a reverse.

"There were words this *babu* did not understand. Incomprehension being cause of mystification of principals—choosing, therefore, discretion as better part of——"

"Out with it! You don't have to understand a message to deliver it."

"*Sahiba* said: 'Say this: I will be as Esther with Ahasuerus!' "

"Good!" remarked Ommony, and grinned again. He had a baffling kind of grin. "Get your gossip over with the servants," he added sarcastically. "They'll be curious to know all about this."

"*Sahib,* in *propria persona* am dumb discretion, absolutely!"

"Well: if they learn anything I shall know who has told them. Barring that, make yourself at home."

"*Sahib,* after light refreshment would prefer to rejoin Fountain of Astonishment at Chota Pegu——"

Ommony's laugh cut the argument short.

"There's too much at stake for your personal preferences and mine to have any weight at all, *babu.* Stay here, and confer with me on my return. You understand me?"

"Sadly!"

"Disobey—and deal with me!"

"*Sahib,* with what reluctance would I do the first! To deal with your honor is a privilege."

"A privilege that hurts at times!" said Ommony. "All right, stay here and entertain yourself."

Without pausing to consider what the *babu* might regard as entertainment, he returned to the veranda.

"Sorry. Urgent business on the other side of the forest. Can you and Jeff amuse yourselves?" he asked Strange. And Strange, with a second tiger to his bag in mind, made departure easy.

SO OMMONY set off on his lean gray pony at a canter, with the staghound careering in advance and the inevitable *jungli,* rag in teeth to keep the flies out, racing like a black fantom on foot behind. It was part of the honor of those naked forest-men never to let out of sight the one white man who understood them, and whom in part—at times—they thought they understood too.

The forest is long and wide, but Chota Pegu lies on a promontory as it were, projecting far into an ocean of trees. From Ommony's bungalow to the raja's palace is hardly forty miles, although by train, including the wait at Sissoo Junction, the journey would take a day and a night. So it was only a little after one that afternoon when the sweating pony steadied to a walk between low houses built from the débris of ancient cities, Diana flopped panting in the shade of a high wall, the *jungli* followed suit, and Ommony dismounting, hammered with the butt of his riding-whip on a gate so old that the iron studs had rusted themselves loose and shook as the struck wood quivered.

There was a long pause. Then a bell rang, as it does in temples to announce the presence and the service—one clear note and over-tones ascending all the way to heaven. A voice, in which a million years of melancholy seemed to find expression, gave an order, and the flower of the raja's bodyguard—four men in crimson and yellow uniform—opened the gate with dignity.

Followed interchange of royal courtesy. Ommony, official tyrant and accommodating friend, stood while the army of four presented arms and a bare-legged man with a bugle blew a fanfare, cracked, but creditable since he did his best. Ommony's right hand went to his helmet-rim in the clean, curt fashion of the West, and then came the rigorously conventional question and reply between him and the turbaned officer, as to health, the crops, the city's peace, and the probable date of the next monsoon.

It would be ascertained whether his Highness was at home and could give audience. Ommony was offered an ancient stool in the shade of a much more ancient tree, while half the army went to find out what all already knew. Compliments were presented—more salutes; Ommony mounted the indignant gray, who

had earned a respite, and rode behind the army up a long drive between old sartrees, preceded in defiance of all convention by Diana. But the *jungli* remained in the street; as the descendant of a race that once ruled half the earth, such trumpery was not for him. He was afraid of it. Perhaps the racial memory had made him wise, as it makes wolves wise, with instinct.

Then the palace door, wide open; but ceremony to be gone through first. A great umbrella trimmed with glass was raised over Ommony's head while he dismounted. Two menials removed his riding-boots and gave him embroidered slippers in their place—a great concession, for custom demands bare feet across the threshold. Shabby, but important men in turbans bowed and walked backwards before him, as the pony was led away and Ommony, leaving Diana at the door, entered into the cool gloom of the palace.

Very little, but too much modern vandalism had crept into that back number of the world's volumes of changing manners. Except for some Tottenham Court Road furniture ridiculously set between antiquities, the place was as it had been for three centuries, low-ceilinged, stately, down-at-heel, and quiet—with the quietness that the noise of a phonograph emphasised. The thing was playing "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and the racket emerged between curtains at a passage-end.

On the right was the door of the durbar-hall, and Ommony was led through that into a room about thirty feet by twenty, lined with teak and polished. There was no furniture; visitors are expected to stand in the presence; but at one end on a red-carpeted low dais, was a gilt and red-silk covered chair of the Napoleonic period, that served for throne. Over that was a tasselled, square umbrella of native embroidery, hung from the ceiling by a wire.

There was a pause then of at least five minutes, for sake of the conventions, Ommony waiting bolt upright in the midst directly in front of the throne, wiping the back of his neck with a handkerchief, because there was no punkah, and through the windows, that gave on to a deep veranda, very little air came in.

Then pageantry awoke. A bell rang, and through a door on the right of the throne came the raja and his whole official family. The raja, without seeming to notice Ommony, took his seat, bowed to by all five radiantly dressed attendants. Two of them took position one on either hand, each armed with a jewelled fan, with which they disturbed the sultry atmosphere; but the other three were evidently of inferior rank and did not set foot on the dais. They stood in line on Ommony's right hand.

The men with fans whispered to the raja, as if informing him who Ommony might be. He appeared interested, and at last looked up, meeting Ommony's gaze directly. Ommony bowed low, and the raja nodded.

He was a lean-looking, whimsically-featured man in a yellowish silk suit adorned with a minor British Order (procured through Ommony's influence). His fingers were covered with valuable rings, but his appearance was not otherwise effeminate. He looked like one who practised more or less asceticism for the profit there might be in it, and cynicism for his own amusement—both practices diluted with a liberal amount of intellectual sensuousness.

"I hope you are well. I am pleased to see you," he said solemnly in the language of the land, and the whole court of five beamed appreciation of his tact and condescension.

Ommony replied, and for about five minutes there was rigorously regular exchange of question and answer, without one hint of human feeling or a word said that could by any possibility be construed into importance. Then:

"I am glad to have seen you," said the rajah, and walked out, followed by the court, leaving Ommony standing; whereat he resumed the mopping with his handkerchief. He was used to the business—knew what would happen next. Some minutes later the raja, with the jewels off and a much less ornate suit on, pushed his turbaned head through the door Ommony had entered by.

"Come on, Ommony, old boy!" he called in English. "Are you so fond of ceremonial that you'll stand there forever? Let's sit under the punkah in the next room."

They shook hands in the doorway, and Ommony submitted to be patted on the back.

"Opportune as ever! Always in the nick of time! I've a surprize for you!"

The phonograph tune now was "Everybody's Doing It;" however, Ommony made

ready for astonishment. There was a sound of four feet slipping on a polished teak floor; but the wise man, like the adder in the Bible, stops his ears to sounds it isn't time to hear yet. They went into a room in which comfortable couches and a shuttered twilight set the key-note, with lots of French novels scattered about, and some pictures on the walls that would have hardly passed the U. S. censorship.

They sat down vis-à-vis, and the raja lit a cigaret, waving it airily.

"Ha-ha! Ommony, old boy, you were never more surprized in all your life than you're going to be! Downy old dodger! You're not the only man who can produce the unexpected! What do you think I've got here?"

"A new elephant," suggested Ommony.

"Pooh! Think again. Everybody's scandalized. My chamberlain is wondering whether I intend to abdicate! Now guess."

"A motor-car."

The raja's face clouded a moment.

"Not yet. Well, I'll tell you, for you'll never guess. A European lady of most exquisite breeding, looks, and attainments! She is teaching me to dance the two-step, and there will jolly well be a revolution in Chota Pegu if I don't look out! And by jove, Ommony old boy, you know, if I could afford to I jolly well would abdicate. This business of being a petty raja is no fun for a man of any intellect. I would like to live in Europe. Paris appeals to me."

Ommony assumed an air of sympathy. He knew Chota Pegu's hold on ancientry, but understood as well that moth-lure of the City of Bright Lights. Chota Pegu's raja was as obviously fooled as any moon-struck college freshman; but even the freshman survives the experience generally, and India has survived the worst her weakness can do to her. There would be reaction at the proper time.

"Paris is a great place," he answered guardedly.

"It is, Ommony, it is! Paris is the mother-city of intellectuals. Hah! They understand there the inanity of hypocritical convention! They see through things—live through them, Ommony! The land of Voltaire, Pascal, Rousseau—and delightful women!"

"Is your guest, then, a Parisienne?" asked Ommony.

"By birth, no. She is Greek—true offspring of a race that won at Marathon, and molded the thinking of Rome and all Europe! She knows Paris inside out. We have been speaking of it. She is charming—exquisite! But come and see."

Gesturing for silence, he tip-toed to a corner, where an ancient, mirrored cabinet stood built into a recess in the solid wall. Searching for a key, he unlocked the central mirror, revealing a deep cupboard, whose back was nothing but the pierced carving of a wall of the room beyond. The entire room was visible, including a phonograph, with its back to a stand of ancient weapons, and Charley Mears winding it. The raja pulled Ommony forward by the coat, and signed to him to peer through.

"Hs-s-sh!" he whispered.

MADAME ZELMIRA POULAKIS was sitting almost facing the aperture, turning over the pages of a guide-book on her lap, and talking over her shoulder.

"No, Charley, no more dancing, it's too hot. Come and help with this. I can't find Chota Pegu in the book; if we can't find something about it we'll be at the mercy of our own resources, and the fewer they are the more they'll confuse us. Come on. Come and help me."

Nobody had too much praised her. Ommony conceded that at first glance. The mystery remained that she was willing to devote herself to the pursuit of Meldrum Strange; but the whole world is full of the unexplainable. If she was thirty, she did not look it. If her past was wrapped in coils of Levantine intrigue, no symptom of it showed. If she was unchaste, Ommoney was unobservant. Mischief sparkled all over her, as brightly as the diamonds on her left hand, but amused, not venomous. If eyes are windows of the soul, as some one says, her merry one looked at the universe through azure panes and liked it all.

The raja closed the cabinet again.

"Did you ever see such eyes, or lips—such hair, or such complexion?" he asked. "Is she not all curves, and suppleness, and lightness? Did you see her ankles? And her wrists? Is her voice not perfect—like the waters laughing at you? And she has money, I imagine; her diamonds surpass mine. Isn't she wonderful?"

Ommony agreed. It was policy; but besides, there was no use in denying the

obvious. But he began to dread the next few days, as sure as that he stood there that the management of a forest and a few score men would be as child's play compared to partnership in an intrigue with Zelmira Poulakis.

"Ommony, old boy, I'm going to ask a favor of you," said the raja, button-holing him. "She will introduce me into Parisian society. Can I go there? Can I afford it? Can a capital sum be raised?"

"Your Highness' subjects are already taxed to about the limit," Ommony answered warily. Something was coming and he did not care to nip sprouting information in the bud.

"Yes, confound it! They're not fit to have a raja; they can't pay for one! I've said that frequently. But I have forest-rights, you know. It's all very well for you to claim control of the forest, and you've conserved it beautifully; but the timber revenue from all this section will have to revert to me when it's time to cut down trees. The *shroffs** won't lend on it; they say there's no knowing when Government will cut, or to what extent my right will be disputed. Now, don't you think, if you advised it, Government would buy my rights for money down?"

"How much?"

"My rights are worth a lot—*lakhs* and *lakhs* of rupees," said the raja. "I would be reasonable on a basis of money down."

All governments are capable of anything. Ommony, as an individual, is not to be judged by that standard. But he was no such fool as to answer outright, and so set the raja dickering with *shroffs* again. He tickled hope, that springs eternal in a raja's breast as with the rest of us.

"I'll ask," he said noncommittally.

"Will you? What a splendid fellow you are! How I wish all Englishmen were like you! Now let me do *you* a favor and introduce you to the most wonderful woman in the world."

"One minute first. How is it you are entertaining her?" asked Ommony, and the raja's face took on that supercilious smile with which the opportunist apes omniscience.

"I have ways and means, old boy, that you don't dream of. Chota Pegu is older than the British Raj by quite a few centuries, you know. Connections everywhere. Wheels within wheels. You English will never understand how we obtain our ends. Ha-ha! No use asking ***her***, you old fox! She doesn't know either! She was 'in maiden meditation fancy free', as the Psalmist or Shakespeare or somebody says, and a little bird whispered to her. Ha-ha! I knew she was coming to visit me before she thought of it!"

Whereat Ommony looked puzzled, concealing his satisfaction at being in no way connected in the raja's mind with Zelmira's visit.

"But isn't it awfully inconvenient?" he asked. And now he was simply curious.

The raja's domestic worries were not even indirectly a concern of his. It was only by hearsay that he knew the raja had two wives and quite a nice stable of dancing women; but it is always fun to speculate on how a man contrives to keep the peace in such complicated circumstances.

"I do as I —— please!" the raja answered after a moment; and in the set lips and studied air of nonchalance was written a whole volume of strife-behind-curtains. But that, again, was no affair of Ommony's; he was merely glad to know of it; since, to quote a favorite proverb of Chota Pegu, all straws serve the birds at nesting time.

"I'm agog to meet madame," he said, with an air of playfulness that overlay real dread lest Zelmira should openly confess him an accomplice.

But not she! Her poise was perfect, and she had evidently tutored Charley Mears, whose natural instinct would have been to wear his pleasure on his face at meeting Ommony again. Zelmira glanced at the raja, as if to deduce from his her own proper attitude toward this bearded, stocky-shouldered individual. She did not shake hands—did not attempt to shine in conversation—hardly indeed looked at Ommony; it was only little by little, as an hour went by, that he knew he was being summed up and analyzed from under drooped eyelashes. He confessed to himself that the girl was adorable, and there was an added charm of deep artfulness without any evident malice, that meant more to him than cupid lips or dark, delightful brows.

And that while, with the raja playing half-intoxicated host, they talked of all inanity, like new neighbors at some one's tea-party. A spy, or an intruder might have guessed them all bored, except the

* Money-lenders.

raja. Not the slightest hint was dropped until the raja left the room, and Zelmira's face became instantly wreathed in smiles. She was about to say something to the point, but Ommony checked her.

"Look annoyed!" he ordered. "You wish the raja was here! You don't think much of me!"

She registered, and Charley followed suit. Ommony, with forest-trained ears alert, was aware of the cabinet in the wall behind him being opened, and could almost feel the raja's eyes making holes in the nape of his neck.

"Let me show you my dog," he suggested, as if he could not think of any other way of entertaining; and, as if even that would be better than a dreary conversation with him, Zelmira jumped up with alacrity. Even so, she played safe.

"What fun! Perhaps the raja will come too. Hadn't we better wait for him?"

Ommony raised his voice a trifle, and capped the safety.

"No," he said, "he's looking up information for me about his claims in regard to the forest. It'll take him fifteen minutes."

With that hint for the man behind the spy-hole he led the way out, and they walked three abreast down the long drive, Zelmira in the midst.

"Don't talk yet," said Ommony. "People's backs give more away than they imagine."

Two hundred yards from the gate in the wall, still in sight from the palace windows, Ommony set fingers to his teeth and whistled shrilly.

"Now watch! The wall's too high for her, but she'll try it first."

Three disappointed, almost piteous barks announced that the whistle had been heard.

"Three shots at it," he said. "Now watch again. There's a *jungli* out there. He'll stand against the wall. She'll back across the street and take a running jump, using his shoulders for spring-board. Watch that space between the two trees."

He whistled again. There was a pause, and then the hound's paw just appeared above the level of the wall, missed hold, and disappeared as suddenly. A yelp, half-angry now, another pause—then head and shoulders—a yelp of triumph—and the enormous dog came leaping, thrusting her nose into Ommony's hand and wriggling satisfaction.

"Now," said Ommony, "we can talk while we fool with Diana. That looks innocent enough."

CHAPTER V

"Sheep's bones and no strychnin!"

SOMEHOW, woman has come to represent temptation in the minds of most of us. Doubtless she earned the stigma, and we the worse one, of being weak. Zelmira Poulakis in pale mauve Georgette was art so refined and simplified as almost to seem divine, so that Ommony wondered whether he could keep his own head. As to Strange, with himself to load the scale clandestinely, he felt no doubt whatever.

"Have you a plan?" he asked her, so well versed in Indian lore that he knew a woman's plan prevails in spite of anything a man can do.

"Nothing," she answered. "He *ought to* marry me. He ruined my husband."

"Revenge?" asked Ommony, not relishing a campaign for that unprofitable stuff.

"No. My husband probably deserved it. But some of my money went too, and I was innocent. Strange needs a wife; he never had one. He kissed me once in New York, when I interviewed him as my husband's emissary,* and—well—I propose to conquer him, that's all."

That was frank enough. It was even credible. If money had been her sole aim she would never have needed to pursue Strange, limiting her scope to him. She was more marketable than the diamonds on her left hand, and no doubt scores of wealthy men had let her know it.

"Conquest, eh?" said Ommony. "Yes, Strange needs conquering."

"He likes me," she answered. "He is only so cruel and selfish that he fears marriage. But I can conquer him. I will make him generous. You'll see!"

"Do you know what Strange will think, if he learns you are staying with this raja?" Ommony asked her. "Our Indian rajas have a certain reputation."

"Poof! He knows better. He might pretend to think that. He is cruel enough to pretend anything. But he will know it isn't true, so what does *that* matter? It is what one knows that influences, not what one pretends to think. He knows in his heart he likes me. He said—over afternoon tea

*"A Secret Society."

in New York—he would choose me before any woman in the world, if he were of the marrying kind. I *am* of the marrying kind, and I choose him! Presto! That is the end of it!" And she clapped her hands, while Charley grinned.

"Can't you have Strange come and rescue her from the raja?" asked Charley, fertile in screen-drama expedients.

"He wouldn't come. He'd send for the police," laughed Ommony. "No, we must have *her* rescue *him*."

"From the raja?"

"From anything that makes him look ridiculous."

"Wise man! I like you, Mr. Ommony," Zelmira announced, her whole face sparkling with amusement.

The best, and the worst of us like to be liked, more particularly by a pretty woman. It gilds the edges of intrigue, and surely dulls conscience to the drab-gray underside of human schemes. Ommony began to like his task amazingly. He almost forgot the forest in determination to make Meldrum Strange a captive of this woman's bow and spear.

"I wish you'd tell the raja about Strange," he said, after making Diana jump over his head a time or two—for he saw the raja coming. "Not too much, of course. Just say he's a millionaire who wants to buy up Indian forest rights. Say you've heard he is staying with me. I think we can safely leave the rest to Strange, the raja, and Providence, assisted by Chullunder Ghose. You stumbled on a jewel in that *babu*. By the way—drop your handkerchief! Quickly!"

She obeyed. Ommony signed to Diana to pick it up. The dog brought it to him, not to her, and Ommony put it in his pocket.

"If ever Di comes, look for a letter inside her collar. You can send an answer the same way."

"Ah! That dog! That dog!" said the raja, joining them. "A perfect beast! So intelligent! But some one will poison her one of these days, and then my friend Ommony will be disconsolate."

He, too, it seemed, knew how to drop a hint. Perhaps he had seen the handkerchief incident, and guessed its motive. Ommony looked straight at him, and their eyes met.

"Then some one would have a personal fight on his hands with me," he said blandly; and the raja, pinked, with an effort switched attention to Zelmira.

Ommony excused himself then, borrowed a fresh horse from the raja's stable, and started back on the long cross-forest journey. After a while he took the *jungli* up behind him, *jungli* and dog taking turn about, the *jungli* between-whiles clinging to tail or stirrup, scouting ahead where he knew of leopard lairs, and not so weary as the fat horse at the journey's end, three hours after dark, an hour too late for dinner.

Jeff was waiting in the dark by a woodpile near the house, and the horse shied at him. The *jungli* fled.

"That rascal Chullunder Ghose is up to no good," Jeff began, seizing a rein to hold the horse still. "Strange and I shot a tiger this morning."

"Which of you?"

"He wounded and I killed. We were back here for lunch. Chullunder Ghose was squatting on the veranda like a big brass idol. Strange began to talk to him. All afternoon, when he wasn't taking a nap or smoking by himself, Strange has been questioning the *babu*, and what he hasn't learned about this forest and one of the local raja's—Chota Pegu I think his name is—wouldn't fill a nut-shell. I couldn't prevent it."

"I'm not sorry."

"If I could have broken the *babu's* neck before he——"

"You or I would have had to do his work. I expect he has done it better."

"Listen. Don't be overconfident," said Jeff. "We used to employ that *babu*. He plays both ends from the middle always. Nothing he says or does is on the level. He'd sell you out to Strange for one rupee over and above what he could get from you——"

"Let's hope!"

"And then double-cross Strange!"

"Excellent!"

"Well, I've warned you," Jeff grumbled. "Be a good fellow and keep Strange occupied while I eat dinner. I'll have one of the servants bring the *babu* to me in the dining-room."

Ommony saw the horse stabled and the dog fed. Ten minutes later he was in the dining-room, with Chullunder Ghose cross-legged on the floor at his right hand.

"So you've moved without waiting for me?" he asked.

"Lot's wife was made pillar of salt, according to Christian missionary. She looked back. Kaiser is in Holland, very hard up. He looked forward. Chinese suffer presently from foreign creditors. Stood still! Choice of three evils leaves enigma up to me. No advice available; no orders, except not to talk with servants; no consolation from Ramsden sahib, who threatens me with out-size boot. What can do but tickle ear of money-nabob with account of ripe apples in next orchard, whetting appetite of octopus for loot, which is envy of white man, always? What could do? Must say something! He is incarnation of inquiry armed with can-opener and too much zeal."

"Did you tell about Madame Poulakis?"

"Nay, *sahib*. Told nothing this *babu* knows for certain. Truth is like savings bank account, for use in dire emergency. Direness not yet obvious. Spoke much of raja of Chota Pegu, intellectual gent with expensive leanings and no cash. Conversation turned on said aristocrat's claim to own birthright in enormous tract of this forest. Did mention likelihood of same being exchangeable, like Testament swap, for mess of pottage—cash in this case."

"How did you know about that?"

"Am all things to all men, *sahib*. To your honor, truthful. Was employed by raja of that ilk to make rounds of Hindu money-lenders in all cities, offering undiscoverable title as security for long-time loan. Was not inundated with success, but drew personal expenses in advance."

To let such a person as Chullunder Ghose into a secret on equal terms would have been tantamount to asking him to take advantage of it. Ommony did not dare even to smile, much less confess that the *babu* had led up to his hand with perfect intuition.

"I gave you leave to sleep here one night," he said presently, after turning the problem over in his mind.

"Am whelmed with gratitude!"

"Go in the morning—at break of day—before Mr. Strange wakes up."

"On foot? By train? To Hades?"

"The raja of Chota Pegu's horse is in my stable. Ride across the forest and return the horse to its owner with my compliments."

"A red one? *Sahib*, I know that beast! Self am not expert in equitation. Forest, moreover, is full of leopards, tigers, elephants, and snakes of all sorts! Do not know way."

"I will lend you a *jungli*."

"Who will kill and eat me! *Sahib*, with your honor's favor this *babu* will take train and change at Sissoo Junction."

"You will leave with that horse before daybreak. You may have two *junglis*," answered Ommony. "If you fall off they will catch the horse and put you on again."

"You do not know, *sahib*, what such fear means to person of unathletic temperament!"

But Ommony did know, and knew, too, the only way short of banishment to keep the *babu* from jockeying for the upper hand of all concerned. Banishment was out of the question; he needed the *babu's* services.

"You leave before daybreak on the red horse," he insisted unsympathetically. "Keep out of Mr. Strange's sight meanwhile."

"But, *sahib*——"

Ommony interrupted by glancing down at him. Their eyes met, and the *babu* understood. There are men who will listen to all sides of a case, but can never be wheedled when once they had given decision.

"What shall I do, then, at Chota Pegu?"

"My advice to you is to watch your step, Chullunder Ghose. I imagine your reward, if Madame Poulakis' plan succeeds, will be proportioned to your zeal. But I assure you the penalty, in case the plan fails through any treachery on your part, will be out of all proportion to the importance of the matter in hand. Let that ride through the jungle tomorrow morning be a hint to you."

"*Sahib*, hint at me with a riding-whip! Take bail! Let me sign a stipulation before witnesses! Only not that jungle ride!"

"And when you get there," Ommony went on, ignoring the *babu's* outburst, "look about you. Get to know people—as for instance, priests. If I should send word to you by *jungli* to meet me in a certain place, why not keep the appointment? If the raja asks you about Mr. Meldrum Strange, you may say——"

"Let me memorize your honor's wisdom!"

"—whatever occurs to you as good sense at the moment. Bed now! There's a cot in the out-house."

THE *babu* shuffled off, his bare feet rutching on the polished floor, and Ommony joined his guests on the veranda. But Meldrum Strange proved taciturn, not even loosening his tongue under the influence of questions about the tiger he shot that morning. He was not diffident about having shot a tiger without Ommony's permission; he made that obvious. From the first he had challenged Ommony's right to have any say in such matters. But there was a new challenge noticeable in his whole demeanor. Abruptly, without apology, he announced his intention of retiring early and walked off with hardly a muttered good night.

"The old man's cooking something," Jeff said, as soon as they heard the bed-room door slam.

"Did he overhear me speaking to the *babu*?"

"No."

"Then I don't care what he cooks. He'll choke on it!"

"Pity I didn't choke him yesterday!" Jeff grumbled. "Strange is no fool when it comes to business. All the way home this morning, after we shot the tiger, he was telling me what a magnificent property this forest is. He has made up his mind to have it. That beastly *babu* has told him how to get it. All he's wondering now is how to meet the raja of Chota Pegu without arousing your suspicion."

"That's all arranged," said Ommony. "If I know Chota Pegu he'll be here soon after breakfast with his best horse foundered under him. I sha'n't be here. This is the order of the day: Chullunder Ghose rides away before it's light. In all likelihood he'll meet the raja and have word with him. I leave an hour later. If I chance to meet the raja I'll have word with him too. You see him next, and leave him alone with Meldrum Strange. They'll cook up something or other between them; and there's nothing we can do until we find out what that is. There's only one point to be careful on: Are you sure the *babu* didn't tell Strange about Madame Poulakis?"

"Pretty sure. Strange would have blown up if he had told."

"If the raja says anything to you about her—I expect he won't—just warn him that's a dangerous subject. If Strange once learns she's near——"

"He'll run! He'll run like the wind!" said Ramsden, half-smilingly.

"Why is he so afraid of her?"

"He's afraid of himself. He likes her too well. He's afraid of the papers. If he should marry her, they'd dig up the scandal about her first husband in Egypt, scareheads, and a full page in the Sunday supplement. He's afraid the scandal might be made to stick to him. If she wins, Ommony, I'll stick to Strange; he'll be worth it, with her to take the brute out of him. He has imagination, brains, and a kind of courage. She'll give him a heart."

Ommony turned in and lay awake until after midnight, tossing and retossing the problem over in his mind. He was aware of Strange doing the same thing in the next room—brain against brain, greed against conservation, selfishness against a life devoted to the trees. But the odds were in favor of Ommony, and he fell asleep first. Fate's dice, he felt, were loaded against the millionaire.

He was awakened long before dawn by Strange calling to Jeff Ramsden. Jeff came from his tent in pajamas to sit on Strange's bed, and for a while there was only audible an irregular jumble of explosions from Strange and Jeff's deep monosyllabic answers. But once he caught words:

"Why don't you go straight to headquarters and have it out with the Government, if you want the forest?" Jeff Ramsden insisted.

"Don't be an ass! They'd listen to him, not me. Whatever I offered, they'd think they might get more. Odds are, they'd call in competition. Parcel it out in the end to coolie contractors. This has got to be done quietly—jockey 'em into a false position—crowd 'em to the rails, and walk away with it. Ommony's a fanatic. You can't buy or bull-doze his sort. Nothing to do but beat 'em to it."

"Well, I've told you what I think," Jeff answered.

"You think with your biceps! You've a head that 'ud make first-class wienerwurst!"

Ommony fell asleep again. But he was up before dawn, helping Chullunder Ghose to mount the red horse, charging two *junglis* to deliver the *babu* safely at Chota Pegu, and seeing to it that they started off by the back way, behind the house, out of sight from Strange's bed-room window. He breakfasted alone, and was on the way himself less than an hour later, leaving only one

horse in the stable, and no chance for destiny to miss-fire, because that one horse was so sore-backed from carrying Jeff's weight that none could ride him. Strange, who disliked walking, would have to stay near the house that morning.

Ommony, too, took the trail for Chota Pegu, but in no hurry. He had all the dogs with him—a sure sign he was out on no forty-mile journey. At the foot of the look-out rock he tethered the horse, with a couple of *junglis* close at hand to watch for leopards, then climbed the obelisk-like rock, and waited, turning a pair of field-glasses at intervals on the face of a bare hill, over whose rock-strewn summit the track to Chota Pegu zigzagged not many miles away.

It was an hour and a half before he saw a horseman hurrying like an insect, downward among the distant rocks. Then it occurred to him there was another trail available to a man in a great hurry who knew the forest well. He called down to the *junglis*, and one of them started away through the trees like a fantom, followed by Diana and the other dogs. (Hereditary *junglis* are as dirt beneath the feet of an hereditary prince; but a white man's dogs are not to be despised.)

In course he heard barking—Diana's echoing bell, and the *yap-yap* of the others. Then Diana came streaking down the lane with filtered sunlight poured on her between the trees, so that she looked like a golden god-thing. She climbed in a hundred leaps, and lay down panting, making no remark. There was nothing untoward. But the *yap-yap* of the other two continued, coming nearer, with now and then an angry shout from some one, who, perhaps, would rather not have his exact location known. Ommony pulled tobacco out, and lighted his pipe. The gradually closing view of Destiny contented him.

Two dogs, belligerent and pausing every now and then to yelp another challenge, galloped into sight, climbed the rock, and lay down gasping beside Diana. The drumming of hoofs pursued them. In a minute more the raja of Chota Pegu reined in a sweating stallion, whose legs were trembling, glanced at Ommony's tied horse, looked up, and nodded angrily.

"Keep your dogs chained!" he shouted. "Why don't you thrash your *junglis* oftener? I'll kill the next beast that gets in my way! —— them! They drove me like a buffalo at milking time! Get some decent dogs, why can't you!"

"Come up, and rest your horse," called Ommony. "Why blame the dogs for good luck? We might have missed each other."

Soft answers turn away wrath sometimes. They usually turn violence into vehemence. Occasionally they take all the wind out of a man's sails, suddenly.

"Were you expecting me?" the raja asked; and his voice betrayed him. He had hoped to get in touch with Strange before Ommony could forewarn or prevent. Now he was wondering how Ommony could possibly have divined his purpose. He was bewildered. He felt like one who sees the ruin of his calculations.

"I'm merely delighted to see you," Ommony answered. "Come on up."

SO THE raja hitched his horse beside Ommony's, and climbed slowly, turning matters over in his mind. He had to make some excuse for being there, at that early hour, on a horse so obviously foundered—some excuse that could not compromise him.

"Have a seat," suggested Ommony; and the raja produced a cigaret, after one inquiring glance into Ommony's eyes, East studying West and learning nothing.

"What's your rush?" Ommony asked knocking his pipe on the rock and refilling it.

The raja hesitated. How much had Ommony guessed? He had to answer something.

"Madame Poulakis told me of an American millionaire, staying at your place," he said at last. "She heard of him yesterday from you. I've never seen one of the breed, and I'm curious."

"Almost eager," ventured Ommony.

"Yes. I propose to invite him to call on me before she goes away. She can help entertain him."

He knew how lame his excuse had sounded, and waited for Ommony to provide him a better cue; but Ommony was leading, not following suit.

"Did you meet any one on the way?" he asked, with eyes averted. If he had wanted the raja to lie he would have looked straight at him and forced the pace.

The raja thought rapidly, and saw no sense in an evasion.

"Only a *babu*, bringing back the horse I lent you yesterday."

"Have word with him?"

The raja thought again. He thought so long that the answer to the question became obvious.

"We spoke. He's a man I have trusted on occasion. Is he in your confidence?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Ommony, grinning.

The raja looked relieved, but it did not last long. Elbows on knees, pointing the stem of his pipe at him, Ommony cleared the issue and clouded it in one breath.

"See here," he said quietly, Dutch-uncle fashion. "If you want to meet Meldrum Strange there's no objection. He's a free man; you're a raja. *But*—if you propose to do business with him—anything along the lines you hinted to me yesterday—count me against you. Understand? I don't want Strange owning any of this forest—don't want him owning even a doubtful claim to a reversionary interest. Are we clear as to that?"

The raja nodded angrily.

"They are my personal private rights," he retorted.

"Exactly," said Ommony. "Then you do as you personally, privately jolly well please with them. But count me out. I refuse my official backing."

"Ah! Hah! I understand. Unofficially——"

"Unofficially I give you this advice. If you let Meldrum Strange know Madame Poulakis is at your place he'll stay away."

"Thanks. You save me then from a mistake. Aha! Downy old dodger! I see through you! Officially unbending, eh? Unofficially hoping; isn't that it?"

He slapped Ommony on the thigh in the well-known fashion of the hale and hearty West—as per instruction book of Western manners.

"Tell me; what kind of man is this Strange to deal with?"

"Hard," said Ommony.

"Subtle?"

"No. Crushes like a python."

"Slow?"

"Quick, I should say, when he makes his mind up."

"Greedy?"

"Absolutely."

"Cautious?"

"Yes."

"What is his weakness?"

"Dread of publicity."

"Ah!"

There was silence for about a minute, in which Ommony would have given a year's pay for the gift of reading what was in the raja's mind. At the end of it the raja stood up, straightened himself, and salaamed to the dogs with both hands.

"I apologize!" he said with a big grin. "You saved a *faux pas*. You brought me to the fount of wisdom. When you visit me there shall be sheep's bones—and no strychnine!"

He waved his hand jauntily, and started down the rock, awkwardly because of long spurs. Half-way down he turned and called back.

"Downy old dodger! After this you will retire, of course! I will meet you in Paris!"

Ommony ignored the innuendo. In India a man grows used to misinterpretation of his motives. Even if he could have proved, black on white, that Strange had not bribed him the raja would have continued unconvinced.

"Don't take my horse," he warned. "That bay's an old friend."

"A *very* old one—yet fresher than mine!"

"I won't have him ill-treated."

"Pooh! Use him for tiger-bait! That is all he is fit for!"

Ten minutes earlier the raja would have deemed it dangerous to jest in that strain. Now he judged himself a sharer of Ommony's guilty secret, with privileges accordingly. But Ommony relighted his pipe and watched him canter away without letting that disturb him. Nothing need disturb a man, except his enemy find out the truth; the more lies for the enemy to lose himself among the better.

Presently he came down off the rock and rode his rounds as if the day's work in the forest were his sole concern. There was a new fire-lane acutting, and he superintended that, contriving to let the hours slip by without any underlings observing that he was simply squandering time. It was high noon before he headed homeward, and met Jeff Ramsden waiting for him at the lane-end, near the house.

"They've put you on ice," said Jeff. "The raja has been here all morning, and the poor fool thinks he can outwit Strange."

"I think he can, too!" grinned Ommony.

"He has offered to sell Strange his rights in the forest."

"Has money changed hands?"

"No, but the raja has suggested you're corruptible!"

"I am!"

Jeff's ponderous shape encloses an unsubtle mind that detests even the suggestion of dishonesty.

"I could have smashed the brute for hinting it!"

"What did the raja say, for instance?"

"Nothing definite. When Strange suggested you might have objections the brute answered by moving his hand like this, and smiling."

"And Strange?"

"Saw a great light suddenly! It dawned on him the check-book was the key to your position."

"So it is!"

"I'm all at sea," said Jeff. "Are you joking?"

"No. I intend to raid Strange's bank-account as surely as he means to raid my forest. Old fellow, I have sold my soul for a promise by Zelmira Poulakis," said Ommony, grinning. "The forests must redeem me. Out of corruption shall come forth trees."

"This is over my head," Jeff grumbled.

"So shall the trees be in time!"

"Ommony, I warn you: Strange has teeth. Take his money on his terms, and he'll grind you to the ground. Many a man has rued the day he took a——"

Jeff hesitated. Ommony filled in the word.

"—a bribe from him? I'll take blood-money! He and the raja——"

"They're thick as thieves," said Jeff.

"Thick or thick-headed?" asked Ommony.

"Strange is playing with fire made of ennui, debt, and the lure of a gay city. He'll burn his fingers, Jeff, and come to me for salve and bandages. You wait and see."

"I know Strange, and you don't," Jeff answered ambiguously.

CHAPTER VI

"C. O. TO Z. P." "Z. P. TO C. O."

C. O. to Z. P. Hold the fort. Let nothing persuade you to leave the palace until further advice from me. Be sick if necessary. Please feed the dog before sending her back.

In the small, file-littered office behind his bedroom Ommony folded the slip of paper and tucked it under the leather loop inside Diana's collar. Then he pulled out Zelmira's handkerchief and let the hound smell the vague, unusual scent.

"Go quick!" he ordered.

The hound's tail drooped. She detested errands so far away from Ommony, but was too well used to them to hesitate. As if she had been reproved she drew her tail tight under her and slunk out, but broke into a trot the moment she left the house, and within the minute was extended in the long, elastic canter she could hold all day.

Ommony had begun to see daylight through the woods; but the raja was in a quandary. He stayed to lunch, and used every artifice he could invent for decoying Ommony into a *tête-à-tête*. But that astute individual purposed neither to advise him further nor to arouse suspicion by refusing. He could not even be tempted into a corner by the sight of a new, gold-plated pistol.

He was depending on Destiny, in league with the fire "made of ennui, debt, and the lure of a gay city." Prodding at Destiny impatiently is apt to bring the importunist down under the flaming wheels, so his artifices for avoiding private conversation were better invented than the raja's for procuring it. Even the excuse that the stallion was unfit for the journey home availed nothing; while the beast was resting Ommony employed himself among the new plantations on his own horse, and in the end the raja had to ride away on the stallion, uncomforted by wisdom from his host.

Then Ommony took tea on the veranda, under the guns of Strange's arrogant contempt.

"That stuff's the undoing of the English!" Strange volunteered. "They sip tea like old women even in the Bank of England. It's the symbol of England's decadence."

"You think we've fallen far yet?" Ommony asked him.

Strange snorted.

"You're succumbing to the same degeneracy you've imposed on conquered peoples—just as Rome did. That raja's a case for you. Intelligent in a superficial way, like a monkey. I don't doubt his ancestors were *men*, who could seize, administer and keep; they'd *nous* enough to rule. That fellow's delighted like a child with a new toy pistol—spineless—no initiative; he's a product of afternoon tea and English education!"

The light back of Ommony's eyes was of deeper amusement than the outburst seemed to warrant. But Strange by habit scorned

the men he proposed to have the better of, and the strongest are blind when in that mood. It is on written record in Millsville, N. H., that Meldrum Strange at fourteen was turned out of Sunday School for insisting that, if he had been Goliath, not only would he have crushed David at long range with a big rock, but that he would have been right to do it.

"I hate to see the world stand still. Progress!" he insisted. "That's the proper key-note. Progress!"

After dinner that evening he resumed the topic. He was still laying law down, lecturing Ommony on the proper use of opportunity, when Diana slunk up through the shadows to the veranda and lay down at Ommony's feet. She was so quiet that not even Jeff observed her. The other dogs took no notice. Ommony slid his hand down to feel for a message in the loop under the collar, found what he expected, snatched it out, and shouted in Tamil:

"Boy! Bring the flash-light!"

"Care to come, Jeff?" he asked, explaining nothing but leading the dog by the collar, away from Strange, around the corner of the veranda to where a side-door, seldom used, provided access near the bathroom. The servant brought the flash-light.

"Warm water in a hurry!" Ommony commanded.

"Blood!" said Jeff, fingering the dog's shoulder.

"I thought at first it was a blow from a leopard," said Ommony, "but you see, there's a hole in here, and out there. It must have left off bleeding some time ago. No serious damage. Hurts her though."

Diana whimpered as Ommony fingered the loose skin above her powerful shoulders.

"Bullet undoubtedly," said Jeff.

"Might be a thirty-two. Did you notice a weapon of that bore this afternoon?"

"The raja's gold-plated toy!"

"Exactly!" Nobody else near this forest owns a thirty-two. That rascally raja suspected her of carrying a message; Diana's notorious, ain't you, old lady! And he's a good shot with a pistol, —— his eyes!"

"It was a close call for the dog," said Jeff, examining the wound.

"As close for me, I think! Let's see what the message says."

He read it by the bathroom night-lamp, holding Diana with one hand to keep her quiet, while the servant held a flash-light and Jeff syringed out the wound, the dog whimpering.

Z. P. to C. O. Am sitting tight. Chullunder Ghose met him in forest and told about Strange liking to shoot tigers. Chullunder Ghose says that may open Panch Mahal, but I don't understand what he means. Will be very sick if necessary. Please meet Charley at noon tomorrow at the look-out rock. He will ride the horse you left here. Chullunder Ghose says the raja has no funds. Shall I lend?

"No, no, no!" said Ommony, so that Jeff looked up, whereat Ommony took the scissors and clipped carefully.

"There, old lady; you'll be all right in a few days."

He stuffed the note in his pocket and scratched his chin, grinning.

"It beats the Dutch," he said, "the way Dame Destiny arranges things. Strange goes from here to the Panch Mahal. That's a little old-fashioned palace twenty miles from Chota Pegu, where rajas hold high revel on occasion. It means 'the play-place of the ladies.'"

"Gosh!" said Jeff.

"Two tuts! The tiger shooting's often very good there. Caretakers have kept the place from ruin, but it hasn't been used often in the last ten years."

"Any personal risk for Strange?" Jeff asked, acutely conscious of being on Strange's pay-roll.

"Prodigious I should say, it means Zelmira marries him!"

In spite of his quarrelsome mood Strange presently wearied of sitting alone, and came blustering in to see what they were doing. Diana, in no sweet mood herself, showed him a glimpse of her fangs.

"Place looks like a butcher-shop!" he snorted, and blustered out again.

"Thought so!" said Ommony.

"Thought what?"

"I have what you'd call the dope on him. Men who want to save the world by system and tyranny are all alike. Everything's impersonal until it applies to him personally—blood in a bathroom included."

"Exactly. That's why I'd rather resign and then lick him!" said Jeff. "Do him good!"

"No. Save him for Zelmira! That's *her* job. Besides, you see, she has bought my soul!" Ommony answered, grinning his pleasantest.

JEFF had utterly ceased to enjoy his visit. A stickler for loyalty all his life long, he hated to lend a hand against Strange, but hated at least equally the thought of Strange accepting Ommony's hospitality and using the man's very roof as a cover for intrigue. Ommony's loyalty to the forest and the job appealed to Jeff; Strange's greed and arrogance disgusted him; but worse than either, he despised himself for not knowing what to do about it. Ommony divined the situation pretty accurately.

"Are Strange's love-affairs your business?" he asked, cleaning out the syringe.

"No, and by gad, I'm not his valet!"

"What *is* your job?"

"I'm his partner in business—salaried partner. He owns control and can vote me out, any time he sees fit."

"Stick to business, then."

"I'll have to warn him to pull out of this, then."

Ommony grinned again.

"I wish you would! If you'll stick strictly to business, and leave him to paddle his love-canoe, there'll be no accidents."

So Jeff recovered his good-humor, and when bed-time came he followed Strange into his room and sat there for an hour, while Ommony, remaining with his pipe on the veranda, caught fragments of a violent debate, in between the pauses of his own conversation with two men, who wore no clothes, and did not trespass on to the veranda, but spoke like dark goblins from the shadow beyond the flower-bed.

"You're a natural-born employee! You can't see things on a big scale!"

"I see more than you imagine! I'm warning you."

"You've osseous formations on the occiput! Bone and beef aren't brain! How d'you suppose I made millions? By being afraid of things? You and this man Ommony would make a pair in double-harness! Go to bed."

"All right. I've said my say, and you won't listen. I tell you again, you're wrong. D'you want my resignation?"

"No, you ass! When I want that I'll tell you quick enough. You're a first-class detail man—a perfect child when it comes to visualizing. Turn in and sleep off your fears!"

Jeff came glooming out on the way to his tent, and sat down for a minute beside Ommony; and once again, as the pipe-ash glowed and dimmed, Ommony divined the wise remark to offer:

"You see, you're a bit too big to quit in the middle of it all. I've depended on you all along to go to the Panch Mahal with Strange and see him through it."

"I'm dumb from now on!" Jeff retorted, and shoving his pipe in his pocket, strode discontentedly to bed. Ommony sat still on the veranda for half an hour, chuckling at intervals.

Next morning only the servants saw him, for he breakfasted alone and thereafter rode to the new plantations, superintending precautions against drought until it was nearly noon and time to keep the appointment with Charley Mears. He was seated up on the look-out rock when Charley came galloping down the glade, and Charley, squinting at lights and half-lights, climbed up to sit beside him.

"I was afraid you wouldn't get the message," Charley began when he had his breath. "The raja said he saw your dog limping along as if some one had shot her. He sent out men to hunt for any one with a firearm who might have done it."

"In America you call that 'bull,'" Ommony answered. "Here it's known as eye-wash. He shot the dog, but she got home."

"How do you know that?"

Ommony whistled. Two black, naked shadows emerged from the trees and stood bathed in the sun.

"Those men saw it. They came last night and told me."

He whistled again, and the *junglis* disappeared.

"Well I'm ——!" muttered Charley.

"No. The raja is. It's too bad poor old Di got hurt, but she'll recover, and the raja won't. For doing that, he shall have his own way and go to Paris, where the last state of that raja will be worse than the first. Do you know Paris, Charley? There are professionals there, male and female, who can squeeze a raja dry in shorter time than it takes you and me to squeeze a lemon. Thereafter, the ash-heap! He's a nuisance here."

"Too bad it'll be his subjects' money."

"No. Strange's money!"

"I don't get you."

"Strange will! And Zelmira will get him, if she plays her hand wisely. There's only one link missing now. What did you come to talk to me about?"

"Nothing serious," said Charley. "There's a box on the way from Delhi, addressed to me in your care. Do you mind paying the charges on it and arranging for me to get it somehow?"

Ommony filled his pipe and lit it carefully before he answered. He likes to suppress excitement. He crowded it down the way he put tobacco in, making sure none protruded.

"I believe I'll be delighted," he said then. "Is it bad manners to ask what's in the box?"

"My motion picture outfit."

"Any film?"

"Scads of it."

Ommony's out-going breath, smoke-burdened, bore a prayer of thanks into the Infinite.

"The last link! Charley, you shall have that box if I have to set it on my own head, and carry it on foot, alone, all the way across the forest to Chota Pegu! What did the gods look like who put that thought into your head?"

"She's a goddess. Zelmira suggested I should ship it before we left Delhi," Charley answered. "She's as mad about movies as the rest of 'em."

"Whom Allah hath made mad let none offend!" answered Ommony, piously quoting scripture.

CHAPTER VII

"A key to destiny!"

THERE were days after that when Strange fretted, and the problem was to distract him from a too quick move, that might have been equally advantageous for Ommony, who held all trumps, but none the less fatal to Zelmira Poulakis. And Ommony considered her his partner now to be considered only less than the forest.

The old disease that had rioted unchecked in Strange for forty years, lulled for a while by his new great scheme to be the world's arch-sleuth, had broken out anew with three-fold virulence. Attain! Acquire! Possess! Exploit! Then on to something else! It boiled in his veins—set his brain on fire. It was all so easy! All a man needed was the money and initiative—that, and the gift of recognizing opportunity.

The only immediate outlet for his surging energy was the forest, so he began to butcher game. The slaughtered buck meant no more to him than yesterday when it is past. Blood-lust was not in him. He recoiled from carcasses, cared nothing for the trophies, only ached to demonstrate his own ability and feel the power that fed.

Blood on his hands disgusted him; it was all too personal. When his clothes were soiled he changed them, and returned for more hunting. He was not cruel in the ordinary sense; he killed clean, or when he failed to kill, kept after the wounded beast until he had it. But the power to kill was his, and he used it, stoking the fires beneath that other power, to have, that he intended to use too.

Jeff protested on occasion, for he was a big-game hunter born.

"If I don't, some one will," Strange answered. "Life's like that. Take, or it shall be taken from you, even that which you have. I've neglected this part of my education. You've neglected business. The result is I've got millions to your thousands, but you're the better shot. I'll learn this. You cultivate your head!"

Ommony knew what was going on, but had no time to interfere, nor much inclination. The game had to be sacrificed on the forest altar. Nature, left alone, would restore the balance presently. He had the big victory to plan for. This butchery was an affair of outposts, not beneath his notice, but insufficient to distract him from the main plan. However, it did not reduce his grim determination to make the ultimate defeat of Meldrum Strange a rout, and if he once had thought of offering quarter, that sweet reasonableness vanished. The devil, that in varying percentage lives in every human, had Cottswold Ommony by the heart-strings; nor was its grip loosened in the least by knowledge that Strange had sent to Bombay for money in large quantities, and that the money had arrived.

So he himself sent a telegram and then rode to interview the raja; but this time instead of waiting at the outer gate for the usual rigamrole, he sent in a note, and rode away to a clearing near the forest edge, where the masonry of an ancient well was crumbling to decay. There he dismounted and waited, peering curiously into and around the well, as if he had expected something, and presently was satisfied. He did not wait long; there was that in his note that had not suggested dalliance.

The raja came cantering, and drew rein just in sight of him, then advanced at a walk, endeavoring to look at ease with all the world and his own thoughts. The result was an absurd mixture of nerves and indifference, whose effect was heightened by the extravagant gesture with which he threw away a half-smoked cigaret.

"Shall we ride together?" he suggested.

"Sit here," said Ommony, laying his hand on the stone-work of the ruined well.

The raja immensely disliked receiving orders, but an open quarrel would have been no convenient thing to have on hand at that crisis of his affairs; he dismounted with an ill-grace, threw his reins over a tree-stump, and sat down with arms folded.

"Well?" he asked. "What?"

"Have you your pistol with you?"

"No."

"You're mistaken. It's in that side-pocket."

The raja muttered an exclamation. It was easy enough to guess what he would have liked to do.

"Uh! My servant put it there, eh? The fool must have thought——"

"May I see it?" asked Ommony.

There was no alternative. As resentfully as a boy caught stealing apples, the raja produced the gold-plated thing, butt-end first. Ommony took it, glanced at it, and dropped it down the well, with his other hand preventing the raja from peering down after it. The well must have been either deep or empty. There came no sound of the pistol's reaching bottom.

"You won't shoot my dog again with that, at all events.

"I did nothing of the kind——"

"I have the dog to prove it, and two witnesses. Shall we ask the dog to settle the point? She's not fit to run yet, but I can have her carried over; or you may come to my place, and we'll know in a minute who's telling the truth."

The raja showed his teeth and chewed the end of his mustache. Then he glanced to right and left. There were no witnesses.

"The beast was being used to carry messages from spies on me!" he snarled. "How dare you do that?" he demanded.

"I dare worse. I dare charge you with plotting to sell this forest to Meldrum Strange without as much as notifying the Government of your intention! But I'll be satisfied with throwing your pistol down the well, provided!"

"What?"

"Provided you're reasonable too."

THE raja glanced to right and left again. The only audience were the horses. Rage had him by the throat; but princes in these drab, degenerate days are worse off than beggars, in that a beggar need have no master. He choked the rage down with an effort, and forced a smile.

"Well, all right then, we're quits. I did shoot your infernal dog, and that well's deep, confound you! But look here, Ommony, old boy, I *must* have money, and the *shroffs* won't lend."

"I understand you've told Strange I'm corruptible," said Ommony.

The raja glared.

"He told you that? He lies! He——"

"Oh no, he didn't lie."

The enemy's mistakes win the victor's battle. The astonishing thought that Strange—not Ramsden—had betrayed him to Ommony more unmanned the raja than a thrashing would have done; and Ommony was quick to seize advantage.

"What a fool you are to trust a stranger, and betray an old friend," he said indignantly. "I've been your friend through thick and thin. I've backed you against the priests, against the central government, against your creditors—against yourself! You've never set a foot wrong when you listened to me. Your revenue is nearly double what it was. You've received a coveted honor on my recommendation. You know as well as I do that my one concern is this forest. And you reward friendship by trying to undo my life's work! What do you think would happen if Strange should ever get a foot-hold here?"

Now the raja traced his ancestry so far back into the dawn of time, and was so inbred—lest the royal strain should be defiled—that European kings were vulgar riff-raff by comparison. And that is a condition that begets a point of view. The ancientry arose within him.

"What do I care? Who are you, you foreigner!" he snorted, "to come here and meddle? The land and the forest are mine—you hear me? mine! You English are thieves, that's all—thieves who will be kicked out presently, those of you who are not dead with——"

"With our boots on," Ommony suggested. "Let's not worry about after that. Until then, is the problem. Until the Powers hoist my number I'm forest guardian, and you've me to deal with. Now then. What are you going to do?"

The raja confessed to himself, at any rate, that he did not know, and his face told Ommony the tale. That is a state of mind that jumps at ready-made solutions.

"What you thought of doing was to sell to Meldrum Strange alleged forest rights, that are doubtful to put it mildly, and to leave him to fight through the courts for the title. That's dishonest. Why don't you sell him something you do own?"

"For instance?"

"Do you own the Panch Mahal?"

The rajah scowled. That was another property on which the *shroffs* would not lend one rupee, not because the raja's heritage was doubtful, but because the priests of the temple of Siva in Chota Pegu claimed a lien on it. There was no pretense of its being a legal lien, only one of those theoretical and subtly enforced claims that the church in all ages and all climes has maintained irresistibly.

"You know what the priests say."

"What can they do?" demanded Ommony.

"Dogs! I won't go near them! They avoid my court. They set the rabble against me. They have me hooted in the streets. They deny me caste. I will make no overtures to that swarm of cankering worms!"

Pride of that sort is impregnable by direct assault, but more susceptible to flank attack than an over-extended speculator.

"Chullunder Ghose has no pride," Ommony remarked, as if to the blue sky, apropos of nothing.

That set the raja thinking on a new line. He would have loved to cheat the priests—to double-cross and laugh at them; but he did not dare attempt that; the priests' power is too subtle and far-reaching, as well as ruthless. Pride, that is sweeter than success, restrained him from an open bargain with them. Poverty—extravagance—the distant lights of *La Ville Lumière* impelled. Chullunder Ghose was a rogue with brains, who would serve any master who paid him well enough. Strange *vs.* Priests of Siva would be a game worth while for the Pantheon of Heaven to come and watch!

Ommony, watching the raja as a salesman studies his prospect, judged his time and struck.

"I'm against Strange," he said frankly, leaning back against the masonry with both hands in his pockets. "You'd better sell him the Panch Mahal, and stick to your old friends."

"Will you not prevent my selling him the Panch Mahal?"

"Why should I?"

"Will you help me against the priests?"

"It's against British policy to interfere in religious matters. You must manage them yourself. Perhaps the priests may make first overtures. They're omniscient, you know. They read thoughts. They're always forehanded. You won't have to eat humble pie if they come to you first."

"I must think this over," said the raja.

"Do."

"And Madame Poulakis?"

"For the moment leave her out of it."

"How can I? She is becoming a nuisance. I can not invite Strange to the palace while she is there, and she has begun to have sick headaches. She complains she is too unwell to travel."

"Keep Strange away, then. Take him to the Panch Mahal."

"But I can't go away and leave her in the palace."

"Why not?"

"It is unthinkable."

"Try to think it. She's a gentle-woman. You can't be rude to her."

The raja hesitated, then took two steps and stood in front of Ommony with arms folded.

"Tell me what she is doing here!" he said. "Chullunder Ghose persuaded me I might reap advantage from her visit. When I ask her why she came, she laughs; and the *babu* swears he's afraid to tell what her business is. Am I being made a catspaw in some scheme?"

"I'd let the *babu* manage that, if I were you."

"That rascal!"

"You took his advice in the first place. Carry on! You've never failed when you took my advice. Go home and think it over!"

The raja snapped his fingers with irritation, chewed at his mustache a moment, scowled, swore irresolutely, scowled again, glanced once at Ommony, who met his eyes

good-humoredly, kicked at a stone, and made his mind up.

"I will try the luck a last time. All or nothing! I will carry on. Ommony, old boy, if you've misled me this time——"

HE LEFT the nature of the threat to be imagined, mounted, and rode away, glancing back twice swiftly over-shoulder, as if to catch Ommony's expression unalert and so divine his secret mood. But he was out of sight before a peacock-colored turban arose slowly from within the well, and a full, fat face beneath it surveyed the scene cautiously.

"*Sahib*, choose new assignation spot! Standing on six-inch ledge, holding with fingers of one hand, with drop into watery bowels of underworld the penalty for least slip, is Grand Guignol sensation!"

"Why not hold on with both hands?" Ommony asked without looking round.

"Needed one for pistol, which *sahib* dumped. Self was dumpee. Said very valuable weapon fell on this *babu*. Having caught same, could not move purpose of disposal within clothing. *Verb. sap.* Am emasculated—very!"

He climbed out over the rim of the well and stretched himself painfully, one section at a time.

"Am creased like old kerosene can! Yow! I need hammer to out-flatten me!"

"Did you hear what was said?" Ommony asked, lighting his pipe, and not even looking at him sidewise.

The *babu* sat down cross-legged on a broken stone to one side of the well, where he was least conspicuous, and proceeded to examine the pistol. He faced away from Ommony. Their conversation might have been directed to the empty air.

"Unlike regal artillery, am not gold-plated. Oh no, very far from it. Am impoverished person. Nevertheless, resembling gun in other matters, I go off when safety-catch is released and trigger pressed—thus. Yow! I did not know it was loaded!"

"Hurt yourself?"

"No."

"Answer my question then."

"All things on this plane are relative and governed by desire. How much did the *sahib* wish me to hear?"

"What *did* you hear?"

"Acoustic properties of well are excellent."

"Can you take a hint?"

"On paper is easiest, *sahib*—with signature of executive of bank of issue!"

"Get your pay from your employer."

"*Sahib*, it is difficult for untitled and impecunious *babu* to obtain permit to carry firearms. Now if influential *sahib*——"

"Should demand the pistol back," suggested Ommony.

"Will try again! There are but five shots left in magazine, plus one empty cartridge, which might be refilled by expedient person in emergency. Sale of ammunition to this *babu* being *ultra vires* of inspected commerce, *sahib* in his magnanimity might——"

"Better take the hint," suggested Ommony. "If I heard too much talk about pistols I might begin to look for one."

"Ah dear me!"

"Have you made the acquaintance of the priests?"

"Have accumulated glamor of much sanctity."

"Well? What are you waiting for?"

"Emolument!"

"I tell you I'm not your employer."

"Oh no! You are only person who can send me on red stallion through forest full of tigers, accompanied by cannibals,* who drive me before them, replacing me on back of said terrifying stallion when I frequently fall off! You are unconnected person, who can nevertheless compel me to cling by toe- and finger-nails to wall of snakesome well. Not my employer! Nevertheless, this *babu* awaits emolument."

But Ommony knew better. Fifty rupees from him would have made the *babu* as undependable as a dog that is bribed to obey.

"Get on or get out!" ordered Ommony. "I can manage well without you."

"Is gratitude always *ex post facto?* May not generosity cast its shadow in advance?" the *babu* grumbled.

"It's getting late," said Ommony. "Suppose you walk to the palace and present my compliments to Madame Poulakis. Ask, if her head doesn't ache too much if she'd care to meet me in the grounds."

The *babu* sighed, salaamed, and waddled off. Ommony gave him ample time to get out of sight, then mounted and rode

*There is a rather widely spread but wholly false belief held by town-bred Indians to the effect that the jungle natives are cannibals.

slowly after him for a quarter of a mile, in order to make sure he had not doubled back to watch him through the trees. However, he saw the broad back continuing in the right direction; and a back tells more than some men's faces; the *babu's* air was businesslike, and Ommony turned again, contented.

He rode into the forest by a trail not often used, pulled out his watch, whistled, peered about him, cantered for a mile or so along a glade, found rising ground, and ascending that, at last saw what he was looking for. A thing of many legs, like a prehistoric monster, passed slowly over a rise a mile beyond him, moving his way. He sat down then and waited until he heard grunts, complaints and quarreling; but before their source appeared in sight he mounted and rode back slowly toward the well.

He had not dared wait. He had done a miracle. He had persuaded sixteen *junglis*, to whom toil at anything but hunting is a worse contemplation than hunger, to carry a load to him across the forest and they are literal-minded folk. They would have dropped the load and run away, if they had found him anywhere before the journey's end. So he sat down by a stone hut with an iron roof, that he himself had built years ago to hold tools, when planting was in progress thereabouts. The hut was almost hidden in the trees and undergrowth, and the padlock had rusted into uselessness, but he smashed that and put a new one in its place.

Then the *junglis* came, weary beyond belief, thin-legged and all new to the exercise, carrying shoulder-high a big box lashed in the midst of four poles. He praised them, promising that the devils of the jungle should impose no more red-sickness for seven years, and rewarded them fabulously from the contents of his saddle-bag. Each bewildered one received, when the box was safely in the hut, a brand-new, glittering, imported knife, whose blade would actually fold into the handle. Each knife had a ring on it, to hang it to a fellow's neck by, and a bright brass chain through the ring. It was incredible; but there the knives were, and they ran lest the devils should see, and envy them, and make new sorts of trouble.

No need to warn them not to talk. Only Ommony in all that forest could converse with them. They understood not more than ten words in any other language than their own decayed Lemurian.

With the key of the hut in his pocket Ommony rode on to the palace, and was admitted this time by a side-gate, since there was nothing official about his call. Zelmira with Charley in attendance waited for him in an open-sided Summer-house in the midst of three acres of neglected garden. There was no chance of eavesdropping, but they themselves were easily visible from the palace windows.

"What's that?" asked Charley.

"A key to Destiny! Your box is in a hut I'll show you. Have you developers?"

"Plenty."

"Can you overcome the mechanical difficulties?"

Ommony spoke calmly, but fear was creeping up his back. Knowing nothing of the nature of the difficulties, he had not even imagined any until that moment, when it dawned on him like the knell of disaster that a reel of film might be unmanageable without extensive apparatus.

"I don't know," said Charley, "I've spent part of two years figuring out a kit that would serve in emergencies. It's all in that box. The hardest job is washing and drying. But I've got a collapsible drum to wind the stuff on. If there's scads of decent water, cool enough—"

"There's a perennial spring of cool water within fifty yards of where your box is," Ommony assured him. "It flows over clean rock, rather slowly."

Charley nodded. That was settled. But now another dread took Ommony by the throat, so that he coughed.

"Have you a projector?"

"Bet your life! No use developing film on the spot unless you can test it and see what you're doing."

Ommony laughed outright.

"What's the joke?"

"It's on Strange!"

"I think it's on me," said Zelmira. "I'm feeling so well I could walk twenty miles, and I have to play sick with my head in a shawl! I want to ride, and dance, and sing, and be alive, but I have to pretend that even the phonograph makes my head ache! The raja's hints that I've been here long enough are getting positively rude."

"That nabob will have his head punched presently!" said Charley, nodding confirmation.

"Faint heart never won fair plutocrat!" laughed Ommony. "Stick it out, madame! The raja will change his tune from now on. Strange goes to the Panch Mahal within a day or two. Then everything depends on you. I'll have a parson in attendance."

"So quick?"

"Surely. Strange needs distraction, or he'll murder everything on four legs and cut down all the trees in the universe! Charley, I want you to look over that kit of yours and foresee every possible chance of accident. We can't afford one *faux pas*."

Charley promised that, and they went into session of agenda, ways and means, Zelmira bubbling laughter and Charley exploding approval at intervals, as Ommony unfolded all his plan.

"It's a sizzling scheme!" said Charley.

"And if it goes wrong it's only another scandal in high life!" Zelmira added, chuckling mischievously.

"If it misses one cog, Amen to my career!" said Ommony, not copying the fabled ostriches that stick their heads in sand. He liked to face all issues.

"The safe bet is," said Charley, "Strange won't dream any one would try to put that over on him. He's so used to people being scared of him, he'll try to bluster, and make it worse."

"Well, let's hope!" said Ommony; and then, as darkness fell, he went to interview the raja.

HE FOUND him *tête-à-tête* with the *babu*, on a side-veranda, facing the other way from the Summer-house. Chullunder Gohse was squatting on the floor near the raja's feet, catching a purple handkerchief between his toes, as he let it fall and pulled it back repeatedly in sign of nervousness. They were conversing in English, as a precaution against eaves-dropping, and because each understood that language better than he did the other's; but all Ommony overheard was—

"They are worse than money-lenders!"

"True, mighty one, they are priests! They will take no less."

"Curse them!"

"This *babu*, sympathizing with your highness, curses them devoutly! Nevertheless—shall I not say—fifty-fifty? Yes?"

"May gangrene rot them! Yes."

"And my honorarium?"

"Here—take this—there's some one coming—go away—hurry!"

The *babu* slunk into the shadows, stowing paper-money into some recess between his stomach and loin-cloth.

"Oh, hullo Ommony, old boy, I'm glad to see you," said the raja. "Are you feeling sprightly and full of the old corn and all that kind of thing? What do you say to a ride through the jungle tonight to your place? Dinner and forty winks, then up like Gay Lochinvar and to —— with caution! I'd like to ride with you, and call on Strange at breakfast."

"Suits me well," said Ommony. "You've done your thinking then?"

"Yes,——! Those lousy priests want everything! They won't sell their claim or release it. They offer to say nothing for the present on a fifty-fifty basis."

"Will they *do* anything?" asked Ommony.

"That's just what puzzles me," said the raja. "They sent that *babu* to say they'd do anything in reason. They don't know what reason is, confound them! I don't know what they mean, or what you mean either! You must be a wizard! How have you contrived to make priests offer to do anything?"

"I haven't been near them," said Ommony truthfully.

"You've had correspondence then."

"No."

"You've threatened them."

"No. I don't interfere with priests."

"I wish you'd let *me* alone as religiously! Well: the priests know everything in advance as usual; and as usual I'm the only one in the dark—the reigning raja! Huh! Why don't you take me into your confidence?"

"I will when my dog recovers."

That rebuke having reduced the raja to glowering silence, Ommony pursued the advantage.

"It's enough for you to know there's nothing legal in the priests' claim; but I advise you to mention it to Strange and to tell him it isn't legal and can't be enforced in court. If Strange asks me, I'll confirm that. Represent to Strange that if he buys the Panch Mahal and pays you cash for it, then you'll consider the forest deal, but not otherwise. I'll admit to him, if necessary, that as a property-owner he'll have a better leg to stand on when it comes to arguing with the Government. Now, are we

agreed? Then good; we'll start after midnight, in time to reach my place for breakfast."

CHAPTER VIII

"And now for the really difficult part!"

"Apprends-moi z'à parler,
Apprends-moi la manière
Comment l'amour se fait!"

OMMONY liked himself in the guise of good Dan Cupid, and as he rode through the forest beside the raja the trees and rocks re-echoed to his song. All he needed was a stringed instrument of some kind to make him look like an old-time wandering troubadour. His voice was ordinary, but his instinct for the music true. His short, not too well ordered beard, and a way of throwing back his sturdy shoulders as he sang, with face toward the tree-tops, made him seem hardly of this day and generation. Moonlight in the clearings, gleaming on bridle, his gray shirt, and the bare skin where the shirt lay open at the neck, touched him with romance and annoyed the raja beyond reasonableness.

"You'll attract wild beasts," he objected.

"Yes, I seem to do that naturally. You and Strange, for instance! Problem is to tame you. Can't be done by cruelty. World's already full of brute force. Marry Mars to Venus, and produce what? Trees!"

"I often think you're crazy," said the raja.

"And you're right. We all are. The least crazy of us are the keepers of the rest. We're Adams, loose in Eden, and we'll get kicked out unless we 'tend to business."

That being over the raja's head—for there is no romance and no true vision left in men on the descending arc of the Wheel—he lapsed into moody silence, wishing the stars between the tree-tops were the lights of Paris, and that Ommony's intermittent singing might be conjured into cabaret revelry. He hated the night, and the loneliness.

Ommony revelled in it—had not known the feel of loneliness since the early days, when the forest swallowed him whole and began his education. And a pair of *junglis*, flitting in and out among the shadows, peering this and that way on the *qui vive* for marauding animals, believed that Ommony was some old god incarnated—his song the echo of the splendor of another world. So do opinions differ, on all sorts of subjects, with the point of view. By the time they reached Ommony's house on the edge of the forest the raja was bordering on homicidal frenzy.

However, Ommony was feeling at his best, which was the main thing. Adam in Eden never managed the assembled creatures better. He put Strange in good humor by saying wealth must have been imposed on him for inscrutable reasons by Providence.

"There's nothing inscrutable about it," answered Strange. "We're given brains; and if we use them we get wealth. That's all there is to it."

But Ommony was not disturbing heresies that morning. When they finished breakfast he led Strange to the veranda.

"You'll need your brains," he said, "if you really mean business with that raja. He has been trying to get hints from me as to how to handle you."

"Bah! All he wants is money," Strange retorted. "Western degenerates are exactly like him. First they try to borrow. When that fails they sell out. There isn't a creative atom in them."

He paused, and looked at Ommony with slightly changed perspective. So Ommony was coming over, was he? Tipping off the raja how to make the right approach, eh? Hah! He had seen that happen scores of times. A government official, bound by oath of office to present an impregnable front, knows better than any one where the flank is weakest. Same old game, eh? Show the line of least resistance surreptitiously, and trust to be rewarded afterward.

"I'll remember!" he said, nodding. "Does the raja want to talk to me?"

So Strange and the raja walked off together, out of ear-shot of a world that might put false constructions on a simple stroke of business. Jeff, on the veranda, smoked in ponderous disgruntlement, admiring nothing not above-board and branded with its proper name. Ommony opened his mail, and studied it until Strange came to interview him in the office, with an unlighted cigar projecting upward from the left side of his mouth—a symptom Jeff recognized.

"Is there any doubt about the title to the Panch Mahal?" Strange asked abruptly.

"None," said Ommony.

"The raja says the priests of some temple or other assert a claim to it under a verbal

deed of gift, said to have been made by one of this man's ancestors."

"It isn't legal. They couldn't establish it in court."

"If I should buy the place, what *could* they do?"

"Depends on your state of mind. If you're nervous or superstitious——"

"Me!" Strange snorted. "Is that all? No risk of riots?"

"Oh no."

"Any risk of the central government objecting?"

"Why should they? It's the raja's private property. If you buy it, it's yours."

"Will you witness the cash payment and memorandum of agreement?"

"I don't mind."

So Jeff and the raja were summoned into the little file-decked office, and a heap of paper-money changed hands that made the raja's eyes glisten in spite of himself, and whetted an amazing appetite for more.

"Bought sight unseen," said Strange. "Now I'll look the place over. You say it's furnished?"

The rajah nodded.

"How soon can we go?"

"I've only one fresh horse," said Ommony "If the raja's horse is fit for the return journey, he might show you the way at once. Jeff and I can bring along your bag later, if that suits you."

The raja was not given to considering horse-flesh. Strange considered nothing but his own objective. They two left within the hour, the raja chattering to Strange like a schoolboy trying to entertain the principal on a picnic.

"How shall we follow without horses?" Jeff demanded. "Yours is dog-tired, and the sore-backed one in the stable isn't up to my weight."

But the resources of him who overlords an Indian forest are more ample than appears. Ommony gave orders, and a man went like the wind. Within the hour there came an elephant, that knelt at the foot of the veranda steps, and into the howdah went Strange's bag, and Jeff's, and Ommony's, along with food enough for several days' emergency. Two servants draped themselves in picturesque discomfort on the great brute's rump. Jeff and Ommony piled in with rifles and shot-guns, and word began to spread in widening rings that the *sahibs* were off on a hunting trip. The mahout exploded harsh impulse; the mountain moved; the howdah swayed; and they were off.

Men carry their emotions with them, and they are more contagious than disease. There is nothing about a ride on the back of an old cow-elephant to bring good-humor and amusement to the surface, nor yet to drown them under gloom. Ommony's high spirits shone forth and aroused Jeff to a similar frame of mind. The trap was sprung at last. The forest-devouring ogre had wallowed in. He was jubilant, and in a half-hour Jeff was singing too, trolling out deep bass harmonies that made the mahout and the servants, clinging like apes on perches, thrill and stir until they nearly fell to earth. All India loves a deep voice and a man of muscle.

And because sleep is less an anodyne than a result of poise and the relapse of worry—midway swing of the pendulum, as it were—Ommony fell asleep after a time, curled up with his legs over the howdah side, dreaming of things a man can't imagine except at sea, or on the heaving top of an elephant. Bed is a lair of commonplace. Sleep under moving skies, amid experience, and learn! He had a new eye—new confidence when he awoke, having dreamt he saw the wheels and works of Destiny.

HE LEFT the elephant resting in the shade of teak trees near the raja's palace wall, and entered through the side gate into the garden where he found Zelmira in the Summer-house.

"Quick!" he said, laughing. "Nets and cords! Your biggest veil, and best foot forward! Tiger's in the trap!"

She ran to her room and came back with head and shoulders wrapped in an enormous motor-veil. You could hardly see her smiles through it, but the thrill was obvious.

"Where's Charley?" Ommony demanded.

"He's hopeless. Since the box came he is like a dog with a bone. Nothing else matters. He's deserted me."

"Good boy, Charley. We'll pick him up en route."

They climbed on the protesting elephant who argued reasonably that forty miles and a day's work were the same thing. But the iron ankus overruled protest, and by the time they picked up Charley at the tool-hut the elephant had decided to swing along

and get the journey over with. Conversation became next to impossible, as the howdah swung like a small boat in a sea-way and the dusty track paid out behind.

"Is the machine in shape?" asked Ommony.

"I've fixed her so she—whoops! Look out!"

Charley hung over-side in the spasms of *mal de mer*, and there was no more conversation to be had from him, except once when he demanded to walk. But when they stopped and let him down he had grown so weak that even with a rope to hold he could not trot alongside; so they had to pick him up again and let him sprawl and suffer.

"What's your rush?" he demanded through a haze of vertigo. But the explanation was wasted on him; he did not even try to listen to it.

"We've got to keep Strange in. Scare him."

"He'll pick a quarrel with the raja, when he learns where I'm staying!" Zelmira prophesied.

"So much the better. The raja's out of it now. Paris and the white lights for him until the money's spent!"

Ommony, not all wise—only wise enough to know the probability of guessing wrong—spoke with more assurance than he felt. He had noticed the glint in the raja's eye when the money changed hands; he understood the lure of that stuff and the risk of treachery. He was silent for the last hour while the elephant, complaining of aching feet, deliberately made the howdah lurch to inconvenience her living burden.

Even the servants were feeling seasick when, at dusk, the walls of the Panch Mahal came in view, with clouds of screaming parokeets swooping between them and the setting sun. There, by a big tree out of sight of the gate, they all got down except Zelmira, taking out all the luggage except Strange's bag.

"Take it to him, as if it were the most natural thing in the world," said Ommony; and Zelmira laughed down from the howdah.

"If he doesn't ask where you're staying, volunteer the information."

The elephant moved on, seeming to swim in golden dust against the sunset glow, with walls of opal for a background. Men built a gorgeous cage for their beloved in the days when that Panch Mahal first rose among primeval trees. At evening it resembles a pearl of prodigious price well set in emerald greenery. Its roofs are domes; its walls aged color, stained, softened and subdued until the whole is lovelier than oyster-shells on wet sea-beaches. The screaming of parokeets pierced but failed to break the silence; and in that stillness the elephant's tired foot-fall sounded like the beat of muffled drums.

Dame Destiny was at her task, but Ommony proposed to watch her, she being a jade who works her will regardless of laggards. "Here's opportunity," she seems to say, and passes on, recalling nothing, changing nothing of her plan, ignoring prayer, not even pausing in her path to laugh at those who clutched and missed. So he is wise who waits alert.

Ommony took the wall and followed that, a shadow casting shadow on the opal, going softly until he reached the corner of the high, projecting gate-arch, where the branches of tall trees overhanging from within combined with the gloaming to make impenetrable gloom.

The elephant was kneeling in the road before the gate. The mahout hammered on old wood with his ankus-butt, and the blows rang out like pistol-shots, disturbing parokeets by thousands, sending them screaming in green clouds. But for a long, long time there was no answer. Then, when Ommony, imagining miscues, had thought of all the accidents that might have happened, and knew for certain Strange had gone elsewhere—and the forest was doomed—and his own career was ended—Strange himself came, not to the door but angrily looking down from above it through an opening in the arch.

"Who are you?" he growled. "What are you breaking down the door for?"

Then his quarreling eye observed a lady on an elephant, and there was pause. He stood still like a baron up above his own portcullis, with stomach thrust out easily over the belt and one hand stroking at his black beard.

"Who are you? "he demanded at last, a second time.

"I've brought your bag. I was asked to," Zelmira called back, grateful for the light behind her that made her no more than a silhouette.

"I can't see your face."

"You're not intended to. That's why I'm veiled."

"Your voice sounds familiar."

"Hadn't you better come down and get your bag?"

"How does it happen you're bringing it?"

"Mr. Ommony asked me to."

"Where's *he?*"

"Down the road. He thought I'd get here sooner. Won't you come down for the bag?"

There were supposed to be servants—caretakers anyhow—somewhere in the building. But even Strange was hardly crude enough to keep her waiting while he should go in search of them, and then find the raja and get his command interpreted. He grumbled something half under his breath, and started down. Ommony withdrew deeper into the dark angle of the wall.

After a minute's fumbling at the gate-bolts Strange emerged, and with his chin thrust out and upward—eyes half-closed because of the last rays of sunset—laid a hand on the howdah.

"I can't see you through that veil," he said testily.

"You should know me without that, Meldrum!"

"Zelmira!"

"Certainly!"

She drew back the veil and laughed at him. There was nothing that resembled pleading in her method. It was challenge pure and simple, and amusement—even, perhaps, a hint of ridicule.

"How did *you* get here?" he demanded. By his tone of voice he might have been owner of India from the Hindu Koosh to Comorin.

"By train from Delhi. I'm visiting the raja of Chota Pegu. Any objection?"

"How do you propose to get back there tonight?" he demanded, and she laughed outright, for it was the first symptom of his caring even with qualification about anybody else than Meldrum Strange.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she answered. "This elephant is tired to death. If the raja were here——

"This isn't his place. I've bought it."

"Oh."

"That's the situation."

"Very well. I'll sit here until Mr. Ommony comes."

"How do you happen to know Ommony?"

"I know him quite well. Mr. Ommony expects his sister, you know."

"Let's hope she comes!" said Strange, in a voice of absolute disgust. "You need a sensible companion!"

"She may be there this evening. If so, I expect to visit with them."

So that refuge was cut off! The only line of retreat left open to Strange was a way by rail from Chota Pegu station. But in the course of the afternoon men had actually come with carts to carry off the furniture. He had to stay in the neighborhood and watch, if he hoped to save the very bricks from being stolen.

He rubbed his chin, pulled out a cigar, and stuck it between his teeth.

"What's the game, Zelmira?" he demanded. "Listen, girl, you only compromise yourself by visiting with rajas and tagging me. It won't get you anywhere. I'm here on business. Now—be sensible Zelmira. Maybe it's inconvenient at the moment—so——"

He paused. He was feeling diffident for nearly the first time in his whole career. Suddenly he blurted out the rest of the sentence, in a hurry to get it over with.

"—let me give you a check for expenses, and you go home!"

Zelmira's eyes were seen to twinkle, even in deepening twilight with her back to the sunset after-glow.

"Do you think that's polite, Meldrum? Are you *afraid* of me?" she asked, as merrily as Titania.

He snorted indignantly, because he *was* afraid of her. Presumably the strongest of us, like Napoleon, have qualms on the eve of our Waterloo. He hesitated, which is always fatal, dallying with brutal ruthlessness in the one hand, courtesy in the other. Something within him, that he judged was weakness, tipped the scale.

"Well, come inside and wait for Ommony," he grumbled.

"I can stay out here," she answered.

"No, come on in."

He offered his hand to help her down out of the howdah, and presently ushered her in through the ancient gate. The elephant rose and hurried off to somewhere where hundred-weights of food were to be had, and Ommony turned back along the wall to where Charley and Jeff and the servants waited.

"Has Chullunder Ghose come?" he asked.

CREAKING of wheels in the distance and a string of quaint, complaining oaths announced the *babu* on the way.

"Oh, you oxen! You are snails reincarnated!" *Whack! Whack!* "You failed to learn. You shall be snails again! Pigeons shall eat you!" *Whack! Whack!* "Oh, my Karma! What a villain I was formerly, that I must endure these consequences now!"

He drew abreast, and the shadows of the men beneath the tree so startled him that he nearly fell from the ox-cart.

"And *she* said, *at* the Panch Mahal, yet here they wait. Inaccuracy, O thy name is woman! Orders from a woman are a belly-ache—incomprehensible wind and weariness!"

"Have you brought what she told you to?" Ommony demanded.

"Everything plus! Whatever Charley sahib placed in boxes in hut is now here, plus."

"Plus what?"

"Plus instructions from Lord God Almighty priest of Siva! This *babu* has received more orders in space of four and twenty hours than agency of deity creating universe from protoplasm to humanity, all included. Job not worth it, either. No emolument!"

Ommony and Charley checked over what was in the cart, and Ommony leaving the servants behind showed the way to what had once been elephant stalls at the rear of the Panch Mahal. Five brick arches stood in a row intact, and one of them had been boarded up before and behind to make a barn of sorts. There Jeff unloaded cases of paraphernalia, setting them down very carefully under Charley's supervision. There in the bat-flitting gloom they left Charley alone.

"And now for the really difficult part!" grinned Ommony. "Come on."

CHAPTER IX

"Tiger!"

THERE is a kind of glamour about decadence until it dips too low. Refraction in the unclean atmosphere of low ideals blurs the outline, coaxing imagination to see beauty where none is. Age, toning everything and introducing beauty of its own, imposes charm that glorifies even battlefields, and dead bones please when they are dead enough. So the Panch Mahal was a wonder in its way. They built it for living women two full centuries after Shah Jehan conceived the Taj at Agra for a dead one; and it resembled the Taj as an oleograph by John Smith is said to be "after" Rembrandt.

They improved on the Taj, of course, since civilization and modernity are one. They made it practical, affording space for merry-making and eliminating austere waste. The money had been sunk in spaciousness instead of exquisite refinement; plaster—peeling now—aped marble walls; and in place of the clean sublimity of line and curve, obscene gods grinned. But in the flickering lamplight Strange's new possession seemed passing fair enough.

Strange was sitting in a courtyard, on a stone bench by a dry fountain, with Zelmira laughing at him from the lap of an immoral-looking deity, when Ommony and Jeff walked in.

"Here's Jeff and his bag," said Ommony, and raised his hat, nodding to Zelmira. She grinned, and lamplight shone on her white teeth.

Jeff bade the servants follow him, and wandered off to look for quarters, with an old campaigner's eye for comfort, and a great dislike for more intrigue than he could any way avoid.

"How did you get here?" Strange demanded of Ommony.

"I've a bullock-cart. Where's the raja?"

"Lord knows. Can't find him or servants."

"We've brought some food and Jeff's man; he can cook supper."

"Can you take Madame Poulakis back to the palace?" Strange demanded in a voice of iron. Food was not to be considered in a class with peace.

"If she don't mind riding in a bullock-cart."

"That settles it then," said Strange, and Zelmira exploded laughter into her handkerchief. The man was frank, whatever else.

"Won't you show us the place?" Ommony wondered.

"Some other time. Come tomorrow." Strange did not add the word "alone," but he implied it, and Zelmira could hardly get down from the god's lap for smothered laughter. She, if none else, was enjoying the game.

"Good-by!" said Strange, and held his hand out, but she courtseyed mockingly instead of taking it, and he did not even follow to the gate to see them away in the bullock-cart. By the way he chewed at a cigar and scratched his chin, he was perplexed.

"*Chacun à son goût!*" said Ommony, who loved to air bad French. "He's yours! But I can't think why you want him."

"Oh, he's gold!" Zelmira answered. "Gold when you scratch him!"

"I know! But his heart's brass, and in his boots this minute!"

Strange must have guessed already he was covered. The raja had even taken away both horses, but that fact only transpired when some one stopped the squeaking bullock-cart. The oxen shied, as they should not have done, for the man was in Hindu costume—bare legs and a turban, with a white man's undershirt, and several yards of cotton cloth around his middle. But his first words explained the oxen's instinct, that detects meat-eating races by the smell, street-widths away.

"Everything's here and it works!" said Charley's voice.

"My ——!" groaned the *babu*. "This is the impersonation of bad business! In that get-up Charley sahib will exist five minutes—if, perhaps! They will detect him with shut eyes, and beat him to death with lathies!" *

"I fooled all of you except the oxen," Charley retorted. "Say: what's the raja doing anyway? There was talking in one of those elephant stalls. The raja rode off less than five minutes ago, leading the horse you lent Strange; and he's left a gang of three men sitting like stuffed idols right next door to where I've got the stuff cached. Beards—bald-heads—lots of white cotton clothes—might be Hindu bishops at a board-meeting."

"Gad! That's quick!" said Ommony.

Chullunder Ghose rolled off his perch in front of the cart and hurried to the rear, where Ommony was sitting on the tail.

"*Sahib!* Listen! This *babu* is Codlin, same being friend, not Short! Short is raja! Atheistic apostate! Too much money is as wine in empty head. This *babu* knows! That raja demanded from priests reinstatement in circle of sanctified orthodoxy."

"How do you know that?"

"Self was intermediary! Self conveyed to him retort discourteous from contemptuous ecclesiastics. Exacerbated raja now seeks double-cross for all concerned, you, me, and priests included! What is betting? I bet raja now sends telegram inviting Central Government to intervene! All is up now! Better leave U. S. plutocrat to stew in juices of annoyed Administration! Let *us* establish alibi!"

The *babu's* panic spread to Charley and Zelmira, both of whom began to fear instantly, if vaguely, on Ommony's account. He had admitted more than once that a false step would imply the end of his career.

"What if he does send a telegram?" Zelmira asked excitedly.

"It will either confirm mine or contradict it. In either case the government will send Sir William Molyneux, who'll bring a padre with him! You drive back with Charley to the palace. Charley, I'll meet you in the tool-hut sometime between now and tomorrow morning. Come on, Chullunder Ghose."

"Oh all inscrutability, what next!" the *babu* grumbled.

But Charley Mears jumped up and took the bullocks' tails. The cart bumped forward, and the *babu* was left standing in the dark with Ommony, who called out a final warning:

"Remember, you're deaf and dumb, Charley! If you speak, you'll give the whole game away!"

Deafness and dumbness had begun. There was no answer. Ommony took the *babu* by the arm and started leading him toward the rear of the building where Charley had cached his things.

"Go in and talk to the priests. I'll go one way; you go the other and make lots of noise; give me a chance to get into the next stall without being heard. You talk, and I'll listen. Be sure you talk loud enough. When it's time to bring me a message from them, come out noisily to cover my retreat, and I'll meet you here. You understand?"

"I understand. But *sahib*, am impoverished *babu* without——"

"Without any hope of being paid by me! You may leave me to manage this alone, if you'd rather."

"Is idealism *always* eleemosynary?"

"Always!"

"Hence materialistic tendency of world,

* Long sticks.

no doubt! Am idealist, nevertheless. *Sahib*, my salaams!"

THE *babu* waddled off; remembering the order to go noisily, kicking at stones and unchecked rambling vines, singing a song to himself about the love of Krishna, darling of the Gopis, idol of the dreaming maids. In less than five minutes Ommony was squatting cross-legged in impenetrable shadow under an old brick-arch, fearful of scorpions, but absolutely still, and listening to secrets in the language of the gods next door.

"I am blessing. I kiss feet. Holiest of fathers, this unworthy *babu* abjectly salaams. Pray pardon intrusion. Only reverence and devoted attachment to your honors' interest brings these humble feet to threshold of divinity. This miserable *babu* found the Englishman, whose name is Ommony, and having with such skill as he possesses tempted the unclean foreigner into conversation, hopes now to render acceptable service with much humility!"

The answer to that overture was proud and curt.

"Did you warn the fool to keep his hands off?"

"No use warning him! Moreover, worshipfuls, the unclean fellow pursues same object as your heaven-born selves. Great wrath obsesses him. He is indignant that the other unclean rogue should buy this place that has been rendered blessed by your honors' claim to it. I think I could persuade him to give artful assistance in support of the heaven-borns' divinely inspired intentions."

"What would he hope to gain by that?"

"Nothing. He is personally essence of unthriftiness. Idealism, much mistaken doubtless since he is alien ignoramus, burns in unclean bosom. And he fears lest the other brute, who has bought the Panch Mahal, may acquire the forest likewise. Moreover, he knows the raja may not be trusted. I think he would eagerly subserve your honors' interests rather than be defeated by the other two."

"Where is he?"

"At a little distance, cudgeling his brains."

"He who allies himself with fools must eat the offal of their folly!"

"True, most worshipfuls. Yet this *babu* is not a fool. A humble person, totally unworthy to stand in the heaven-born presence, but endowed by the Creators with an intellect. In this *babu's* unworthy hands, that foreign ignoramus might be trusted."

"We make no bargains with such people!"

"Nay! But with this subservient *babu* as go-between, much might be managed."

There was whispering, which the *babu* may have heard but Ommony did not. Then:

"Let no offer of alliance seem to come from us. There is no treaty—no contract—no given undertaking. Go to him and find out what he wishes. Then report to us again."

The *babu* backed away, making such a noisy protest of his reverence and full obedience, and stumbling so awkwardly over a heap of fallen bricks, that Ommony had no trouble at all to escape unheard. There was no risk of being seen. The Indian night had shut down like a black dome pierced with diamonds. He and Chullunder Ghose met again in the road where they had parted company.

"Offering advice to *sahibs* is like touching high-tension wire with monkey-wrench," said the *babu*.

"Nevertheless, your advice is?"

"*Ahstil!* * Steady the Buffs, by Krishna! Keep priests waiting! Likewise lord of dollars in Panch Mahal, where loneliness roars like lions! Let us sit down. Smoke a pipe, *sahib!*"

So they sat, in mid-road, face to face, each able to watch half of the mysterious horizon; and Ommony smoked a whole pipe out before he offered a suggestion. Then—

"Why was the last raja—this man's uncle—allowed by the priests to use the Panch Mahal undisturbed?" he asked.

"Because he submitted to initiation, thus acknowledging the priests as superior to himself and virtual landlords," said the *babu*.

"And this man?"

"Would like to be initiated; but is such religious apostate and renegade that the priests will have nothing to do with him. He has applied, but they refuse, suspecting he would only turn tables on them, thereafter setting people against them, instead of their making monkey of him on all public occasions, as now happens, oh yes, invariably."

*Go slow.

"Is there any other reason why this raja has had to keep his hands off the Panch Mahal?"

"No other reason, sahib. First he tried to live in it with many women. They say that two women went mad, and one killed herself."

"How was that done?"

"Apparitions! Thefts! Noises in the night! Flesh creeps to think of same! Tunnels! Accomplices can accomplish! Bur-r-rrh! Have heard tales."

"They plan, of course, to treat Strange the same way?"

"Why not?"

"Have they started on him?"

"They are not here for nothing!"

Ommony chuckled, and then thought of Jeff Ramsden, which made him chuckle more.

"There'll be heads broken," he said; and the *babu* twitched his bare toes in the sand, comprehending disadvantages.

"Not good," he remarked.

"E x c e l l e n t!'' corrected Ommony. "Strange's nerves will be on end, and the priests will reconsider agenda. Both sides will need advice and assistance. That's where we come in."

"Self being *sahib's* coconspirator!"

The *babu* preened himself. Every atom in his being seemed to tingle with pride at the thought. He leaned forward, laying a finger on Ommony's knee by way of celebrating partnership. But what he was starting to say died still-born.

"Get away from here! Go and scheme for the other side," said Ommony, seizing the upper-hand instantly, at any cost. He knew his *babu*. "Betray me all you want to. I'll manage this alone."

"This *babu* is mud beneath *sahib's* feet! Am co-nothing—but coincidence! Am subventitious aspirant for eleemosynary service! My excruciated salaams! Only send me not away!"

"Keep your proper place, then! Now: go to the priests, and suggest to them something like this: They're not really owners of this Panch Mahal; but they're as good as owners if they can haze the life-tenant into a proper attitude toward them. Isn't that the idea?"

"Core of the belly of truth, *sahib!* Most explicit!"

"There's nothing religious about it—nothing Brahminical."

"Rather the contrary. Initiation has always been most scandalous. There are tales——"

"Never mind. Why not initiate Strange? Suggest that to them."

"Tee-hee!" The *babu's* fat sides began to shake. "Tee-hee! Has the *sahib* ever witnessed an — hee-hee!—initiation?"

"I've been told. We might get it modified."

"Tee-hee-hee! Temple nautch-girls! Mu-mu-moderation! Tee-hee!"

"Suggest it to the priests. Meet me here later. I'll see Strange."

"Khee-hee-hee! Salaam, *sahib!* Oh, my ribs! Dee-licious, very! Genius! My ——, yes! Oh, ha-ha-hah! Kuh-scuse it, *sahib*, please! Your humble servant! He-hee-hee-hee-hee! I go, I go, I go—no, no no—no kick! I ——"

The *babu* waddled off, aheave with irrepressible emotion. What Ommony had only heard of, *he* had seen. His great bulk shook as long as he was in sight; he almost seemed to be dancing as the darkness swallowed him, and the hugeness of his amusement gave Ommony pause. He would hardly be willing, even for the forest's sake, to over-do the scandal. He decided to commit the priests, and then interview them personally. However, Strange first.

He went and hammered on the wooden gate until it shook and the arch above it echoed; then waited several minutes. No answer, so he beat again. Then he heard Jeff's heavy footstep approaching, and gave another knock or two.

"That's enough!" Jeff roared in Urdu. "If I have to open that gate I'll loose off both barrels at you! Go to the ——, and leave that gate alone!"

"This is Ommony."

"Oh!" The bolts began to rattle. "Sorry, old man. Come in."

Jeff stood in pajamas and bare feet, with the shotgun ready cocked.

"I meant business!" he announced gruffly. "Strange is nearly off his head with rage. Did you hear me shoot, ten minutes ago?"

"No."

"This place swallows noise and shoots it out the way deep mines do," Jeff grumbled. "We thought you'd hear the shot 'way off down the road and come back."

"What did you fire at?"

"Lord knows! There! Look at that —— thing!"

THEY were under the arch, looking inward across the first courtyard, where Zelmira had sat in a god's lap. Across the court on the far side was a veranda covered by a tiled roof, and above that were rows of shuttered windows. Along the tiles there crawled, or seemed to crawl, a thing like a snake, thirty or forty feet long, moving itself in corkscrew coils, and glowing as if drenched in phosphorus. It had eyes, for they shone and were moving; and it was solid, or semi-solid, for the tiles were invisible through it. Jeff raised the shot-gun and fired twice. The pellets rattled on the roof and brought a loose tile away, but nothing else happened. The thing like a snake continued on its way, and disappeared—it seemed into the wall—at the far end of the roof.

"Have you seen that before?" asked Ommony.

"No, that's a new one."

"What else have you seen?"

"The thing I fired at looked like a naked faquir dancing in a corner of the big assembly-room, where Strange and I were trying to get some sleep. The critter had horns and a beard like a goat's."

"Did you hit him?"

"You bet I did! But he didn't even trouble to stop dancing till I started across the room. Then he disappeared. There isn't a hole in the floor or the wall thereabouts."

"How does your servant like it?"

"Bolted! Can't find him anywhere."

Strange, in pajamas too, came to the wide door of the assembly-room, that opened on the courtyard.

"Have you caught some one?" he shouted.

"Ommony!"

"Huh! Are *you* responsible for this?"

He came to meet Ommony bare-footed, looking more than half-inclined to hit him.

"If I catch the imbecile who's playing these tricks, I'll jail him or know why!"

"Don't be a fool," Jeff advised quietly. "Let's see if Ommony can explain it."

They entered the assembly-room and sat on Strange's cot. It was a huge place, like a modern theater, without seats or stage, but with rows of columns down either side supporting a wide balcony, which was grilled up to the ceiling, so that women could watch unseen whatever might take place below. The other furniture consisted of gilded, upholstered divans, and six tall mirrors in panels against the wall at the farther end.

Strange started to speak, but as he opened his mouth foreknowledge of something about to happen checked him. It was the sort of silence that precedes a bomb explosion, and his mouth stayed open wide.

Suddenly, three times repeated, a breeze several degrees cooler than the surrounding atmosphere struck them in the face. There was a sound like the flapping of a punkah—even the squeak of the cord through a hole in a wall that pulled it—but no punkah visible. The wind was real, for it blew the lamp out.

Then, through the ensuing darkness, came a scream that chilled the marrow of the listeners' bones. It increased and waned in spasms. They could almost see a rack being tightened in jerks, and a woman stretched between the rollers.

"I'm going to kill some one!" Jeff announced, and struck a match.

A breath of wind blew it out instantly. He struck another.

By its light they saw a headless corpse hung by one leg, apparently from a hook between two mirrors on the wall that faced them. And between the next two mirrors was the corpse-less head, hung by a nail driven into the mouth, and seeming to have been pulled off, for there were shreds of flesh and sinew hanging down from it. The match burned Jeff's fingers. He swore, dropped it and struck another. The corpse and the head were gone. But again came the cool wind, and the scream of atrocious agony. There were no words to it. It was pain and fear beyond the power of speech.

"Good God!" Strange exploded. "What kind of place is this anyhow?"

Ommony found the lamp, relighted it and sat down. By its light Jeff exchanged the shot-gun for a rifle. The breeze blew out the lamp, and there was silence, broken only by a click as Jeff tested the breech-bolt action in the dark. Then new horror, unseen, unheard at first, and indescribable, but there; some sort of presence, and a musky smell. Presently foot-falls, slow, irregular, and almost too secretive for the ear to catch.

Ommony sniffed twice.

"Tiger!" he said curtly. There was no sound from Jeff. He was ready.

"My God! A tiger in here? Strike a match!" said Strange, groping vainly for

the pockets of his suit on the chair beside him.

"Shut up!" Ommony commanded *sotto voce.*

"No matches!" Jeff growled. "You'll dazzle me."

The cot creaked under his weight as he leaned forward, peering along the rifle-barrel. The creak was too much for Strange's nerves. He jumped off the cot, upsetting Ommony, and seized the chair, the only weapon within reach—then stepped back until he felt the wall behind him.

"Now by ——, I can defend myself!" he gasped.

Ommony lay still. Jeff never moved, bent forward, peering along the rifle-barrel. They could hear the soft foot-falls more distinctly, as if a beast were exploring the floor in widening arcs.

Then a tiger coughed. That was unmistakable. Jeff's rifle belched light—twice—three times, with a din that filled the place and drowned the answering snarl.

"Got him!" he said.

"You fool, you've — ——! Here he is!"

A leg cracked off the chair as Strange raised it and struck the wall behind. Then he hit something with a thud that shivered the chair to pieces, and groped for the cot, backwards. The backs of his knees touched it, and he collapsed, lying still, with his knees curled up under his chin. Ommony, down on the floor, struck a match at last.

"I *thought* I got him," Jeff said pleasantly. "See—twice. The first one missed, but the flash showed his eyes."

A big male tiger lay within a yard of where Strange had stood—shot twice through the lungs. Blood flowed from the open mouth. The claws were extended in his effort to struggle close and slay before life left him.

"Stone dead," said Ommony.

Then the match went out.

"Don't light the lamp yet," Jeff whispered.

There were decencies to be attended to, best managed in the dark. He groped for Strange and shook him by the arm.

"Come on," he said, "you're all right."

Strange sat up, trembling, grateful for Jeff's strong grip on his arm.

"Just nerves, that's all," Jeff said quietly. "You did well for us. When you moved you startled him. He coughed, and that gave me the cue."

"But I hit him with a chair! I broke a chair on him!" Strange stammered.

"I know you did. Are you all right now? Light the lamp, old man."

Ommony lighted the lamp and held it so that the yellow glow shone full on the tiger, and the stripes appeared to move a little as the flame danced in the chimney.

"Is he dead?" Strange demanded. "Better put a bullet in him to make sure."

"Stone dead," said Ommony.

"Killed a tiger with a chair! Jee-rusalem!" Strange sat down on the cot again. "Can you beat that? Killed a tiger with a chair, you fellows! Can you beat it?"

Ommony, with his back to Strange, stooped down, examining the kill. Jeff joined him.

"Caged for a good many years. Well fed," said Ommony. "Probably half-tame. See his pugs? They're soft, and the hair has grown long over the claws. He's old, too; look at the length of his eye-teeth. That's a collar-mark on his neck, or I'm mistaken. He's been somebody's pet cat."

"Which explains why he didn't attack directly he winded us," said Jeff.

"But he did attack!" Strange got to his feet again and came and stood between them. "I stood there. You see how close he got to me? I wonder if I cracked his skull—must have—his mouth's full of blood," he hesitated. "Say, you men, suppose we keep this among ourselves? I don't choose to be known as a liar. If we took oath to it, nobody'd believe a man of my age killed that brute with a chair-leg. D'you mind keeping it a secret to oblige me?"

Strange was feeling finely again. Even the memory of goose-flesh raising screams had dimmed in the glory of this achievement.

"With all your strength, I'll bet you never pulled off a stunt like that!" he said, digging Jeff in the ribs. "It was luck, of course, but ——"

"Yes, you're lucky," Jeff said, grinning at him. Then suddenly his face grew sober. "Ommony, old boy, we're wasting time. Who screamed just now, and why? We've got to unearth that. Then there's that corpse——"

"Buncombe! Let's sit here and see what happens next," said Ommony. "I don't know how they did it, but it's all a trick. The scheme, of course, is to make Strange abandon the place, just as his friend the

raja had to. The priests are old hands at this frightening business."

"Huh! Scheme to scare me off the lot, eh? ——, you told me their claim won't hold water," Strange objected.

"It won't. But they've defeated everybody yet who tried conclusions with them."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"I warned you. You snorted."

"Well. I'll fight 'em." Strange found a cigar, and began chewing it. "They've a Tatar on their hands."

"There's a better way," said Ommony.

"The place is *mine*."

"Persuade them to admit that, then why run the chance of poison, fire, goodness knows what else. They claim the right to approve or disapprove a tenant for life, and they stop at nothing to uphold their right."

"Neither will I."

"They've always managed to get rid of any one who disputed their right."

"Oh! They claim right to dispossess?"

"Only if the tenant for life, after they've approved him, backs out of his promise to let them hold a yearly ceremony here."

"Would they exclude me from the ceremony?" Strange asked.

"I think not. You see, they insist on initiating any tenant before they'll let him occupy in peace."

"Initiate him into what? Mysteries?"

"Hardly. They'd never admit a white man into those."

"Well then, into what?"

"I've never seen the ceremony. I might not be allowed to witness it, even if they accept you. But once you're accepted and admitted, as an initiate they'd very likely let you see the yearly ceremony. It lasts a week, I'm told."

"That might be fun."

"They say it's wild. Its origin is so far back in time that nobody knows its meaning any more, although it was probably religious, once. They used to hold it in the temple, but it got so scandalous that when this place was built they persuaded the raja of that day to let them hold it here instead. He was under their thumbs in some way; and ever since then they've asserted an unlegal but prehensile claim to nominal overlordship."

"Scandalous, eh?"

"So I'm told."

"Well. If it's secret, who's to be any wiser afterwards? It might be good fun."

"You're a —— fool, Strange!" Jeff growled. "Keep out of it."

"I'm no milk-sop," Strange retorted. "I'll keep my head in any situation these fossils can invent. If you're afraid, suppose you go home!"

"I've said my say," Jeff answered. "I'll stand by. But you'll get no sympathy from me, whatever happens."

"Nothing 'll happen. Huh! They've come to the end of their resources now. We've sat here half an hour and not a sign from them. That tiger was the ——"

AS HE spoke the light went out. The chill blast of air was renewed, only tenfold. A man's shout, and a scream like a woman's in grief as well as agony froze their blood. Something flapped in the air above them, and there was a sudden hurrying noise across the floor that sounded as if ghouls were chasing one another. Then the thud of a trap-door closing, or something resembling that; and silence, in which Jeff's steady breathing sounded like the ebb and flow of six-hour tides. After two interminable minutes Ommony struck a match.

The tiger was gone. The only trace of him was blood on the wooden floor, where his head had lain and a long smear where he had been dragged across the room. A blast of cool air blew the match out. Something sighed. A shape like a woman's, faintly phosphorescent, seemed to be wafted on a wind across the room about fifteen feet in front of them. Jeff made a jump for it, and landed heavily on nothing. The shape vanished.

Ommony lit the lamp again, and the three explored the whole room. There were two doors, one they had entered by, and another in the far corner, opposite, but no discoverable trap-door or sliding panel, although the walls sounded hollow, and in places the floor seemed to hint at booming caverns under it when they jumped.

They opened the door in the corner with difficulty, for although it was not locked something seemed to hold it; but when Jeff exerted his strength and it flew wide, there was nothing there—nobody—no sign of anybody having been there.

So they took two rifles and a shot-gun and explored long passages and rooms absurdly furnished with imported export stuff, of the sort that generation after generation of

rajas had believed was "quite the thing." There was almost nothing antique or genuine in the place, although there was plenty of evidence of reckless spending. Not a sign of a human being; only rats that had nested in the stuffing of armchairs and ran as they entered the echoing rooms, striking match after match.

Jeff was for exploring the cellars, too, but Ommony demurred.

"Snakes," he suggested. "Ambush. Anything might happen and be explained away as accident."

"Upstairs then," Jeff proposed; but that seemed almost equally risky, especially as they had left a shot-gun in the assembly-room along with their few other belongings. So they turned back, expecting to find their way easily by the light of the lamp they had left burning.

But the light was out again. Jeff groped his way in the lead and struck out with his fist at something that he felt rather than saw in the passage just before he reached the assembly-room; but whatever it might have been, he missed it.

He struck a match and held it high, to get as wide a circle of light as possible, stepped forward, tripped over something, swore; and the match went out. Ommony struck another close behind him. Jeff kicked at what had tripped him, and the pieces of a broken shot-gun scattered across the floor.

Ommony looked for the lamp, but it was broken too—smashed into smithereens. His feet crunched broken glass, and his shins struck the legs of the over-turned cot. Jeff struck his last match, and by the swiftly waning light of that they could see all the furniture overturned and their torn clothes scattered at random about the floor. There was not a seam apparently unripped, and the bags were torn to pieces in the bargain. Then darkness, and no more matches.

Nothing for it but the courtyard, where the rising moon was just beginning to pour amber light over the roof and change a quarter of the paving into a floor of pale gold. There Jeff took position in the god's lap that had nursed Zelmira recently and, looking like a herculean god himself in loose pajamas, kept a *qui vive* with the rifle pointing every way as one sound or another drew attention.

But the only noises now were owls' hoots. The only movement was the swooping of the big bats, looking like specters as they swerved across moonlight and plunged into shadow again. A jackal's yelp broke silence at intervals from over the wall, and once in the distance an elephant trumpeted disgust at something.

"Strange," Jeff said at the end of an hour's vigil, "I advise you to pull out of here first thing in the morning."

"Yes. In pajamas! I see myself!" Strange answered. "Mr. Ommony, I'll have to have my trunk sent over from your place. Can you manage it?"

Ommony supposed he could. There were more impossible things.

"It'll take time, though," he warned him. "Meanwhile there's no knowing what these priests will do."

"I'll stay on and stick it out!"

"How would it be for me to suggest to the priests that you'll stand initiation? That might end this foolishness."

"What does initiation amount to? Don't know, eh? Well, ——, I'm interested—yes, try anything once. Yes, get word to 'em!"

"Strange," growled Jeff Ramsden, "you're a fool for all your money. You're a gilt-edged rube—no better!"

CHAPTER X

"Up to you, sir!"

LONG before dawn they let Ommony out to interview the priests and send for clothes, provisions, servants and what not else. Strange's cigars had all been ruined; the tobacco in Jeff's tin can was scattered on a dusty floor; they were a desperate garrison in danger of ill-temper.

"Tobacco first!" said Jeff. "Send stacks of it."

"And tell those priests I'll fight 'em to the last ditch unless they're reasonable," was Strange's final word.

So Ommony took the dusty road along to where an idol sat in moonlight on a pile of masonry that might have been a wayside altar once on a time. The idol came suddenly to life as he drew within ten feet of it, rolling off-center and lurching into the road before him.

"Have seat, *sahib*. Meditation-place of fakirs—most gregarious for wisdom—just like sitting under shower-bath of ideas! Thoughts being habituated like trained animals to come to holy man in certain place,

whoever sits there—take a seat and try, *sahib!*"

Ommony preferred to take it standing up and declined the invitation. Too obviously Chullunder Ghose was seeking to soften the impact of bad news.

"What did the priests say?" he demanded.

"They are worse than Christian devil, which is saying much!"

"What did *they* say?"

"Very little, yet ultimatively! Proud fools! Unwilling to concede your honor's right to dictate outcome of events! This *babu*, using seven keys of argument to unlock hierophantic minds, failed nevertheless. Said locked minds are rusty. Nobody home, and nothing doing, same as Charley sahib says! The best they will concede is that Panch Mahal must become theirs absolutely. On such terms they will play into *sahib's* hands in matter of initiation. They demand explicit promise."

"Meanwhile, how much more of this horse-play have they in mind?"

"Hee-hee! In mind, much. In posse, very much. In esse, at moment, no more. There is armistice. Temporary respite for accumulation of resources. Hee-hee! *Sahib*, they have congeries of living animals, reptiles and insects, that would make Zoological Society of London gnash teeth in envy! Noah should be relegated now to second place! Hee! They have gas composed of petrifying corpses, mixed with dust of red pepper and sal volatile! They have a corpse so realistic that there is serious anxiety lest the God of the Dead should demand its immediate decomposition! There is a tube concealed in the walls that will magnify a scream; and there are two tunnels through which they have access to the interior of the building by secret doors."

"If they're not careful Strange will discover those tunnels—or Ramsden will. Then the game will be all up."

"They will be very careful, *sahib*. They are most resourceful. Trust them."

"I don't, and I won't. But will they trust me? If I tell them they may have the Panch Mahal, will they believe it?"

"Why not? A promise made to the priests and broken subsequently is——"

"I get you."

"*Sahib*, there was a High Commissioner once who broke a promise to the priests, and took long leave, and went to London. He had a servant to taste his food, but neglected to consider the gum on the flaps of envelops he licked. It is possible to oppose the priests, and even to defeat them without unpremeditated consequences. But to break a promise made to them is suicide. Speaking of which, I see Charley sahib riding this way on native pony!"

Ommony, who had turned his back to the moonlight in order to see the *babu's* face, did not look round.

"How d'you know it's Charley?"

"Blind idiot with head in bag could recognize in darkness U. S. effort to ride bareback in fashion of Chota Pegu. Back-bone of lean old pony proves uncomfortable—very!"

The pony's hoofs drummed nearer and Ommony, expecting new awkward developments, turned slowly to watch the herald of disposing gods. It was not such a bad attempt, after all, that Charley made to ride in Chota Pegu style; he looked like a native of the country mimicking a white man, with turban-end astream behind him and his right arm working like a flail to keep his balance. The pony "planted" twenty yards from Ommony, and Charley saved himself from a header by vaulting.

"Glad I've found you," he said. "Your sister has come, along with Sir William Molyneux!"

"Angel of light and devil of darkness in same train, eh!" said the *babu*.

"Came at midnight in a special—locomotive, one car, and caboose. She's A 1. Nice old lady. Don't know what to make of him. His voice is like a kerosene-can falling downhill. He looks like a cross between a prize-fighter and an Anglican bishop."

"He is," said Ommony.

"I'd nothing to do—couldn't sleep—so I went to the station to get pointers on how a deaf and dumb Hindu should behave himself. Usual ten or a dozen people there, sleeping on the platform, ready for tomorrow's train, so I sat around and watched 'em, having fun with the station *babu* who asked to see my ticket. He told me at last to beat it, but I got wise a train was coming, so I shook my head and stayed on, squatting in the lamp-light like a——"

"Wait!" said Ommony. "How did you cover twenty miles to the palace in an ox-cart before midnight?"

"——! That was easy. I ditched the cart and turned the oxen loose. Zelmira and I both figured we'd sooner walk. I

guess we walked a mile, till we came to a thing they call a house in these parts. There were two ponies in a thorn corral; this beast's one of 'em. We waked the owner and Zelmira bought the critturs; she had cash with her, but it took us half an hour to make the guy see reason. Then we rode, and Gee! she looked funny. But she beat me to the palace gate. I couldn't go in, of course, in this disguise, so I went to the station after a while, as I told you; and along come Molyneux and your sister, he helping her down out of the car as if she were the queen."

"How's she looking?" Ommony interrupted.

"Fine. The people on the platform all did poojah, and the *babu* fussed like a wet hen. Nobody'd expected 'em, and there weren't any orders, so nobody knew what to do about it, and they all did nothing at the limit of their lungs. I sat there looking deaf and dumb. I guess I was the only one on the platform who wasn't yelling—except maybe your sister; she was coaxing Molyneux to keep his temper. Seems a telegram had missed fire. Nowhere to go—nobody to meet 'em—nothing. Your name bursting on the scene like hand-grenades at intervals. Me sitting still.

"Pretty soon Molyneux gets your sister back into the car, and demands a messenger to go and find you. No messenger. Nobody knows where you are. Nobody cares a ——, either. The *babu* tells Molyneux in English that the train's got to move out of the way, or go back to Sissoo Junction or something, and Molyneux swears it shall stay right where it is for a week unless he gets a messenger to go on horseback and find Ommony sahib.

"Well, the *babu* points to me and says I'm a deaf and dumb lunatic who won't go away. He adds I've a pony hitched to the station railings. Molyneux strides up to me, takes me by the ear, and yanks me up-standing.

" 'Let's see whether I can make him understand,' he said, scowling with his forehead all over his eyes—just like a pug.

"I didn't take to that any too cordially. So he says:

" 'Hello! A Hindu who can use his fists? What does this mean?' And he pulled my turban off. 'Short hair, eh?'

"I said, 'Shut up, you fool!' and he looked kind of hard at me in the lamp-light. I was getting ready to run, for he could have whipped me with one hand tied. However, he says:

" 'We must look into this. Come with me.'

"So I went with him into the car, where I told Miss Ommony how glad I was to meet a sister of her brother.

"Well: Molyneux thinks at once I'm in the secret service, and I had a dickens of a time to unconvince him. Then he starts to shoot questions at me like an old stork picking a dead dog to pieces, and I was plumb scared. I didn't know how much it was safe to tell him. At last I doped it out that as your sister was there, and he was talking right out in front of her, he was prob'ly o.k. with you. I took a chance on that and told him all of it.

"He laughed for about seven minutes straight on end. His laugh's worse than his talking voice. When I'd done counting all the fillings in his teeth he asked me to go on the pony and find you. I guessed I'd better.

" 'Tell him,' he said, 'that Brass-face says he is anxious Ommony should watch his step. Say the raja of Chota Pegu has wired to the Central Government that Ommony is accepting bribes in league with some priests to give a millionaire named Strange a half-nelson on the forest. Tell him we've got to straighten this out without pulling feathers, within the week or there'll be trouble.' That's the message."

"Brass-face is a brick!" said Ommony.

"That brick struck this *babu* once. Not again!" said Chullunder Ghose, and he was on his way instantly—any whither except in the direction of the station.

"Stop!" commanded Ommony.

"But that Brass-face sahib——"

"Sha'n't hurt you this time."

"*Sahib*, he hurts all and sundry. His bowels are merciless! He is chucker-out-bouncer for Government when illegality shall be done under mask of high-handed individual mistake. He thrashed a Maharajah! He will enter temples and desecrate holiness at moment's notice on any whim of caprice. He deprived me of government office, leaving self, family and numerous dependents at mercy of chance emolument. He kicked me twice in same place, which is manifestly unfair. He——"

"I tell you, I'll protect you."

"*Sahib*, he will get you next! He is

administration whips and scorpions, laying on hard! Not known as Brass-face because he is gentle. By no means. Believe me."

"Brass-face is my friend," said Ommony quietly.

"Krishna! You and he will then run universe! But if he kicks me, I will poison him."

"My kingdom for a horse!" laughed Ommony. "Wireless! Telephone's best. I must talk with my sister or Molyneux. I don't care which. Both for choice."

"This brute's about finished," said Charley. "You're too heavy for him anyway."

"He'll have to serve. Chullunder Ghose! Feed Charley sahib and find him a place to sleep."

"Am I God of Hebrews, producing manna in wilderness?" the *babu* answered impudently.

"You heard what I said. Work a miracle, confound you! He eats before dawn, or you catch it! See you later," he called back to Charley, driving his heels into the flanks of the miserable plug.

SAY what you like about oats—and they're needful—but it is the will of riders that makes horses gallop when reason declares they can't do it. Ommony rode, not using stick or heels too much, those being inefficient substitutes for horsemanship. The lean beast scattered three good leagues behind him, and most of the dust that covered those, until in the glimmer of false dawn he fetched up foundered near the house of an old-time friend of Ommony's.

The friend came forth with half a dishrag on his loins and a turban big enough for two men, grinning, and as pleased to be of use as a dog to see his master.

"Aye, *sahib*, verily; and in haste! The fleetest animal in Hind! A mare I bought from the army, cast for vice because the fat soldiery were afraid of her. A beast with a heart, and legs. Behold her eye! She has but the one, and lo the white of it! Deal not gently with her, *sahib*. Best to let her feel a strong hand on the rein; and beat her thrice over the buttock as she rears. See—I will stand here, thus, and strike her with a lathi. Aye, *sahib*, I will feed the other carrion, though he isn't worth the meal. Come again, *sahib!* Come soon! Nay, no payment! Nay, the mare is thine!"

So Ommony came to the station on a squealing bay of nearly seventeen hands, who took three fathoms at a spring, and tried to savage him as he dismounted. And as he might have guessed if he had stopped to think of it, he found Sir William Molyneux asleep and snoring serenades to Miss Ommony, who leaned rather bored from the window of the front compartment.

She refused to kiss Ommony, objecting to his whiskers; but she was a nice little middle-aged spinster, with a twinkle in her gray eyes and the same way of carrying her chin half-tilted toward the tree-tops that Ommony, and some sea-captains, have.

"He's really ramping," she said calmly, glancing at the open car-window whence the snores came. "I think it's a good thing he found me waiting at Sissoo Junction and brought me along in his train. He says you play too much politics and he'll break you for it if you don't reform, even if he is your friend. You'd better humor him; I know there's no hope of reforming you, but you needn't emphasize that."

So Ommony entered the other compartment and awoke Molyneux, who was sleeping fully clothed in deference to mid-Victorian proprieties. (His father *was* a bishop.)

"Hah! Uh-huh-Hurrum!" said Molyneux, sitting up, wide-awake instantly and searching through vest pockets for his monocle.

"Yes, I know all about that, sir," said Ommony. "Point is——"

"The point is, what the —— do you mean by the presumption! Why in blazes didn't you refer Strange to the Central Government, and leave them to tell him to go to ——?"

"Because they wouldn't have told him to," Ommony answered. "They'd have referred it home, and Whitehall would have asked the Treasury; the Treasury would have called bankers into consultation; and the bankers would have backed up Strange, on the scratch me and I'll scratch you principle. Farewell, forest!"

"What's this about the priests?"

"They're offering Strange the Third Degree."

"What for?"

"Same old game. If he recognizes their authority by submitting to that they'll let

him occupy the Panch Mahal in peace. If not, no."

"And the idiot consents? By Gad, he must mean business! He realizes if the priests once recognize him as lawful life-tenant he'll have a status here no Government could upset. The priests 'ud construe eviction of him into insult to them. 'Twon't do. Got to stop it. You've made a mess of this!"

"Hear both sides first," said Ommony. "The priests are willing to take our side, on condition they get title to the Panch Mahal."

"We can't do that. It belongs to the raja."

"No, he's sold it to Strange."

"Worse and worse! If we refuse to register the transfer, that means a fight through three courts against Strange and his millions. Complications, Ommony! It won't do."

"You haven't heard all yet. Did you bring the padre? There's a lady in this——"

"Not your sister? For heaven's sake!—yes, the padre's coming. Couldn't imagine why you wanted him."

"A Madame Zelmira Poulakis——"

"What? Zelmira Poulakis! I met her in Delhi. She's charming."

Molyneux found his monocle at last, screwed it in, and stared at Ommony, frowning over it as if the weight of brow were necessary to keep it in place.

"You'll meet her again then. She's here."

"The —— you say!"

"She's crazy enough to want to marry Strange."

"Crazy my eye! The man's richer than Crœsus."

"And as pleasant as physic! However, she wants him. If she gets him, she'll call him off from interfering with the forest. I don't doubt she'll do anything we ask about the Panch Mahal."

"But could she call him off?"

"Oh yes. He's run away from her. She's the real reason why he's hiding in the Panch Mahal this minute."

"Hates her, eh?"

"No."

" 'Fraid of her?"

"No. Afraid of himself. He's got bachelor's bile. He's afraid if he sees too much of her he'll discover his heart somewhere, and ask her to marry him, and be a bachelor no more, amen."

"How sure are you of this?"

"As that I sit here. It all depends on you, sir."

"——, what have *I* done?"

Molyneux sat silent for as long as it took Ommony to charge his pipe.

"——! Eh? A woman in it!" he said at last. "She's a charming woman, Ommony. I'd say she's brains."

"She's all right."

"Yes, I think so. The whole of Delhi was after her, self included. She turned us down one after the other. Knows her P's and Q's. Can she be trusted?"

"I understand she has *been* trusted by some of the most suspicious crooks in the world," said Ommony.

"By gad, sir, so have you!" said Molyneux. "That's a recommendation. Umtiddle-i-um-tum-tum. But suppose Strange bolts for it, and lays his case before the Central Government?"

"He can't, sir. He's in pajamas in the Panch Mahal. No clothes, no horses, no servants, no possible messenger except Jeff Ramsden, who's in pajamas too; no telegraph—telephone—nothing."

"Got his check-book with him, I suppose! He can buy what he needs. There's always some one after money."

"No, the place is watched."

"By whom, for instance?"

"Babu Chullunder Ghose for one."

"That rascal? That settles it! Strange can give us all the slip the moment he's inclined."

"No, sir. Chullunder Ghose is in Zelmira Poulakis' pay and in the secret, expecting what he calls a 'competency' if she pulls this off."

"By ——, the thing looks water-tight!" said Molyneux.

"Depends on you, sir."

"Confound it, no! It's you. If you've misjudged the situation, ——! we'll all be in the soup! I admit, I've never had cause to regret trusting you. But that's the way it goes; you trust a man, and trust him, until he lets you down finally; it's human nature."

"Up to you, sir."

"What do you want of me?" demanded Molyneux.

"Tobacco and cigars. The more the merrier. I'll take them to the Panch Mahal to keep Strange and Ramsden from going mad, while I get some sleep."

"They're in that hand-bag. What next?"

"Take my sister to the palace and introduce her to Madame Poulakis. Talk it all over with her."

"——! First thing you know, the raja will blow the gaff. He's a cheap reptile."

"Promise him a trip to Paris, sir. He's got Strange's money. The shell of him that returns in a year's time won't hurt anybody!"

"Yes, that's reasonable. The first *demi-mondaine* he hooks up with 'll put the hat on him forever. All right, what else?"

"Nothing more now, sir. I'll be off," said Ommony. "Look after my sister. Good morning."

And Ommony mounted the vicious bay after a five-minute fight for mastery, and vanished in clouds of sun-lit dust.

CHAPTER XI

"Who eats crow, eh? Wait and see!"

CHULLUNDER GHOSE meanwhile solved a problem with Alexandrian simplicity.

"He said I must feed you or catch it, *sahib*. How much can you eat?" he asked Charley.

"A horse. I'm hungry."

"Carniverous Western blood-hunger! No remedy but this way then."

He led Charley to the front door of the Panch Mahal, gave Charley a rock, and bade him hammer on the wood with it.

"But remember—deaf and dumb!" he cautioned.

Then he stepped aside, and hid behind the projecting masonry.

So it was Charley who received on head and shoulders the bucket of water that Jeff poured down from above the arch; and Jeff who received the rock, plunk in the chest, hurled by a pretty fair to middling bush-league pitcher's arm.

"Try another exchange!" he suggested, and Jeff recognized the voice.

"You durned young hoodlum! You can't come in here," Jeff laughed. "Strange 'ud——"

"Oh yes, *sahib!* Oh yes!" Chullunder Ghose came under the arch and made violent gestures implying intrigue—conspiracy—secrecy—urgency—silence. "Open and let us in!"

Jeff hesitated. His regard for Charley Mears was nearly as high as his opinion of the *babu* was low.

"He has promised me breakfast," said Charley.

"Am magician!" said the *babu*, gesturing again. "Can cook coffee—fried eggs—bacon—toast— Just think of it!"

Jeff glanced behind him to make sure Strange was out of ear-shot.

"We *had* some food, but it's gone," he answered. "Thieves got away with it in the night."

"Am thief-catcher! Will bring all back. Come, Charley sahib."

He started off at a fat run round the corner, beckoning to Charley to follow.

"I'll let Charley in," said Jeff.

"No, no! Charley sahib is deaf-and-dumb cook's assistant."

Charley followed the *babu*. On foot, in the enormous turban, he looked exactly like one of those low-caste Hindu youths who do the chores around *sahib's* kitchens. Jeff shrugged his shoulders and returned to the courtyard, less in love than ever with intrigue of any kind.

Chullunder Ghose led the way at a surprizingly fast waddle around the building to the elephant stalls in the rear, and thence to what had evidently been the servants' quarters in the place's palmy days. There was a hut divided into cubicles for twenty or thirty men, but nothing in it at the first glance except rats and beetles. However, the *babu* seemed well acquainted. Without hesitation he jerked open a cupboard door, disclosing a man fast asleep on a long shelf. Bad language ensued in Tamil—lots of it. The fellow was as much annoyed by the incoming light and air as at being wakened; he was even angrier when the *babu* started cuffing him and dragged him out on to the floor.

Observing then that Charley was the smaller man, and of lower caste, he flew at him, and was sent sprawling for his pains. Thereafter he decided to be reasonable and, opening another cupboard with a key he kept hidden in his loin-cloth, disclosed the provisions that Ommony had brought on the elephant. Nothing had been harmed. No packages were broken. There were kettles—matches—rather stale bread—everything.

Chullunder Ghose heaped the lot into an empty box and hove it on to Charley's head.

"Act part, *sahib!* Act part complacently!" he whispered.

Then, with a parting kick directed at the key's custodian he led the way back to the front gate, through which Jeff presently admitted both of them. Strange, naked to the waist, was washing himself in the fountain, and as it never entered his head that Charley might be Charley, and as the box on top of the turban kept the face underneath in shadow, Charley got by undetected.

The *babu* led straight to the kitchen, and half an hour later there was nothing lacking but cigars to make Strange almost pleasant company. Although he had missed his sleep, he was beginning to find the adventure amusing. It rather intrigued him to think that a middle-aged, rich man like himself should be enjoying poor-man's fun.

He unbent toward Chullunder Ghose, and, while Charley made away with victuals in the kitchen, using appetite to offset dumbness, asked the *babu* question after question, seeking to throw light on the night's events. Nothing suited the *babu* better than exercise of imagination, so Strange heard tales about the priests that, even though he mocked them with explosive snorts and hah-hahs, had some effect. His inborn incredulity—the rich-man's *vade mecum*—had been undermined in the night. There had to be some explanation, and there might, after all, be something in the *babu's*.

"They are great magicians, *sahib!* They can do things done of old in regular course of day's work by wizards only mentioned now in fairy-tales."

Strange encouraged him to talk on, since there was nothing else to do, and no tobacco. Jeff, disgusted, went to the kitchen to interview Charley, and together they made the round of the upper story, Jeff looking for something to explain the disappearing snake of the night before, and Charley scouting on his own account. They both found what they wanted.

There was a room whose one window provided a full view of every inch of the courtyard. It faced a blank white wall on the far side; and the wall was overshadowed by a cornice. Charley considered that with an appraising eye. Beside the window, just above the floor and on a level with the tiles of the veranda roof that ran along the whole of one side of the courtyard on their left as they looked out, was a large round hole, closed easily by a lid that swung on hinges. The floor-dust was considerably marked with the impress of naked feet; there were spots where two men might have knelt beside the hole; and there was a long smear where something had obviously been dragged across the floor.

"That settles that!" said Jeff, thinking less than ever of intrigue and priestly magic.

"Yes, that settles that," said Charley. "Problem now is how to get the stuff in here unobserved."

"That ought to be easy enough, Jeff mused; then turned and stared at Charley suddenly. "What do you know about it? You weren't here last night! You didn't see that snake they pulled along the roof."

"I was thinking of something else," said Charley.

"Let's go, Jeff. I don't want Strange to catch me up here. We can talk outside."

They found a stair within a turret that let them reach the courtyard without having to pass Strange, and, closing the outer gate behind them, went and sat with their backs against a wall, in a recess between two buttresses, where Jeff's pajamas were not so likely to attract attention. There they talked until it was after nine o'clock, Jeff grumbling away steadily and Charley just as steadily insisting that Strange, "had it coming to him."

"Any one who plans to rough-house him has me to fight first," Jeff said definitely, more than once.

"Aw, shucks! They'll only make a fool of him," Charley argued. "They'll fix it so he marries a nautch girl. I'll have a picture of the ceremony, and we'll rub that in. He'll be told afterwards it's regular, and the only way out is by public divorce, which'll get in all the papers, naturally. See him wince? That's where Zelmira comes to the rescue. She's jake with the priests and calls the whole thing off—on terms."

"I never heard such rot! Jeff exploded beginning to laugh. "Strange isn't an idiot. He'll turn the tables on the lot of you, or my name's Johnson. Zelmira will lose out, and serve her right!

Charley was about to offer further explanation, but they were interrupted. Sitting in a recess between two buttresses of the outer wall, they had neither seen not heard three horses cantering steadily toward them in the soft dust. Zelmira Poulakis,

Miss Ommony, and Sir William Molyneux, all mounted on the raja's Arabs, drew rein right in front of them, and Jeff got to his feet, buttoning his pajama jacket nervously. Zelmira laughed. Miss Ommony looked sympathetic.

"Seen anything of Ommony?" demanded Molyneux.

To Jeff's disgust Zelmira introduced him. To his chagrin Miss Ommony held him in conversation. To his utter discomfiture Zelmira and Molyneux rode off in search of Ommony, leaving Ommony's sister still conversing with him and exhibiting no inclination to leave off. He couldn't be abrupt and walk away. He couldn't command her to follow the others. She dismounted, springing down from the saddle as easily as a twenty-year-old, and stood in the dust before him. He had to hold her horse for her.

"Jeff Ramsden, I've heard of you. I think you've heard of me. Tell me all about this!" she demanded suddenly. "Is my brother Cottswold mad?"

She had Ommony's face, with the firmness but not the pugnacity—sweetness in the place of subtlety—and all her brother's honesty of purpose shining out of young gray eyes, that made the silver in her hair look almost comical by contrast. Jeff almost forgot his unseemly apparel and bare feet, in admiration of her.

"My difficulty is," he said, "I seem to be in everybody's confidence. The less I say the better.

"Except to me. I'm trusted with secrets of state," she answered; and Jeff believed her. She was that kind. However, he hesitated. Deep answers deep by doing as deep does, observing confidences. She respected that, and nodded:

"Very well. Let's see Meldrum Strange."

"He's in pajamas too.

"I don't mind.

"He will!"

"Does that matter?"

"The gate's not locked," Jeff answered. I'll hold the horse."

SHE smiled and walked in through the gate, closing it behind her. Jeff led the horse to where some trees provided shade, for he had no helmet; and thither Charley followed, to sit in the dust with him again, and yawn, and swear at flies, and wish there were tobacco, and behave in general as two men do, who like each other well enough but disapprove each other's attitude.

Not even Chullunder Ghose knew what happened on that occasion inside the Panch Mahal. He came out looking like a man rebuked, and in answer to Jeff's questions said that Ommony was bad enough, but his sister was the ——

"Did she know you?" Jeff asked him.

"She knows too much!" he answered.

"How did Strange like her appearance on the scene?"

"He ran upstairs and shouted at her from upper window. She sat on side of fountain, saying she has seen many people in pajamas, viceroys included; will therefore wait until he shall feel brave enough to interview her in riding suit. He came down, and they talked, this *babu* listening unsuccessfully. Drew closer without ostentation, and received rebuke—extremely acrid —very! Two minds with but a single thought, same being that *babu* is dirty person devoid of self-respect. Came forth accordingly."

There was no sign of Ommony. It seemed that Zelmira and Molyneux had found him, for they did not come back. Jeff, Charley and the *babu* sat there flapping flies until the shadow shortened to announce approaching noon, and still no sign of any one. Charley fell asleep. The *babu* dozed at intervals.

At high noon Jeff got up and strolled toward the gate, wondering whether he ought not to investigate. Those priests might be up to more impudence. There might have been an accident. He should at least peer in through the gate and ascertain that all was well. However, the gate was locked, which rather scared him. He beat on it, imagining a thousand things.

To his astonishment, not Stange but Miss Ommony opened it at last, and she was laughing. There was more unmixed amusement in her eyes than he remembered to have seen in any one's. Nor did she aplogize for having kept him so long waiting. But that was deep to deep again. Her air, he thought, was rather of cameraderie —a sort of, "you'll know soon enough" attitude—as if she understood his position fully, and would explain her own at the proper time.

"Would you mind sending the *babu* here?" she asked him.

So he walked back, wondering, knowing he liked her amazing well, and feeling confident she would not do anything to make the situation worse, whatever happened. He was sore with Strange, as who would not be? But loyalty to an employer or a partner—Strange was actually both—was al most the breath Jeff breathed. He felt comfortable now Miss Ommony had come, yet wondered why.

"She wouldn't go against her brother," he reflected. "She's notoriously hand-in-glove with him."

Puzzled, yet not so irritated as he had been, he sent the *babu* hurrying, and sat down for another hour, sleeping at last beside Charley. It was the *babu* who wakened them both at two o'clock. The horse was gone. There was still no sign of Ommony, or Molyneux, or Zelmira. The *babu* sat in the dust in front of them, all his dissatisfaction evaporated and a look of sanctified immodesty projecting almost a halo into the air around him. Sunlight heightened the effect.

"Well? What?" Jeff asked him.

"Tobacco. Cigars likewise!"

Chullunder Ghose sat down in the dust—produced matches—struck one—passed it to Ramsden.

"How did you come by these?" Jeff demanded, exhaling imported smoke.

"This *babu*, beholding state of mind of *sahibs*, contemplating same, prayed to diverse gods for tobacco, lest ill-temper of deprivees later on make job unendurable. Gods were very generous—*I* think."

"Where did you find 'em?" Jeff asked him.

"Outside gate of Panch Mahal—in dust. All but trod on same, emerging."

"What went on in there?"

"Miss Ommony, *sahib*, went off—on horseback, this *babu* inducing horse to walk from here to gate. Very gentle creature—fortunately!"

"What happened inside?"

"Inside horse? He ate nothing. She rode outside, this *babu* assisting her to mount."

"Inside the Panch Mahal, you ass!"

"Oh!" The *babu* tried to look as if he had not understood the first time. "Nothing," he answered, more blandly innocent than ever.

"Then why did they send for you?" Ramsden demanded.

"Perhaps to prove that nothing happened, *sahib*. Am exquisitely discreet witness."

"Strange has bought you, eh?"

"Am poor *babu*, but unpurchasable."

"Where's Mr. Ommony?"

"Not knowing, can't say."

Jeff hove himself erect, left Charley smoking, and walked back to the Panch Mahal, where Strange admitted him. Strange grabbed a cigar.

"Seen Ommony?" he demanded.

"No."

"Where did you find tobacco?"

"Ommony seems to have left it outside the gate."

"Huh! His sister was here."

"I admitted her."

"The —— you did! She didn't say that. Have any talk with her?"

"Nothing to mention."

"See her ride off?"

"No."

"Talk with the *babu?*"

"Questioned him. He told me nothing."

Strange seemed satisfied to know that. There was a new atmosphere about him, hardly less assertive, but more pleasant. He was plainly well-pleased with something.

"What's eating you?" Jeff demanded of his employer.

Strange smiled aggravatingly, eyed Jeff as one appraises, say, a horse, and kept his own counsel.

"I like to put one over on Johnny Bull," he answered cryptically.

"You're the goat all right, this trip," Jeff answered. "Don't be a fool, Strange! Pull out of this before they make you look ridiculous. I won't tell what I know, but I warn you. Pull out!"

"I'd stay and watch, if I were you."

"It won't amuse me to see a man of your age and dignity made the goat by a lot of Hindu priests," Jeff retorted.

"Take my tip and watch!"

Strange, even in pajamas, looked almost as he used to in New York when he paced the office floor tossing triumphant orders to a corps of clerks. He threw a chest. He clasped both hands behind him, and even kicked the fountain at the end of a to-and-fro patrol just as he used to kick the office wainscot, sitting down at once to curse and fondle his bare toe—but even so not rabid in his rage as formerly. The pain brought

water to his eyes, but he found grace to laugh at himself.

"Why don't you marry Zelmira?" Jeff asked him suddenly, judging that a favorable moment to surprize the underlying truth.

Strange set his toe down and stopped swaying. He glanced up, seeming to think deeply for a minute. He looked half-astonished, as if the notion were a new one.

"You think she would?" he demanded.

Jeff laughed.

"Save lots of trouble," he said. "She's a nice girl."

"Yes, she's nice—confounded nice! But d'you think she could endure a crabbed old fossil like me?"

"I suspect she's game to have a crack at it."

Jeff folded herculean arms across his chest and laughed aloud. If he had had clothes and shoes—or even a horse, without those—he would have started off that minute to find Zelmira and bring her there and offer the two his blessing.

"How long before Ommony sends our trunks?" he wondered. "An elephant might make the journey and return in——"

"Never mind," Strange answered. "I've had a long talk with—er—Miss Ommony. Don't care whether we get the clothes or not. They'll fix us up with doodads for the ceremony; you'll look fine in silk and ostrich-feathers!"

"I'll kill the man who tries to haze *me!*" Jeff retorted. "So Miss Ommony has been encouraging you, has she?"

"I found her quite encouraging."

Strange smiled exasperatingly.

"I'm surprized at her," Jeff growled back. "It's natural, I suppose, that she should take her brother's part, but——"

"Yes, I'm surprized at her too."

"I liked her. I thought she was——"

"Yes, I like her, too, first rate."

"You'll not like any one—yourself least—before long!" Jeff assured him. "Strange, you're off your head."

"Maybe, maybe. We've all a right to go mad if we want to."

"Yes!" exploded Jeff, "and take the consequences!"

"Um-huh! Consequences. Take 'em. That's not half-bad. Who eats crow, eh? Wait and see."

Jeff could get no more out of him. Strange avoided further talk by rearranging the overturned cot in the assembly hall and settling down to make up for lost sleep. In fifteen minutes he was snoring, seemingly without a worry on his mind. Jeff explored the building for a while, then wearied of that; cleaned the shot-gun and rifles with a fragment of Strange's shirt; wished there were something to read and, wish producing nothing, rearranged the other cot and presently slept too. Their snores rose and fell like the chorus of a busy lumber-mill.

CHAPTER XII

"Is everything ready?"

THE next few days were in some respects the most remarkable in Ommony's adventurous career, although at the time he was too occupied to realize it. He fretted for the future of his forest like a woman with one child and, being a man of action, it occurred to him that the only way to prevent one of those unforeseen slips that send men's plans agley was to keep every one else busy.

He had to keep good-tempered and apparently serene, which in itself was difficult enough; to think in two languages, which was easy; to divine the thought of Hindu priests and a Bengali *babu*, in which practise had made him proficient; to foresee chance, which is impossible; and to be everywhere at once, which is mainly metaphysics. He accomplished marvels; but all men have their limitations.

His opinion of Strange by that time was much lower than any man may safely entertain about any other man. The trunk arrived by elephant, and he sent it to the Panch Mahal. Then, fearing that Strange might walk abroad and stumble upon facts too plain to be misinterpreted, he begged his sister to see as much of the millionaire as possible and use her tact to the utmost to persuade him to stay indoors. She consented. She always had been sisterly and loyal; many a difficult negotiation Ommony had pulled off with her devoted aid. But she disgusted Jeff Ramsden by so obviously aiding in a plot that he thought outrageous.

"Women are all cut from the same piece!" Jeff grumbled to himself, and left them as much as possible alone, strolling off for exercise whenever she put in appearance.

The raja was another difficulty. Ommony managed him by harping on the *Ville Lumière* string. He persuaded the raja to

get busy packing, not, however, encouraging him to leave Chota Pegu yet, for fear he might meet some high official in Bombay or elsewhere and let the cat out of the bag—a thing he would delight in doing.

Then Zelmira Poulakis needed wise counselling. He insisted to her that the danger was Molyneux, who might at any moment fly off the peg and stop the whole proceedings with a high hand.

"Brass-face is a hard nut for his own sex; but he's putty in a woman's hands," he told her. "He's another of these convinced bachelors who'd rather flirt than feather a nest. Go riding with him. Use the raja's horses. Keep Brass-face off the lot as much as possible."

Zelmira complied. She was nothing if not a good sport; and a good sport, of either sex, was the one thing under heaven Molyneux admired. So Molyneux attached himself to her court as mounted baronet-in-waiting and the two rode all about the countryside with a Hindu *sais* behind them, who entertained the other *saises* in the stables afterwards with imitations of the Brass-face sahib's, "Hah-hah-hah." But he could not describe Zelmira's answering music; she laughs like Titania, which is over the head of an Indian groom's histrionics.

Then there was the *babu*. Something had bitten him. He was getting uppish. He had altogether too much to say—too many notions—too much independence altogether. He did not even clamor for emolument. The wine of the conspiracy had gone into his head. He talked of "we, ourselves, and us," as if Ommony and he were partners, and he senior. When ordered to do one thing he frequently did another; ordered to say one thing, he sometimes said the opposite. Abused and threatened for it, he tried to look chastened, but failed, and could be heard chuckling the instant Ommony's back was turned. Yet Ommony dared not get rid of him at that stage of proceedings. The *babu* knew too much.

Besides, Chullunder Ghose would have to serve as go-between; almost as master of ceremonies. Some one who knew English and could interpret the priests' requirements would have to be in attendance, and none except the *babu* was available. Ommony himself could hardly put in an appearance. He intended to witness the initiation, but from hiding, along with Charley Mears; and it was likely anyhow that Strange would object to having any white man, except his own friend Jeff, to witness rites that he felt sure Strange hoped would be outrageous.

And that thought brought another in its wake. He knew Molyneux. He dared bet on what Molyneux would do in any given set of circumstances. Nothing less than fatal injury would restrain Molyneux from witnessing the ceremony—a certainty that presented advantages, but an obstacle as well. Objections raised by the priests themselves would weigh nothing in Molyneux's estimate, who would present himself at the front gate, demand admittance and obtain it. That might stop the whole proceedings.

"Tell you what," he said to Molyneux. "You don't want to appear in this officially, I suppose?"

"——, sir, no!"

"Strange might jib at that, too. He'd hate to be made a fool of in front of a uniformed British official.

"I don't blame him."

"The raja won't be there, of course. The priests and he don't hit it off. Why don't you borrow an outfit from the raja. You'll look splendid in it, and Strange won't know you're not an Indian prince. He doesn't care in the least what Indians think of him."

"Hah-hah-hah!" The monocle went into place. "Gad, Ommony! By ——, that 'ud be a good joke, wouldn't it! Think the raja's finery would fit me? Eh?"

Ommony took heart of grace. As a machine-gun man will test the mechanism that he knows is perfect on the eve of action; as a hunter tests a trap-fall; as a doctor feels a convalescing patient's pulse, he could not keep himself from testing what seemed to him the one uncertain link.

"You've no objection then to going through with it?"

"By gad, no!"

"No fear of your calling it off at the last minute?"

"None in the world."

Ommony sighed silently, relieved beyond expression, and went off for another interview with the priests, who he knew might not be trusted, but whom he felt he could manage none the less. Molyneux was dynamite. If he exploded, nothing invented could contain or hold him. The priests were mercury, elusive and dangerous,

but likely to flow down-hill along the line of least resistance.

On the way he met Charley Mears, and stepped aside behind a garden wall to talk with him.

"Is everything ready?" he asked.

"Sure bet. I got the camera in place while Strange was showing your sister the inner courtyard. But it's my belief Strange don't care a hoot. He saw me once, and I think he recognized me. He avoids that room up-stairs as if he knows my things are in there and don't want to seem to know. The door's locked, but he's never even tried to open it."

"That's just fortunate coincidence."

"Well: he's looked everywhere else. I asked Jeff what he thought about it, and Jeff just snorted. He's not fit to speak to—wanders off on his own like a bear with a sore head."

"Last minute nerves, that's all," said Ommony. "Over the top tomorrow, and all's well."

"Yes, I guess it's nerves all right. I've a hunch there's a peg loose. However, you're running it."

"Everything's in first class shape," said Ommony, and laughed, and left him.

Then the priests: another matter altogether. They were aloof and alone in a quiet temple that had seen its better days, perhaps, but still exuded an atmosphere of changelessness and influence. Its outer court was hidden among sar-trees and surrounded by a wall on which the legends of the gods were carved with no mean skill. The centuries had smoothed and subdued all harshness, and a bell that tolled frequently suggested in mellow tones that there was comfort in austerity—a thought improved on by the doves, that cooed all day long in an endless hymn of mother-magic.

There was no space in the courtyard where an unclean heretic from oversea might stand; but there was an outer court—a sort of jail-yard, cut off by high, squared masonry, where those untouchables who sweep the streets and make themselves generally useful may squat and listen to beatitude afar off. Ommony was in their class for the time being. He entered the enclosure with suitable reverence, and stood still until a twice-born venerable with shaven head and straggling beard hailed him reasonably insolently from a platform set above the wall. With becoming diffidence Ommony drew nearer.

The platform was designed, with a round hole on the side toward the unclean department, so that riff-raff from the dregs of the less-than-Brahmin world might stand underneath and be blessed by curt phrases, as it were spat down at them. They might even make their wishes known by standing beneath with faces upturned, that being a properly repectful attitude, calculated to enhance the priestly dignity. But it was excruciatingly uncomfortable; and the view to be had of the underside of a priest—a sort of worm's-eye view of heaven—added nothing to the charm.

THERE was silence for quite a long time, while the priest waited for Ommony to speak first, and he waited for the priest, neither man choosing to overstimulate the other's pride. The —— of it was, that if you looked up you looked suppliant; and if you looked down you naturally presented a hang-dog aspect to the haughty ecclesiastic. However, those were the two alternatives; if you stepped back you were beyond the pale, not speechless necessarily but according to the rules inaudible.

The temple bell boomed three times, its golden note shimmering away into infinity, before Ommony could master his exasperation to the point of speaking first.

"Are all things ready?" he demanded.

"All what things?"

Ommony laid his head right back to see better through the hole, but had to squint because the sun was in his eyes.

"You listen to me!" he retorted angrily. "This affair has gone too far for any high-horse business. If you don't talk frankly you can call the whole thing off and we'll let the Government interfere.

That is roughly what he said. The Urdu of it, literally set down, would not appeal to a western sense of the proprieties. The words he actually used were penetrating—pierced even priestly armor—brought response.

"There is no need for the *sahib* to feel indignant."

"No, no need! Permit me, *sahib!*"

He turned and found Chullunder Ghose behind him, looking meek and amiable, which surely implied he was full to the cranium of mischief. What was worse, it

implied the *babu* had been spying. Why had he followed Ommony in there uninvited? Why should he approach the priests at all by that humiliating route, when there was another, fairer court reserved for persons of his intermediate state of unrighteousness?

However, the *babu* seized the upper hand by storm before there was time to prevent him. Standing well back, so that he could see the priest over the edge of the platform, he began to hurl abuse at him, insulting him with every epithet Bengali imagination could invent, ending breathless on the point—his real argument:

"Moreover, you are a fool. This *sahib* has brains. You should treat him with deference."

Whereat the incredible occurred. The priest called to some one beneath him in the inner courtyard. There was a pause, after which keys were heard to jangle on a ring. Then a small door set deeply in a corner of the wall was opened cautiously; and through the opening, but touching neither door nor wall, an arm emerged and beckoned Ommony and the *babu*.

"Quick, *sahib!* This is a high honor!"

The *babu*, almost pushing Ommony in his excitement, hurried through after him and a lean priest locked the door at their backs. Even so, they were not in the inner courtyard, but in a sort of cell without a roof, with another small door at the far side, through which the man with the keys disappeared. It was like a pen for sorting animals, where they might perhaps be disinfected before admission to the main corral; only there was a stone bench along one side, and Ommony sat down on it.

"High, very great honor!" said the *babu*, squatting at his feet.

Before they had time to exchange a dozen words the inner door opened and two priests entered, neither of whom was the same who had spoken from the platform. By their air these were men higher up, although they wore no insignia to prove it. They had no need to swagger. Their assurance was too absolute to call for self-expression. Self-conscious sanctity had no more use for sanctimoniousness. They had come to study an insect, and proceeded.

"What do you want?" asked one of them, as if that might be interesting.

Ommony took his time about answering. He was seated, and it did not run counter to his humor to keep them standing. What little wind he could feel in his sails, so to speak, that minute was so light that he pondered before deciding on which way to lay his helm. And before he made decision the *babu* robbed him of what little wind there was.

"The *sahib* comes to ask your honors' excellency whether all is in order for the initiation? Are there hitches?"

"No, no hitches." Just three words, spoken without apparent movement of the lips, in a voice devoid of emotion. Then: "But delay," said the other priest; and if he noticed the look of exasperation that swept over Ommony's face he gave no sign of it.

"The *sahib* is in haste," said the *babu*, glancing from Ommony to them and back again.

No statement ever was more true, but it had no effect on the priests. They were as interested as anglers might be in the protests of a dying fish. Ommony could not afford to let proceedings hang fire. Strange might cut loose any minute. Molyneux might change his mind and decide the Central Government should interfere. Zelmira—even his own sister—might make some mistake. He himself was nearly worn out with sleeplessness and worry; and there was no certainty that the raja might not betray the whole plan any minute. If the raja should see Strange——

"It is time," he said simply, mastering the impulse to stand up and storm at them.

"Then why does he wait?"

That was the ultimate of insolence, expressed superbly. No frown—no curling lip—no hauteur; merely interest, addressed to the *babu*, not to Ommony. Ommony decided it was time to lose his temper.

"I'm here to tell you I propose to wait no longer!" he answered indignantly. "It's time for you to carry out your promises."

"To what does he refer? We made no promises."

To the *babu* again, not to Ommony; as if the *babu* were his keeper. The *babu* began to speak, but checked himself. The other priest had a word to say:

"It is for suppliants to promise. We have ears, and we remember."

"What does he mean?" demanded Ommony, trying to turn the tables by directing his question at the *babu* instead of at them. But he gained nothing by it; the priests' indifference was that of graven marble.

"*Sahib*, it is as this *babu* said. They make no promises to any one. They make stipulation, and await *sahib's* promise, same not having yet been made."

"What do they want?"

"Promise of Panch Mahal."

"It isn't mine," said Ommony. "How can I promise them what doesn't belong to me?"

The *babu* made no pretense to knowing that. He turned to the priests. The exchange between him and Ommony having been in English, he interpreted.

"Neither does his necessity belong to us," one of the priests answered.

Ommony swore fervently under his breath, not caring whether the priests saw his discomfiture or not. They obviously understood the situation. They had let him lay his plans to the point where success depended solely on themselves, and now took advantage of that to spring impossible demands. How could he promise them Strange's property?

"Tell them I'll do my best," he said angrily.

One of the priests permitted himself the luxury of a thin, hard smile.

"They want definite promise," said the *babu*, without waiting for the priests to say the obvious.

Ommony got to his feet disgusted, feeling for his pipe.

"All right," he said. "Let 'em call the whole thing off."

He did not know what he was going to do, except to turn his back on the priests and have no more dealings with them. He supposed he must go first to Molyneux and confess failure; then, presumably, to Strange and plead with him. He liked that thought about as much as a condemned man enjoys the prospect of the gallows. However, what was the use of arguing? He laid his hand on the door leading to the outer court. But it was locked.

"Let me out," he said angrily.

But while his back was turned he had given the enemy time for conference. It does not take long for priests of that religion to exchange glances and a nod. They made no move to let him out, and he turned on them again. One of the priests said something in a low voice to Chullunder Ghose.

"Their excellencies say," said the *babu*, "that the Panch Mahal is theirs by right. No white man will be allowed to occupy it."

The priest spoke again. The *babu* interpreted.

"They need it for their purposes. They would be careful for the forest."

The other priest said something in an undertone. The *babu's* quick ear caught the words, and he turned them promptly into English—

"Moreover, in the matter of the forest, it is not wise to offend the servants of the gods."

The implied threat was obvious enough, but Ommony's spirit surged in him instantly. They were temporizing! They did not wish to close the discussion! Then there was a weak joint in their armor somewhere. He prayed to whatever gods there might be to point it out to him, but the gods seem always humorously dumb in an emergency.

He looked at the priests. They were emotionless. His eye fell on the *babu* squatting before them in a pose of reverent humility. Reason, intuition, instinct, all three warned him that the *babu* was playing for no hand but his own. Ergo, if the *babu* had a private understanding with the priests then he might be the weak joint. But how to prove it? And what then?

Possibly they thought he, Ommony, was somebody whose yea or nay amounted to more than it really did. The *babu* might have given them to understand that. Priests think in terms of autocracy, and most of India deludes itself as to the real power, or lack of it, that legally belongs to an official.

"Ask them what they think of me?" he demanded suddenly.

The question took the priests entirely by surprize. They smirked at each other, confessing they did not know how to answer it. Their true thoughts would have been so insolent as to make further approach impossible. They had a thousand thoughts about him in the relative, where temporary delusions are acceptable for the sake of convenience. Which thought did he mean?

"Nothing!" was the answer they would have liked to give; but one does not give that kind of answer to a government official at whose hands advantage is sought. One of the priests said something very quickly. The *babu* caught it and interpreted—

"They say, they know the *sahib's* influence can prevent a transfer to themselves of legal title to the Panch Mahal."

To tell the truth and deny that would have been mere stupidity.

"I promise not to try to prevent it," he said simply.

"If a transfer is arranged, will the *sahib* permit it?"

"Yes."

That was all. The priests nodded, saying something as they turned to go.

"The ceremony may take place tomorrow," said the *babu*, as the man came with the keys to turn them out through the other door. So Ommony went, feeling mystified. What had they up their sleeves? What, he wondered, did the *babu* know about it?

CHAPTER XIII

"Watch! Watch! Be still!"

ALL CHOTA PEGU turned out in gala attire for a holiday. Lord knew there were few enough occasions, and few, too, who could afford much finery; but such as they had, and such as this was, they made the best of it. The huts yclept houses disgorged their living streams at dawn, and those in turn were swallowed in a denser stream of country-folk from surrounding villages, a trifle shy and rather sniffed at—since even Chota Pegu draws a line between the towny and the hick.

Some one had blundered, or had let the news get out, which amounted to the same thing. Ommony suspected the raja; the raja blamed it on the priests; they dropped dark hints about Chullunder Ghose; and he said nothing. But it transpired later that the man who opened up a lemonade-stand near the Panch Mahal front gate, and did a roaring trade, had to turn over the lion's share of the profit to the *babu*, who financed him.

Even jugglers came, and snake-charmers from only they knew where, and performed for copper coins before the crowd, that waited patiently as Indian crowds can be depended on to do when there is entertainment.

There were even wrestlers—such artists in their craft that they would struggle for twenty minutes and tie themselves into inextricable knots of which none could guess the outcome; and they would hold that insoluble conundrum, contrary to all nature's laws, while a small boy took up a collection; after which they would calmly unravel themselves and begin all over, working up new enthusiasm for a second offertory. And nobody ever did learn which would have won if the match had gone on to a finish.

Then there were acrobats, who could stand on one foot on top of a thin pole whose other end rested on bare earth, distorting themselves on that giddy perch into likenesses of nothing any one had ever seen. And there were beggars of course; and a man who said he was a leper, and looked it. And they all gave to the leper, although everybody knew that if he really were one the Government would have taken him away long ago; they being charitable folk, more anxious to acquire merit than to impose it on others.

Then, about eight in the morning, every one said, "Ah-h-h!" because the elephants began to come from the direction of the temple. Lots of people got in the way and were all but trampled on, which was exciting; and they naturally laughed because they had escaped, and the rest laughed at them, so there was a great time. They had all seen elephants every day of their lives; but it is the mood you are in, not what you are looking at, that counts.

Besides: the elephants had curtained howdahs, and everybody knows what thrilling secrets that suggests. As each enormous beast padded up, swaying and looking for mischief with his trunk, there was silence to see what happened when he maneuvered into position exactly in front of the main gate, and knelt there. They all knew what would happen, but they were excited just the same.

Out stepped the most beautiful, ravishing, marvelous, jeweled and scented nautch-girls the world had ever seen; and all the world that knows anything at all is familiar with the fact that the temple girls of Chota Pegu are the loveliest anywhere. Are they not brought there when hardly old enough to toddle, and trained—and trained—and trained until they can not only dance all the intricate steps that the Gods used to dance in the old days when they lived on the earth among mortals, but can even look exactly like the Goddesses, whose portraits for comparison are on the temple walls?

They had all seen the nautch-girls scores of times, but it was always a new thrill; and this being a merry occasion, it led, of course, to jokes that it was a good thing the priests

did not hear. Sometimes the priests know when it is wisest not to listen.

They counted nine-and-forty nautch-girls—seven times seven—a miracle-working number, portentous of good luck. And the last nautch-girl laughed aloud as she got down from the elephant, which was an omen positively. Nothing could possibly go wrong after that; there must be new amazement coming.

And there was! The raja's elephants—the four that had to be supported from the taxes—as distinguished from the priests' elephants, which were supported by donations, which is different. The raja was not there, but nobody minded that; the priests had called him a low-caste degenerate, and they were no doubt right, being priests, who know everything. But on the elephants' backs were the most wonderful people they had ever seen, and nobody knew who the people were, which made it thrilling.

On the front elephant there were two ladies—great queens presumably. One was veiled heavily, but the other wore no veil at all. Her jewelry sparkled in the sun—about a *crore's* worth* by the most conservative estimate. She was a European queen undoubtedly, for she wore the European style of dress—or so they all supposed, for they had never seen anything like it. She was all trigged out in silver and gray, with a hat so smothered in flowers that it looked as if she must have stolen them that morning with the dew on them from the garden of the Gods. She smiled to right and left, and her smile would have melted the heart of a money-lender, it was so genial and kind and merry.

Then every one said "Ah-h-h!" again; for on the second elephant there was an emperor—no less! He wore some jewels, although not so many as the lady did; but to make up for lack of them he was robed in shimmering silver-and-golden silk. His turban was woven of silver and golden silk in alternate layers, criss-crossed up the front; and there were half a dozen ostrich-feathers stuck into a brooch in front, that would have made the King of England purple with acquisitiveness.

He was a big man—broad—up-sitting—threw his shoulders back as if he were well used to leading armies on parade. No doubt he was a great king from foreign parts or somewhere. Heavens, but he was dignified! His brow, they agreed, was like a mountain frowning down over the sea; and if he hadn't worn a monocle in the English fashion they might have almost believed him a God. Nobody ever remembered to have seen an image of a God who wore a monocle, so that settled that. But he was wonderful.

And now another wonder! On the elephant behind him rode a plain, undignified, unvarnished English clergyman, in a plain black suit, with a white topee, mopping his face with a plain white handkerchief, and seeming unused to elephants. That was old "Begum" anyhow, a cow whose gait was always more uncomfortable than an earthquake. And serve him right! For he was one of those black-dyed rogues who, their priests had frequently assured them, are worse than all the devils in the Hindu Pantheon. They laughed to see how green his face looked; and some said he looked, too, as if he disapproved the whole proceedings, which made it even funnier.

Then, although the raja stayed away, there were several of his courtiers, who arrived in a troop on horseback; and there was a joke to be made about every one of them, because everybody knew how in debt they were and who really owned their horses if the truth were out. They let the truth out merrily. One wag swore he saw a money-lender's name on the accoutrements, and that joke was voted so excellent that thereafter you might have trodden on folks' toes without making them angry.

But the most surprizing marvel of all was yet to come. There had been plans whispered from lip to ear to climb the *sar*-trees presently and see as much as might be seen of what should take place within. The walls were high and available trees were some way off; but the glimpses so had would serve to weave gossip of for months to come.

Some boys had even gone to fetch a ladder and they had it stowed in a safe place out of sight. They even had prepared what to say to the raja's "Poo-Bah" policeman, in case that worthy should turn up and make himself objectionable; there were lots of things that might be said, nor any very comforting to his esteem, but they chose the most scandalous, that being high festival. Whatever that irascible official might say in return, they were determined to climb the trees and remain in the branches

* *Crore*—million.

until the show was over, or until he fetched an ax and cut the trees down, which they offered to wager he was much too lazy and dignified to do. (All Chota Pegu is willing to bet on a certainty.)

However, when the last of the court noblemen had dismounted, tossed his reins to a ragged *sais*, and swaggered in, the unbelievable occurred. Somebody threw the great front gate open wide and invited them all to enter and be seated! They could hardly believe their senses! True, the priests had a hand in this, and the priests were always generous providers of pageantry; dangerous folk—mean, grasping, contemptible in many ways—but always willing to let the crowd in on eye-feasts.

This, though, was a white man's *tamasha**. *Sahibs* did not provide fun for mere village folk—at least not often, and when they did there was always a string to it, like higher taxes, or vaccination or some other scheme for impoverishing them in this world and depriving them of heaven in the next.

Everybody knew Iss-tee-range had bought the Panch Mahal, and that he had gone mad in there, shooting off his rifles at the rats at night and prowling around by day in pajamas and bare feet. Perhaps this was part of his madness.

Anyhow, there were the gates wide open, and somebody beckoning, so they all trooped in, treading on one another's heels for fear Iss-tee-range might change his crazy mind and slam the gates in the faces of the last ones. But there was lots of room and no hurry after all.

Chullunder Ghose, perspiring and nervous to the verge of a collapse, ushered them into long rows on the side of the courtyard facing the door of the assembly-room—in which all the old scandalous debauches used to be held, which every one agreed were a disgrace to the countryside, and nobody would have missed for a year's income if by any means he could worm a way in.

And although there was a fountain between them and the other side of the courtyard they could all see nicely, because the fountain was not high, and some sort of stage had been erected, reaching nearly the full width of the courtyard with its back against the assembly-room wall. They recognized that stage; it was the one the priests used when they provided a ceremony outside the temple walls in order that all—even the very lowest castes and the casteless—might benefit.

And they knew the screens that stood at each end of the stage and in the midst in front of the assembly-room door; those were the screens the nautch-girls hid behind, to emerge for the ritual dance. They were the screens an old-time raja—a real one, not to be mentioned in the same breath with this man—had brought from Burmah; and some said they had been made in China, or some such far-away land. Whether that was true or not, they were wooden, and carved all over with delightful dragons, and no man now alive possessed the craftsmanship to fashion others like them.

In the midst of the courtyard with his back to the fountain, beside the image of a god who had four faces so that he might see everything, sat the magnificent prince with the monocle; and it was well worth a three-hour wait to sit in the sun behind him and study the set of his shoulders and see the dignity with which he smoked cigars. The princess with the diamonds and without the veil was beside him in an ordinary armchair, and he paid her a great deal of attention—much more interesting than the antics of a leopard in a cage or any other of the sights they were used to.

After a while he complained of the sun, in a big brass voice that must have awakened the gods, because four temple attendants came and rigged up an awning over him and the princess, which rather spoiled the view of those behind him, but they overcame that by crowding closer toward the right and left.

THE princess in the dark veil was missing, and none could guess what had happened to her, which was intriguing. But "Mellidrum Iss-tee-range" with a big cigar in his mouth sat in a chair over to the left, with an enormous man beside him who was twice as big as "Ommonee," and who somebody had said could kill an ox with one blow of his fist. Everybody hoped he would do that as part of the entertainment. He was a *sahib* such as everybody loved; when he spoke his voice rumbled like gun-wheels; and even the stray dog that had found its way in was not afraid to go near and sniff him.

Iss-tee-range and the big *sahib* were dressed in ordinary serge suits, and Iss-tee-range was smiling—as who wouldn't be who

*Affair.

owned all the *crores* and *crores* he was reported to own. But the big *sahib* looked uncomfortable, which nobody could account for. Was he not also an Amelikani? And are not all those people fabulously wealthy? Can a man be rich and anxious at the same time? Well, there he was. Behold him, fidgeting at intervals and throwing away a good cigar before he had smoked the half of it.

Then, oh! Watch! Watch! Still! Be still! Make those women hush the babies! The musicians come!

And sure enough, out from behind the screen in the midst of the stage, and down the steps in front of it, came twenty-eight members of the temple orchestra, each with his string, or wind-instrument; and then seven drummers with tom-toms, making thirty-five in all. They squatted in a long row in front of the stage and began there and then to discourse sweet music—so sweet and marvelous that it made the great brass-voiced prince from foreign parts call out.

"——! Can we stick it out? By gad, by gad, by gad!"

They wondered what language that might be, but did not doubt it was applause. And so evidently the musicians understood, for they redoubled their efforts; and the princess of the sparkling diamonds sitting beside the great prince laughed until they all laughed too, they couldn't help it. Nobody in all Chota Pegu ever had half such a wonderful time.

CHAPTER XIV

"Chullunder Ghose prays to all the Gods!"

UP IN the little hot room with a hole in the wall that provided view of the whole courtyard, Ommony stood sweating beside Charley Mears, who had abandoned native costume because there was no more need of it. Charley was arrayed in white duck pants and an undershirt. He looked like a gun-layer going into action. But his gun was a machine with a powerful lens, whose food was sensitized film instead of cartridges.

The window was shuttered, which made the air stifling, but there were holes through which a man could see, and Ommony, wiping the sweat from his neck, clapped an eye to each hole in turn repeatedly, careful not to trip over the camera legs that were spraddled out in three directions so that the camera looked like an enormous spider ready to spring on its prey below.

"Can't see my sister anywhere," he grumbled. "Did you notice her come in?"

"No," said Charley. "I was sighting the machine."

"——!" remarked Ommony.

He realized that he had seen too little of his sister during the last few days, and she had all the family proclivity for launching off on independent lines of action. Brains she had, and loyalty she had, but scant sense of obedience, and too much reliance on her own judgment. He recalled more than one occasion when she had taken her own course without waiting to consult him. Where the dickens was she?

"Strange is looking much too pleased with himself," he said presently.

"It's my belief he knows this camera's up here," said Charley, squatting down at last beside his gun, since all was ready. "He glanced up here once or twice," he added, wiping the sweat off his hands on the seat of his pants. "Gee! Is that what they call music?"

"Who let the crowd in?" Ommony demanded. He had been busy talking to an emissary from the priests in one of the other rooms, and the man had been so deliberately stupid that everything had to be said three or four times over, so that Ommony had missed quite a lot of what went on.

"Dunno," said Charley. "The *babu* acted usher."

"—— that *babu!*"

"He seems like a kind of a humorous guy to me," said Charley. But that remark was only further irritation.

Ommony had worse than doubt of the *babu.* He more than suspected him. He was willing to take oath that Chullunder Ghose was up to mischief on his own account, making money out of the proceedings in some ingenious way. For one thing, he was nearly sure he had an understanding with the priests; and he did not flatter himself for one minute that his own bargain with the priests was worth an anna if the priests should discover another means of getting what they wanted. They had promised nothing—merely permitted him to infer that they would fulfill their part; and he would not have felt much easier even if they had made a definite promise.

"Rascals!" he muttered, over and over again.

Well: it was too late now to change anything or call the whole proceedings off. He foresensed disaster; but in that event he knew what he would do. There would be pictures, that much was certain—pictures that would make Strange look ridiculous—that, if a Government a thousand miles away should see them, would show Strange in an intriguing light. If worse came to worst, he would go down into the courtyard and dare Strange to do a thing about the forest—threaten him—tell him of the pictures. And there was a rope-ladder all ready for Charley to make his escape with the exposed reels. If Strange should laugh at the threats, then the reels should go to Simla and be shown there.

His whole plan began to look like a nightmare that might end any way except satisfactorily, and the infernal music in the courtyard heightened the suggestion, grating on nerves already on end from lack of sleep and proper meals. He had tried to oversee too many things at once, and knew it. Charley, eyeing him thoughtfully, diagnosed stage-fright and tried to comfort him.

"You should worry," he said. "You'll have done your best. That's all a man *can* do."

But Ommony's creed is stern. He must save the forest. India, the world, the universe would undoubtedly continue to evolve, whatever happened. But there would be no excuse acceptable in face of leagues and leagues of slaughtered trees. There was his life's work. When his own hour came to face his Karma there would be the dreadful question—just, simple, inescapable—"What ha' you *done?*"

Not what the other man did. What had he, Cottswold Ommony done? Where were the trees entrusted to his keeping? Sincerely, simply, he would rather die than fail the forest. His own personal honor and advantage weighed nothing in the scale.

"Gee! The light off that wall's perfect!" said Charley, scattering encouragement at random in the hope that some might stick.

"Keep Strange in focus. That's the main thing."

"Can't do a close-up from here, you know. He'll show small but recognizable."

"Are you ready?" Ommony snapped suddenly. "Shoot then!"

And the crank of the camera began turning steadily, sixteen times a minute.

Below, the weird stringed-instruments burst into sudden spasms of twanged noise and the flutes screamed through that while the thumping of the tom-toms rose and fell. Out filed the nautch-girls from behind the screen—bare of stomach—breasts hidden under tinselled shields—shirted to the knees in pale-blue gauzy stuff. Half moved to the right, half to the left, until their line stretched from end to end across the stage and they all stood motionless, leaving a gap in their midst through which the forty-ninth, the "leading lady," came.

She was unlike all the others—prettier; and such scant garments as she wore were bronze instead of blue. The bosses on her breasts were studded with uncut jewels, and her bracelets glittered. In either hand she held garlands made from flower-buds threaded on strings, and as she swayed her lithe body those shook until they looked like wind-blown blossoms falling from the trees. But that was not their purpose. She had other use for them.

Strange sat smiling with a big cigar stuck upward in the corner of his mouth, having his money's worth so far by the look of him and much too pleased with himself.

"You wait!" muttered Ommony. "You forest-robber! Wait!"

But he had an eye, too, for Zelmira, whose jeweled bracelet rose and fell as she tried to find some intelligible rhythm in the music. It did not seem to Ommony that she was paying sufficient attention; she should have been watching for her cue, instead of whispering to Molyneux and laughing at the man's jokes. Molyneux was perfectly capable of spoiling the whole thing by keeping her there beside him, instead of letting her slip away behind the scenes.

However, the nautch was on. Ommony's urgent business was to stand ready to hand Charley a fresh reel and slip the exposed one into its steel box, so that they might miss as few incidents as possible.

THE music diminished to proportions in which some ryhthm was at last perceptible, and the forty-nine girls began to sing, swaying from the feet upward, rather like plants seeking to uproot themselves than women dancing. The long line moved in ripples like waving corn, and the gong was a wail, mad-melancholy, but redeemed by golden notes and the faint, far-away peal of a bronze bell struck from behind the scenes at intervals.

It was a long dance, and a language. Each motion was a symbol that had meant the same since India arose from prehistoric sea-bed and became a land; plainer and fuller of meaning than words to eyes uneducated in the changing symbols of the West. It was a simple enough story, of seed, rain, growth and harvest, with fertilizing wind ablow through all of it, and all the while a lipped hymn to the ancient Gods who cause such sequences to be—melancholy only because men refuse to recognize the breath of God in all things.

These were the temple virgins—institution older than the hills—no more conscious of the inner meaning of the ancient rite than their audience, that looked for phallic impropriety, and found it, India having descended into evil days. Production, reproduction, birth and evolution, all were mocked in a rite designed to glorify them. But it pleased Strange. He chewed on his cigar, and smiled with hands across his stomach, like a bald-head in the front row at the Gaiety. It was expensive. He had paid too much for the Panch Mahal. But this was a pretty good make-weight they had thrown in.

You could see him wondering what the fellows at the club would say when he told them all about it. Not many Englishmen, and no Americans had ever seen that dance. There was one Englishman who did not want to see it, and the village audience chuckled, for the padre-sahib, who had been sitting out of sight of them on a low chair in front of the image of the four-faced god, came around and sat between it and them, where he could not see the stage.

The music changed, as if the padre-sahib's mood invited it. It defied him—mocked his disapproval—rose into a wild confusion of wailing wind and thrumming strings, with the drums doing galloping foot falls. The eight-and-forty nautch-girls stood nearly motionless, swaying only slightly from the waist. But she in the midst with a glittering gossamer shawl to aid her, began a serpent dance, like the fabled madness of the pythons in the spring. And that was devilish.

"Get this!" urged Ommony. "Focus on her now, and follow her whatever happens!"

"——, she moves too quick!" said Charley. "She's the goods, if she'd go slow!"

"Aim for her and nothing else! We'll get some of it."

There came eight priests chanting, and walking slowly out from behind the screen—filed down the steps—and stood in line between them and where Strange sat—backs to the audience—cutting Strange off, as it were, from the common herd. And Ommony laughed, for he saw Jeff Ramsden nudge Strange and clench his fist. There was going to be a fight unless the priests should watch their step, and that would serve perfectly. Anything, in fact, would serve that should give Zelmira her chance to rescue Strange from a predicament.

But Strange whispered behind his hand, and Jeff sat back again apparently contented. And why had Zelmira not vanished behind the wings? She should have gone already, but there she sat still beside Molyneux, without a trouble in the world, to look at her.

"Another reel, quick!" snapped Charley. "This is hot stuff!"

The python-dance was languishing to long, slow, undulating movements that the camera could record, and fingers slippery with sweat worked feverishly to snap the fresh reel in and resume cranking. Ommony clapped his eye to a hole in the shutter again, and almost shouted:

"Get this now! Get this! Are you sure you're on?"

"Sure, I've got it. It's good."

Slowly down the steps the nautch-girl came, pausing on every step to let the python-spirit torture her into new, monstrous shapes. The priests' chant and the music rose to wilder heights. The other nautch-girls swayed in a sort of delirious ecstasy, humming obbligato to the priests. The native audience moved in unison, their breath expiring in great gasps all together. Suddenly Strange let his cigar fall, and sat bolt upright.

"Keep her in the picture now!" said Ommony excitedly.

The dancing girl ceased writhing like a snake and suddenly ran toward Strange as if he were her only love. For a second it looked as if she would embrace him, and all the audience drew its breath in sibilantly. But instead, she tossed the garlands over his neck and swept back six paces, pausing as if to admire him, while the music and the chorus rose to a scream and the tom-toms thundered.

Next she advanced and threw her veil before him, knelt on it as if imploring him,

and backed away withdrawing veil and all as if he had rejected her advance and she was broken-hearted. Then forward again as if to fall into his arms, he grinning, and away before he could touch her, not a thread of her gossamer shawl as much as brushing against his sleeve.

"Hah-Hah!" laughed Molyneux; and for the first time it seemed to dawn on Strange that possibly he was being mocked. He began to look uncomfortable and a trifle flushed.

"Hah-Hah!" Molyneux laughed again, and the audience all began to laugh too, because that kind of jeer is contagious.

But the dancing girl danced on, and the music wailed and shrieked in time to the dinning tom-toms until Strange, feeling all eyes on him, glanced to right and left looking as if he would like to escape. It is all very well to be made a lot of, but to be worshipped in public by a lady in diaphanous attire is more than even millionaires can stand. He glanced up once as if he knew the camera was recording everything.

"Did you see that?" said Charley.

And as he spoke the woman let her gauzy shawl fall over Strange's head and shoulders. The audience yelled as if she had crowned him king.

"Did you get it?" squealed Ommony.

Strange did not know what to do. He simply sat there looking foolish. But Chullunder Ghose appeared from behind somewhere and stood beside him, urging, protesting, gesticulating. Jeff Ramsden laid a hand on Strange's sleeve, but Strange shook it off; and the girl began to dance as if luring Strange on to heaven knew what behind the dragon-screens.

Chullunder Ghose took him by the right arm and almost pulled him out of the chair, ignoring Jeff's protests. Jeff shook his fist in the babu's face, and Molyneux barked "Hah-Hah!" again, while the audience squealed above the din of music. The girl began backing away, and Strange, yielding to Chullunder Ghost, got up and followed her.

"Oh gorgeous!" chuckled Ommony.

" 'Nother reel quick!" snapped Charley.

They re-loaded like a destroyer's gun-crew at battle practise, in time to catch Strange sprawling up the steps in the girl's wake, for somebody or something tripped him. And when he reached the stage the nautch-girls all surrounded him and danced in a whirl, so that for a minute nothing could be seen of Strange at all; it was as if he had been swallowed. They had his coat and collar off, for some one flung them at Zelmira's feet, where she sat beside Molyneux, bubbling laughter. And when the whirling circle broke at last and the girls spread outward either way along the stage the python-girl was gone, and there stood Strange arrayed in a peacock robe and turban with aigrette, looking pompous and ridiculous with boots and trousers showing underneath. Zelmira's laugh rang like a peal of bells, and Strange frowned at her.

"—— the woman!" muttered Ommony. "She's done for herself now, that settles it!"

It was hotter than a Turkish bath in there, but a cold chill swept over him at the thought that none now would have sufficient hold on Strange to make him let the forest go. Half of the plan had failed with Zelmira's influence. Surely Strange would never listen to her now. Well; there was the other half of the plan—the alternative. Strange looked ridiculous enough, and worse was coming. There would be the pictures to hold over him by way of threat.

Chullunder Ghose, acting fat, obsequious impresario, climbed the steps and began tutoring Strange again—pointing toward the wooden dragon-screen. His words were totally inaudible in the din of drums and music, but he seemed to insist on something prearranged, with one hand gesturing toward the priests, as if he spoke for them, and with the other pushing Strange toward the dragon-screen. And out of the mouth of the dragon came a hand—a woman's—certainly the python-dancer's, for the wrist had the same heavy, jeweled bracelet.

The music crashed, and ceased. In silence, broken only by a crow's caw on the roof, Strange walked toward the hand, and seized, and kissed it three times. Crash! went the music again, and the native audience seemed suddenly to go mad, rising and leaping and yelling as if all their future had depended on that one piece of foolishness.

"Have you got that?"

"Got it all!"

"Good! Carry on now! I'll go below. You keep on cranking as long as you've a foot of film left!"

Ommony nearly broke the key in his eagerness to get out—slammed the door nearly off its hinges—and ran stumbling down the stairs, kicking open the door at

the bottom and wading through the audience like a man waist-deep in sea-water. Zelmira nodded to him, but he took no notice of her; she had failed the forest, and was out of his calculations for good and all. He was actually off his head that minute—worn out with worry and fear and lack of sleep—fired by the sight of victory almost within his grasp. Strange was still standing there, ridiculously foolish with his turban awry, looking rather like Henry the Eighth and holding the hand through the screen.

"Chullunder Ghose! Tell him what that means!" yelled Ommony, not recognizing his own voice, it was so strained and high-pitched.

Jeff Ramsden, understanding men as some know horses, began making his way toward him. The *babu* grinned, aping humility, bowing and salaaming to Strange, too deferent at last to play a leading part. He began to back away and nearly fell off the stage.

"Strange, you're married!" Ommony roared, his voice cracking strangely. "That's the custom! What'll you do now? Every one of those nautch-girls has to marry before she dies. Most of 'em marry trees. That one's got you! Now then!"

Strange had the effrontery not even to seem sheepish, or annoyed. Jeff, getting close enough at last, put his huge arm under Ommony's and tried to quiet him; but Ommony only drew strength from the contact, not calmness.

"You're married, you hear me? You've married a nautch-girl before witnesses!"

It was unseemly—horrible; Ommony was screaming at him. Strange with his hunger to exploit had probed the man's secret passion to its depths and driven all that was evil in him to the surface. He was worse than a woman with her child condemned to death, for in that hour he lacked power to plead—a primitive, abysmal human stricken to the heart and fighting back. He struck Jeff's arm away, and Molyneux rose from his chair to help restrain him. But Strange's answer brought them all to a standstill.

"May I have a Christian ceremony then?"

The last chance gone! The monster was willing to marry a nautch-girl! He would use that technicality to reenforce his claim on the forest! Ommony stood dumb, bewildered, with the world swaying under his feet, unconscious of Jeff's arm again through his—staring at Strange as at Nemesis.

And Strange let go the hand. Grinning, he stepped to the side of the screen to bring the woman forward; and she came, looking scared, because Ommony fainted away.

She was Ommony's sister.

IT WAS an hour before he returned to consciousness, and the priests, the nautch-girls and the crowd were all gone. Two women were slapping his hands, and he recognized Zelmira first—hazily, as one awaking from a bad dream. He shook his head at her.

"Go away!"

"We're friends. You know me," she answered.

But he only shook his head again.

"You failed. You promised me you'd be behind the screen and marry Strange. Why didn't you?" he murmured.

"I couldn't. How could I? I'm Lady Molyneux! Sir William Molyneux and I were married this morning at seven o'clock."

"I'll be ——!" murmured Ommony; and Molyneux' responsive "Hah-Hah-Hah!" seemed to revive him quite a little. He turned his head to see who held the other hand, and looked into his sister's eyes.

"You always *would* do things your own way," he grumbled. "Have you saved the forest?"

"Yes. Here's Meldrum. He'll tell you so."

Ommony sat up suddenly. Memory galvanized him.

"Good ——, Kate, you're married to him!"

"No," she said smiling, "not quite. We're waiting for you to attend the wedding. When you're ready we'll begin."

"You saved the forest?" he repeated.

"Surely."

"Marry any one you like!"

"Oh closer than a brother!" she laughed delightedly. "Come, Meldrum. Tell him."

So Meldrum Strange came forward and played the man.

"Old fellow," he said simply, "if I had known how your heart was wrapped up in those trees I'd never have caused you such agony. I beg your pardon."

"By ——, Ommony, shake hands with him!" roared Molyneux. "He's played the game. He turned the tables on you. He's a good sport after all. What's more, he's given this Panch Mahal to those rascally

priests. No chance for anybody now to get a foot-hold. Go on, shake hands!"

"Not yet," said Ommony. "Where's Charley Mears?"

"Here. I'm all right," said Charley. Then he answered the question unspoken on Ommony's lips. "Strange has been —— decent. He bought the film for enough to finance a picture-shooting trip all through the Indian jungles. Darned white of him, I'll say."

"All right, I'll shake hands with you, Strange," said Ommony.

BUT Ommony was ill, and very nearly at death's door. He collapsed when he had seen his sister married, and they put him to bed on the cot in the Assembly-room, the women taking turns to watch him; and for four-and-twenty hours he raved in delirium, calling to half the Gods of India to come and save his trees, while half a dozen naked *junglis* camped in the courtyard afraid of every one, but more afraid they might lose Ommony. They found roots in the jungle, and they killed fresh meat, and brought them and laid them at the threshold, where the women stumbled over them and carried them in—to hide them and pretend they had been put to use.

So the *junglis* tell you to this day that they own Ommony by right of capture from death's claws. It was they who brought him his dog Diana, to stand guard by the bed; and she did, never stirring until he was well enough to recognize her.

Then came a night when the women might safely leave him; and he awoke after dark, believing himself all alone with the dog. But after a while he heard another sound beside her breathing, and saw a white-robed figure dimly outlined in the night-lamp glow—a figure like a great, fat idol—motionless. For a long time he thought it was an idol, until he remembered there was nothing of that kind in the room. So he coughed, and it brought the thing to life.

"This *babu* salaams respectfully, hoping *sahib* is remarkably better!"

"Did the dog let you in?"

"No, *sahib*. She-dog was most cantankerous, until *memsahib*, *sahib's* sister, tendered philharmonic offices. She-dog yielded to blandishment and shrewd behavior. Have sat still."

"What do you want?"

"*Sahib's* swift recovery."

"*What* else?"

"Oh, just to round out."

"What?"

"Emolument!"

"You rascal! You drew pay from Madame Poul—from Lady Molyneux."

"Yes, *sahib*. Likewise percentage from priests in form of cash, and subsidy from raja, plus gift from Mellidrum Isstrange, added to share of profit from sale of soda-water. Am well contented. Oh, no reason to complain. However, *sahib* being *babu's* friend, in view of Karma and advantage of beneficence—have thought it well to—permit *sahib* to—acquire much merit by—by contributing likewise and rounding out—emolument? Eh? Yes, *sahib?* Your very humble and obedient servant! Chullunder Ghose prays to *all* the gods for your honor's full recovery!"

BREECHES

By Leonard H Nason

Author of "The Patrol," "A Happy Birthday," etc.

"COME on, Jack; give us another spoonful, will yuh? I didn't get any supper last night."

"Nix, no more; I ain't got enough to go round now. On your way."

"But I ain't got enough to feed a sparrow! How come a man can't get enough to eat anyway?"

"Gwan! On your way!"

"Kick him outta there."

"Give that chow hound the A. H."

The waiting line grew impatient, and the hungry soldier sadly held out his cup to the man by the coffee-tank, and had it half-filled with grounds.

The most of a battery of field artillery except the gunners, unable to leave their guns, was eating breakfast. Back of them was Montfaucon; on the right the woods were being heavily shelled. In front an attack was in progress, and the infantry kept going through the eating men, rifles slung and their faces grimly set to the hills in front of them.

"What the —— is this stuff anyway?" muttered one of the telephone men, stirring his mess-kit with a bit of hard biscuit.

"Looks like bacon-grease thickened with cornstarch."

"I guess that's what it is. Yuh never know what you're eatin' these days. Hey you, pick up your feet; you're gettin' my coffee all full of dirt."

This to a passing doughboy, who answered him impolitely.

"Don't pick on him," said one of the eating men loudly, so that all the passers-by would be sure to hear. "He'll be deader than a can o' goldfish in half an hour."

The poor doughboys grinned feebly at this, but made no reply.

A sudden wild pounding of machine guns, and a distant hum that grew into a roar. Heads began to be raised.

"Air fight, huh?"

Shouts:

"Under cover, men! Air raid! Boche! Boche! Hit the ground! Hit the ground!" and the hostile planes were overhead.

Down they swooped, almost to the ground. *Wham!* A bomb struck the rolling kitchen fairly on the lid. There was a thunder of galloping hoofs as the limbers, ready harnessed in case of emergency, stampeded down the road.

Each for himself, the battery melted. A dozen men tried to get through a dugout door that would be narrow for one. A bomb in their midst solved the difficulty. An old gun-pit, big enough to hold three at the most, held ten, and more kept leaping and diving into it, for all the world like a waterfall.

"For ——'s sake, get your foot outta my mouth," said a bitter voice at the bottom of the pile.

"Breeches," copyright, 1923, by Leonard H. Nason.

"Well, git your mouth outta the way," was the retort. "It's too big anyways. Waddya think, I come in here to pay yuh a call? They's two guys sittin' on my neck now."

"Kin yuh imagine a cheap guy that would raid a place at breakfast time! All our chow gone blooey!"

"I hope the mess sergeant gets hit, the scurvy bum! I been offa him since he dumped all our blankets outta the *fourgon* at Nonsard. I ain't had a decent meal since I was in rest camp."

The boche were still circling and taking a pot-shot now and then. A man lifted the rubber sheet that hung over the entrance to the pit and dropped it quickly as a dark-green shape roared by, not more than a hundred feet up.

"Let down that curtain, you idiot! Now he'll shoot us up sure."

"Oh, you poor dumbbell! You ain't got the brains God give a jack-rabbit. Waddya do that for?"

Silence. Another cautious peek.

"They're gone. Come on out."

"Hot dog! I ain't got any ribs left," said one; and another asserted that his leg was "bruk."

The battery came out from hole and dugout, feeling themselves, breathing thankfully again, some of them looking away from the mangled heaps that lay here and there. Hospital-corps men were too busy bandaging the living, and the overworked stretcher-bearers had enough to do without taking care of stiffs. Cover them with a shelter half until the burying-detail could get to them.

Suddenly there was a flutter of excitement.

"Onorio's hit!"

"Where is he?"

"He's lying up on the hill there."

One or two began to walk casually in the direction of a slight rise of ground; some more followed at a faster gait. The first men quickened their pace; then all broke into a run.

"To think," panted one of them, "that I followed that guy every time he went up to the O. P., and near got bumped off myself, and here he gets cracked right back of the kitchen, and me nowhere near."

The runners halted suddenly. A man was coming toward them, swaying slightly as he walked. There was no sign of hurt on him save for the peculiar grayness of his face. He was wearing the regulation uniform except for the breeches, a beautiful pair of gray buckskin that fitted him perfectly and were tailored in a manner to make any officer green with envy, to say nothing of a buck private.

"Gwan," said this one, "get away from me. I'm all right. Nix, you jackals, you ain't got 'em yet."

The soldier's hearers looked somewhat disappointed, while a few laughed feebly. They turned and started back down the hill. Just then the man with the breeches sank slowly to his knees, but was up again instantly.

"Oh, God!" said he. "To think of the times when I prayed to get it, knee or hip—anywhere just so I could get out and never have to come back. And now I get knocked 'way back here when I got a dry bed to sleep in, and no duty coming for two nights!"

He took off his helmet and hurled it from him and swung his gas-mask as far away as he could. Then he fell back into the arms of the nearest man.

LET us go back in explanation a month or so, to the yard of one of the great *casernes* of Toul. In a small building, sheltering himself from the slowly falling rain, sat a sergeant of field artillery. This man was known to his companions by the name of Onorio, first because he was an instrument sergeant, and second because he frequently quoted one Onorio Morretti, who had written a book about the proper way to draw maps and do all the things that an instrument sergeant had to do.

Onorio was in that condition known as O. L., both A. W. and S. The first because he had been absent from post and duty some four days, without any authority for so being. He had partaken of strong waters and heady wines, and these had stolen away what few brains he had, so that he had smitten a member of the military police on the jaw, and in his resulting flight had proceeded to lose himself.

When he returned to the place where he had left his battery it had marched on, and no man knew the spot where it might be found. Now, in addition to being A. W., he became S. O. L. Lost. A man without a friend, a prey for any prowling M. P.,

hungry, wet and cold. He was in the sector of his division. Always he met others on the road in the same plight that he was.

"Hey, guy, what outfit you out of?"

"Sixth Engineers," or "Third Ammunition Train," or "Seventh Infantry"—any one but his own.

This perhaps because the Seventy-sixth was ruled with an iron hand, and its personnel not allowed to wander foot-loose and fancy free all over the Department of Meurthe et Moselle.

"Seen anything of the Seventy-sixth Field?"

"Naw. Not since we left Mandrees." Or: "Seventy-sixth? Yeh, I seen 'em hikin' somewhere the other night."

"Where were they goin'?"

"Over there somewhere."

A vague wave of the arm.

"I don't know; maybe it was the Tenth. Got any cigarets?"

So then, to our hero in the *caserne*. It was dry in there anyway. A truck-driver had told him that the divisional ration dump was in one of the buildings, and he was trying to gain courage to hunt for it. And then an officer went by the window.

"Hey, Max; hey!"

And the sergeant galloped out the door. The officer had turned and was waiting. Somewhat confused, the artilleryman came to a sliding halt and saluted.

"May I speak to the lootenant?"

"Sure, shoot!"

Now this was Lieutenant Freidman, late Sergeant Max of that ilk, who used to be canteen sergeant of the Fifth in the old Army, now a lieutenant, Q. M. Corps, and in command of the ration dump. To him the absent one poured out his sad tale, for they were old friends and had often got drunk together and gone howling home, their arms about each other's necks, to the scandal and disgrace, etc.

"Sure, I'll get you back. There's a truck goin' up this afternoon. You come down to the dump and let on you're one of the detail and lug a box out and put it in the truck and camouflage around, and when the truck goes you hop onto it. Compree?"

So it was done.

Now while the sergeant went in and out the door, bearing boxes of canned Willie, bags of bread or tins of bacon, he noticed each time a pasteboard box, like those tailors use, tied up with string and having in one corner the picture of a most natty officer. Finally he stopped to view it closely.

"Burberry, London," it said. "17 High Holburn," or some such address.

And it was consigned to an officer noted throughout the Army for the excellence of his uniforms. He was quite the same size as our sergeant.

Had there been any one to observe with eagle eye he would have seen a soldier with a most sanctified expression bear out a pasteboard box. This soldier vanished into a truck. Later he emerged in a slicker, still bearing the box, which he put back where he had found it. It bore no marks of ravaging. Shortly the truck bore the sergeant up to his battery, and the box went *its* way toward its rightful owner.

That night was the night before St. Mihiel. Battery commanders are not great sticklers for discipline on the night before a drive. This time tomorrow, who will be left to press charges or to answer them? Our sergeant went unscathed by reprimand or rebuke. And all that evening, while there was yet light, he paraded up and down the wooded road where the battery was bivouacked, gay in a pair of breeches that were the envy of every officer of the regiment.

"Golly!" said he to Ham, the machine-gunner. "I'd give a month's pay when the colonel opened that box and found my old breeches in it. They were an old salvage pair, and the seat was gone since we was on the Marne. Thank —— he's a doughboy and don't never have no truck with the artillery, or I might find myself in the mill one of these fine days. Ain't they the nuts, though, huh? Look at me through smoked glass, kid, or you'll hurt your eyes."

So then, to our battery eating breakfast, and the little hill to the north of Montfaucon. Onorio's breeches had made him a marked man. Officers had tried to buy them. Enlisted men had tried to steal them, all without success. Never did the sergeant flop for a shell but three or four heads would be eagerly raised to see if he had been hit.

Well he knew that he would never fill an unknown grave, for always some one was handy by to rush out, should he be wounded or killed, and have his pants off ere he grew stiff.

Onorio was on the hill, somewhat in rear of the guns, smoking his after-breakfast

cigaret. Across the road men were burying the night's dead in the Thirty-eighth. He could see them quite plainly, filling in the fox-holes and sticking up a little cross. A G. I. can would burst down at the cross roads, now and again, but otherwise all was serene.

Came a sudden pounding of machine guns, and over the opposite hill came four planes, low, and flying at high speed. Two clouds of smoke among the grave-diggers. Onorio seemed frozen to the ground. The breakfasters melted, each for himself. The roar of the propellers grew louder; a machine was right overhead. A hornet's sting in his side, and the sergeant was down.

"Well, I'll be ——!" thought he. "Now what was that?"

The sergeant was lying on his side, his hand tightly clasping his stomach. A far-off voice, calling:

"First aid! First aid!"

Some one was hit. He moved his legs; O. K. He moved his arms; Jake! He looked for blood. None. What the ——! He decided he wasn't hit and got up. Where did these guys come from?

"Git away from me," he said, pushing them off. "I'm all right. I'm all right now; lemme alone."

And he walked off toward the guns a few steps. There was a mist before his eyes; the earth waved to and fro like canvas in the wind. His knees collapsed. They didn't weaken; they just removed themselves entirely and let him down.

"Bring that stretcher over here!"

"Where'd it get yuh?"

"Are yuh hit? Or did it just knock the wind out of yuh?"

"Oh, ——! I'll say he's hit! Look at that!"

"Shut up, you —— fool! Just knocked the skin off, sergeant; not much of a wound."

Blue sky, with white, white clouds. Green fields. A feeling of comfort and peace such as he had never known. He couldn't be hit bad, he felt so good. The medical-corps guy was putting a dressing on the wound, and he rose up and looked at it. A little hole no larger than the end of his finger, out of which came blood, like a bubbler drinking-fountain. Well, that ought to keep him off the front all Winter if he handled it right.

He looked up at the misty faces about him, and tried to smile. Stealthy hands undoing his putts.

"You ——! Let go of them breeches!"

And then they bore him away. Each group they passed called out—

"Who is it?"

The crew of Number One piece came over and looked at him as if he were a stranger, and not some one they had known for months. The mess sergeant called from the seat of the rolling kitchen—

"What battery is that guy out of?"

" 'A' Battery."

"Thank God for that. That's six this morning. I don't wish 'em no hard luck, but I hope they get a few more before dinner-time. We ain't got enough bread to go round as it is."

The dressing-station was in an old gun-pit, hidden by a growth of low trees.

"Hey, Joe," called one who observed their approach. "Here comes another one."

Joe appeared.

"Haul out your dog-tag, kid. Sgt. Battery A, 76th Field, Number 542770, 10:30 A.M. Montfaucon, G. S. W. abdomen. Shot o' A. T. S. All right, give it to him."

And he pinned a tag with the foregoing on the sergeant's blouse.

"Now, what are you goin' to do?"

Thus our hero to one who held a long, shining thing like a bayonet in his hand and had a sinister look of gloomy joy about him.

"Just a little shot," said the gloomy one. " 'Twon't hurt you none."

"The —— it won't! I've had you medical birds tell me something wasn't going to hurt before."

"Well, you gotta take it anyway, so let's get it over with."

"Give us somethin' to take hold of."

And the sergeant reached up and took hold of the handles of the stretcher above his head, while the gloomy man ran about three feet of steel into his stomach and filled him full of several gallons of anti-tetanus serum. After that they left him.

In a little while the wounded man became aware that some one had come into the pit and was standing near him. He craned his head. Baldy and the liaison corporal. At once they laughed heartily.

"How's the kid?" they cried. "You goldbrick! Waddye mean by goin' out with a little scratch like that? Pretty soft, kid; pretty soft!"

Now the sergeant knew full well that if he had only a slight wound no man would say a word to him, but would curse him bitterly in that he had the luck to get off the front with nothing more serious than the loss of a little hide. But him that was wounded unto death they always joshed and told him they would see him in a week or so and expressed doubt that he would be admitted to any hospital.

"Look," said the corporal; "you hadn't better go through no hospital with them breeches. You know they steal the gold teeth out of your head in them places. Better leave 'em with me, and I'll put 'em in the *fourgon* and keep 'em for you till you come back again."

"Huh!" said the sergeant. "These here pants is goin' to stay on me till the last gun is fired. And if I'm cinched for ——, then they're goin' there along of me. And also there ain't no pill-roller been foaled can get 'em off me, nor any —— —— artilleryman either."

Thereupon the visitors departed.

The throb of a motor in the road.

"Bring out your wounded!"

They brought them out. Onorio drew an upper berth, so to speak, and his musette kept slipping off and well-nigh choking him, and his one blanket would not stay in place, so that he was cold. Moreover the effects of a shot of coke that he had had began to wear off, and his wound hurt him intensely.

"Well, anyway," thought he, "I still got all my legs and arms, an' I'm goin' to be between sheets tonight and have a good night's sleep if the place ain't bombed."

He thought pleasantly for a while on the prospect of soft beds, clean, well-cooked food and lots of it, soft-voiced nurses—oh, boy!—the restful quiet of the hospital. Poor man, he knew no better. This was his first time out. Presently he fainted quietly away.

The pain of his wound revived him. He was lying in the mud, and a genial man in spectacles was reading his tag.

"Am I there yet?" asked the sergeant.

"No, not yet; just changing ambulances. Want anything to drink?"

"Nope. Give me a shot, will you? This belly of mine is pretty sore."

"Surest thing. Here, put this sergeant in an American ambulance, and put him on the lower tier. All right now, trooper; they'll take care of you."

"That guy ain't a doctor, is he?" said the artilleryman to one of the bearers.

"Sure he is. Why ain't he?"

"Oh, I dunno. Only he seems like such a sympathetic guy."

"There's a load o' stiffs for yuh," said the bearer as they shoved the last wounded man into the ambulance. "Ain't nary one of 'em goin' to live an hour."

"Here's one that fools 'em," thought Onorio as the morphin began to work on him.

He felt of his breeches to reassure himself, and then prepared to endure the journey as best he might.

A LONG shed with a dim electric light, shadeless, swinging in the middle. The low muttering of many voices. Row of silent figures on stretchers. There was one poor nurse in her blue uniform, looking at tags, ordering the orderlies around:

"Take this one out; he's dead. Undress that one. Give this one some morphin. I haven't got any cigarets. I don't know who took your watch. You're at Souilly. I can't help it if you have been on duty since last night. So have I. Who's going to take care of the patients if you go to bed?"

She looked at the artilleryman's tag.

"Undress him. Give him a shot, and let him alone."

The sergeant fought back the mists that were rising about him. A poor man who could scarce keep his eyes open was fumbling through his pockets, putting his collar ornaments and whistle into a little bag.

The sergeant gurgled. No sound came from his throat, though he tried to shout. His body was limp. Shoes, puttees, shirt, all gone. A last supreme effort.

"Gimme them pants!" he cried, and fell back on the stretcher.

"Sure, here's your pants," and they were pushed under the wounded man's head.

He feebly pulled the belt around his neck and fastened it, gave a long sigh and went quietly to sleep.

Morning. Cold. A doctor listening to Onorio's heart.

"Just waked up, soldier? How do you feel?"

"Great. How's yourself?"

"All right, I guess. Here, take this one to the X-ray room. Ought to have operated on him last night. Twelve hours with a belly wound. Born to be hung, that man."

They X-rayed him. The artilleryman learned that he had a foreign substance steen centimeters from somewhere. He was not greatly concerned. He felt the belt of the famous breeches about his neck, like the *Old Man of the Sea.* The X-ray room was dark, and no one could see them, hence there were no attempts at theft.

The cutting-room. One can not see much from a stretcher. Perhaps this is just as well. It was at least very light, and there were a great many people there.

They had him upon a table, and two who might have belonged to the Ku Klux Klan to judge by their costumes approached and looked at the artilleryman with eagerness.

"It is," said one, "too high for his kidneys, and too low for his liver. Hum!"

Said the other:

"Let's do an Italian resection on his spine. He can't live anyway, and I have always wanted to do such an operation on a living subject."

Here a third man appeared.

"Nix," said he. "All the interesting cases gravitate to me by reason of superiority in rank. Shoot him the ether, Eddy, and hand me a scalpel. Elbow-room, boys," and he prepared to work. "How come with that ether? Do you think you're giving some lady smelling-salts? What's this he's got around his neck? Take it off!"

"No! No! Those are my own breeches!" cried Onorio. "I want to take 'em with me."

"All right; you can have 'em, but I don't guess you'll want 'em very bad where you're goin'."

"Let's hear you count," said Eddy.

"One," said the sergeant, "two, three. Lemme see them pants again."

"I got 'em right here."

"Surrerbish—brishes—glurp——"

"All right, doc," said the cheerful Eddy. "I guess we're ready."

THE ward was hardly up to Onorio's idea of a hospital. It was far from quiet. Men were being brought in from the cutting-room and being carried out to the hospital trains continually throughout the day and night. Men with slight wounds sat up and smoked. The air was blue. They talked incessantly in loud tones and shouted to acquaintances the length of the ward. A nurse came to take the sergeant's temp.

"How do you feel, son?" she asked.

"Fine," he said, which was not true, for he was suffering terribly.

He had no pain of his wound, but his head ached and his throat was dry. Moreover, he was bruised in spirit, as shall appear.

"How's chances on a drink?" he asked.

"No, you mustn't drink anything. You've lost a lot of your intestines, and water would be bad for you."

"I lost a good pair of breeches, too," he said bitterly.

"Don't worry about them," said the nurse. "There are lots more where they came from," and she rubbed his forehead with her cool hand.

"There are not. Golly, they were a keen pair. All buckskin, like a glove. And some pill-roller took 'em while they was cuttin' on me, the scurvy crook!"

"Never mind; now never mind. You can have a new pair when you get well."

And she prepared to give him a shot, for she thought he was batty. The sergeant said no more, but wept, for he saw that she had no understanding.

Later in the day the nurse came back, and with her a doctor.

"Listen," said the doctor. "You are a brave soldier, so I know that you won't be frightened; but in case anything should happen, have you any message you would like to leave with me? I'll see that it is delivered."

"Is it as bad as that?" said Onorio.

He lay for a while very quietly. And then—

"I wish you would tell the guy that stole my pants that I'll be waitin' for him on the other shore."

Then he closed his eyes upon the tears, and they went away.

NIGHT, and a living gale. Sleet and snow and deep, deep darkness. A great ship that had come banging down from Brest, six days from coast to coast, hurrying to her doom with breakneck speed, a navigator whom Josephus had imported from a coastwise line on her bridge. Sleet and snow, as I have said— But wait.

On Christmas Day Onorio, with some fourteen hundred other convalescents, embarked at Brest for home. He was in the last boatload to go aboard, so that he was too late to get any dinner.

"I sure have my jinx with me all the time," said he to one who was with him, a friend he had made in the hospital.

This man was called "Flatbush," after the Army manner.

"Cheer up," said Flatbush. "The guys what ate won't have long to enjoy it. Wait till we get outside the harbor."

"I hope we get better chow than we did coming over. I come over on one o' them limey boats, and we didn't get enough to keep a canary bird going."

This from another acquaintance, hight "Clippers" for no known cause.

"Huh! As long as they don't feed me goldfish or rice, I guess I can make out. Ask one o' them gobs how they feed."

"Hi, sailor, how do they feed yuh on this ship?"

"Rotten."

"Rotten!" cried the three soldiers. "How come rotten?"

"You'll find out," said the gob. "Comin' over from New York we only had pie twice. I'm tellin' yuh this wagon is a hungry ship, believe me!"

And he went on about his business.

"Can yuh imagine that!" said Onorio. "Pie twice a week. Only twice. I ain't seen a piece o' pie for eighteen months."

But the other men were without words.

The ship was not so bad. True, they were packed in tiers from the uppermost deck to the keel, and no man could move at night without putting his elbow in one neighbor's eye, and his foot in another's face. For first two or three days the quarters were like a noisome sewer, but after the poor stomachs, accustomed for so long to the quiet of a hospital cot and a meager diet of soup and rice, had become accustomed to the bounding wave, things were better.

There were about two hundred men aboard who were unwounded, having but just landed in France. These were forced to work their passage home, in a manner of speaking, by waiting on the cripples.

The soldiers all ate in what had once been the first-cabin dining-saloon, when the transport was a Pacific liner. The cripples went in and sat them down, and howled melodiously until one of the cooks' police came and waited on them.

The men who were able to walk formed in line as always, and waited their turn to get into the kitchen. This line was long, and wound itself in among the bunks, and up and down the ladders, and lost itself in alleyways, so that often after a man had waited an hour or so he would find that the line in which he stood was following itself around the promenade deck, and was getting nowhere. This occasioned some hard language.

The third day out, Flatbush, rounding the corner of the deck-house, was stricken with amazement. Onorio stood before him, gazing with horror-stricken eyes at an officer, who was regarding the horizon with a field-glass. The artilleryman walked from one side of the deck to the other, muttering to himself and looking at the officer from all angles. At last he seemed satisfied.

"By ——," said he, "it's them."

The officer looked at him in amazement. Onorio seized Flatbush's arm and led him away.

"Listen," said he when they were safely out of sight. "Do you know that colonel?"

"Sure; he was out at Kerhuan with us. Ed Rohrlach is dog-robbin' for him."

"Hunt me up this Ed guy," said Onorio, and they dived down the nearest ladder.

The Ed guy was with difficulty extracted from a game of blackjack with two sailors.

"Listen," said Onorio. "Where did the colonel get them leather pants he's got?"

"Them buckskin ones? He got 'em in London, an' then some one stole them off him. But he got 'em back."

"How come?"

"Well, he said he was in the hospital waitin' to be evacuated, an' he seen an orderly with his pants on. Somebody pinched 'em in the mail or somethin'. Anyway the colonel just raised ——.

"They give the orderly three months in Gièvres. He said a wounded man give 'em to him, but if he didn't steal 'em off the colonel he stole 'em off some one, because no one would give a pair of breeches like that away."

"The illegitimate!" said Onorio. "They ought to have give him a year."

The last night at sea Onorio and his two boon companions sat in the mess-hall, waiting patiently for some one to bring them some supper.

"What will you do when you get ashore?" said Clippers.

"The first place that I will hit," said the artilleryman, "will be a bar."

"I hear they'll have us ashore by New Year's Day."

"Shouldn't wonder. The old boat is steppin' right along."

"It's kinda wild up on deck. The wind is blowin', and it's beginning to snow. When I went over it was so hot you could fry eggs on the deck, and here I am back again."

The three began to grow impatient. The chances on their being served began to grow smaller. Some of the K. P.'s were already sitting down to their own suppers.

"Hey," called Flatbush to one of them, "what time do they shut up this place?"

" 'Bout seven-thirty. Why?"

"Well, don't let 'em lock us in, will yuh?"

And now, as I have said, a wild night and a raging storm. Onorio slept peacefully, far down near the keel. A low, grinding scrape penetrated his ear, as if some one had dragged a piece of sandpaper along the hull. He stirred uneasily.

Came the pounding of reversed engines, then a dull thud, and the sergeant gently shot from his bunk to the steel deck. There were sleepy curses from the darkness, and inquiries as to what the —— was that? The ship fell heavily to one side, so that many of the men were tumbled in heaps. A voice called down the ladder—

"It's all right men; we're just picking up the pilot."

A little uneasy ripple of laughter, a thunderous crash against the side of the ship, silence and a gentle *plop, plop, plop,* of dripping water.

Onorio seized his life-preserver and fled up the ladder. A man on guard at the top essayed to stop him, but the sergeant was gone into the darkness.

There was another sentry at the opening on deck.

"I'm an officer," said Onorio, and was by before the man could make up his mind what to do.

It was inky black, and the rain fell in sheets. The ship lay on her side, and every now and again the North Atlantic came aboard and sloshed around the decks, or else tried to leap-frog the vessel, falling with a thunderous crash on her decks.

The artilleryman clawed his way to the uppermost deck and cautiously peered over the side. Right under him, so it seemed, was a house, and a light in one of its windows. On either side he could hear the roar of the surf.

"I said the first thing I'd hit would be a bar, and I sure enough hit one," he muttered.

Rockets were going up from the forward part of the ship, and an answering flare came from far up the beach. Onorio climbed the sloping deck to where two sailors were casting the gripes off a lifeboat.

"Hang on, soldier!" cried one of them wildly.

The sergeant looked up and saw a gray wall far above his head. He watched it hang there, and wondered idly if it would ever fall. He felt himself caught up and spun about, crushed, suffocated, carried overside and down, down, into unbelievable depths.

He struck bottom at last, with his lungs bursting. Almost at once he drew a deep breath of air. The sea had carried him across the deck and wrapped him around a ventilator. His head spun, and his side hurt him cruelly. The boat was hanging in splinters from the davits, and the two sailormen were gone.

Poor soldier! The black, black night, and the thunder of the breakers, and the great ship lying helpless on the beach. Right down there, almost with arm's reach, were people in that house, sleeping warm and snugly in their beds. Machine gun, bomb, and the surgeon's knife, he had escaped them all, and now to meet a cold and clammy death when he thought the last of his perils was behind him.

Well, he had nothing to lose this time. A sudden thought burst upon his mind with the brightness of a star shell. Instantly he was on his feet, and slipping and sliding along the deck to the nearest ladder.

DAY broke on a gray sea, the great rollers piling in with the force of the gale behind them. Every once in a while one would make a clean sweep, so that the quarters were well wet down by breakfast time.

Aye, breakfast time indeed. Though these men knew not what minute would find them floundering in the icy surf, they were still alive and must be fed. The American soldier does not crave to go before the Judgment Seat on an empty stomach. Cries of "When do we eat?" were beginning to be heard when the doors to the dining-saloon opened and they filed in.

The ship lay so that with the going down of the tide she fell yet more upon her bilge. The back-wash from the shore would rock her over to seaward, and a great comber smash her down again upon the beach.

A line of men walked tenderly along the lower side of the mess-hall, each holding a mess-kit full of beans. The ship laughed softly to herself and fell over to seaward, so that each man promptly put his beans down his neighbor's neck and slid the width of the deck to bring up in a hideous welter of legs and arms and coffee and mess-gear on the other side of the hall. The scalding water from the tanks where the mess-kits were washed added to the chaos. After that no more meals were served.

The view from the deck held no cheer. To seaward was a waste of tumbling waters and driving mist. A lone destroyer was standing by, rolling on her beam ends with the swell. Flatbush and our sergeant regarded her.

"Do you think she'll hold us all" asked Flatbush.

"She'll hold all that ever get aboard of her," said Onorio.

With one accord they crossed the deck and inspected the land. Far up the beach the coast guard were toiling through the sand with a surf-boat.

The shore was almost under the ship, but still it was a long way off, and the surf made wild play along the strand, for all that the transport acted as a breakwater. The sailors rushed wildly up and down the decks carrying enormous hawsers. When these were in place, a C. P. O. would curse horribly, and the poor gobs would pick up the hawser and depart with it somewhere else. All day long they picked them up and laid them down, so they must have been very weary by nightfall.

During the day a few more ships appeared, and one of them, a destroyer, came up close under the transport's counter. The sailors prepared to shoot a line to her. They had a small gun and a tub of line.

The soldiers gathered from all parts of the ship to enjoy the event. The newness of being shipwrecked had worn off, and these last were very cheerful. They followed the gobs about and watched the clearing-away of the boats and the running up and down with the greatest interest. He who has been through the battle and *huit chevaux* and replacement camps and hospitals and all the thousand and one things that put the S. O. L. in soldier, such a one is not easily dismayed.

The gun was placed, and the tub of line carefully prepared. It was loaded, after a great deal of reading of directions aloud and considerable language on the part of the petty officer in charge.

"Shot the gun-wad!" cried the C. P. O.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Port your helm."

"A port it is, sir."

"Splice the mainbrace."

"Splice it is, sir."

"Ready now?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Stand by!"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!"

"Aw, what the —— is the matter now?"

"The destroyer's moved."

All waited until the destroyer had swung out to seaward and back in a great circle that brought her close again.

"Stand by!" called the C. P. O. "Fire!"

A loud report. The projectile shot out in a great arc over the sea with about a hundred feet of line trailing it. Then the line fouled, and projectile, line and tub all went to Davy Jones together. The soldiers cheered thunderously.

The morning of the second day the sea had gone down, and a surf-boat brought out a line from the shore by means of which a breeches buoy was rigged. A few went ashore in this, but under compulsion. The journey was very wet.

More ships were in the offing. Ferry-boats, tugs, transports, destroyers, hospital ships, battle-wagons, sub-chasers—everything in New York Harbor that could float was there, and by the third day the task of getting the men off the wreck was well under way. The men stood in lines—everything in the Army is done by lines—and when their chance came they went over the side into anything that was waiting for them.

There was an order that nothing should be taken from the wreck except the clothes one could carry on one's back. When this order was announced a man in the uniform of a sergeant of artillery was seen to go aside and give himself several large hugs. This same man was seen to hang closely around the deck from which the officers were debarking. After a while he was seen no more.

"Where's Onorio?" asked Flatbush as he and Clippers met on the deck of a sub-chaser that was taking them out to one of the waiting ships.

"I ain't seen him since yesterday," said

Clippers. "He had somethin' on his mind, that guy."

A hot and excited soldier came running up to Flatbush.

"Say," said he, "you remember that guy was with you the day you pulled me out o' that blackjack game? Where is he?"

"How should I know?" asked Flatbush. "What do you want him for?"

"Well, he was helpin' me pack up some o' the old man's things the day before yesterday when we got orders to leave everything. An' then when I went to look for that pair of leather breeches they was gone."

"Maybe the colonel took 'em with him."

"He did not. I put 'em under the mattress in the bunk. I had my eye on them breeches since we left France."

"Do you think Onorio got away with the pants?" asked Clippers when the Ed guy had gone sadly away.

"I shouldn't wonder. These old-timers would steal the gold out of a dead man's teeth."

A group of flatfeet, going along the port alleyway of the hospital ship *Solace* on their way to the ship's store, encountered a gloomy soldier.

"How come the gloom, buddy?" asked one of them.

Onorio told them the tale of the leather pants.

"When I seen him go over the side without 'em," he concluded, "I knew they was mine. An' that dog-robber of his hid 'em under the mattress. We used to press our blues that way in the old Army."

"Well, you haven't anything to be sad about," said one of the gobs.

"You don't know the half of it," said Onorio. "The son of a gun had had them pants altered, and I couldn't get 'em on."

Whereat the sailors bore him with them to the store and bought him ginger ale.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Wisdom

A MAN has an ideal, and that being so all the praise in the world must be but as the water on the feathers of a duck—it mustn't be allowed to penetrate.

Praise is bunk. I—Oh, well—doggone it—I'd like to make the sea smell upon a bit of paper, and the moon-gold half-blind a reader's eyes, and the indigo deeps cry so callingly that he should rise in his chair, and start, open-lipped to his door to see if the tide was coming in. See?

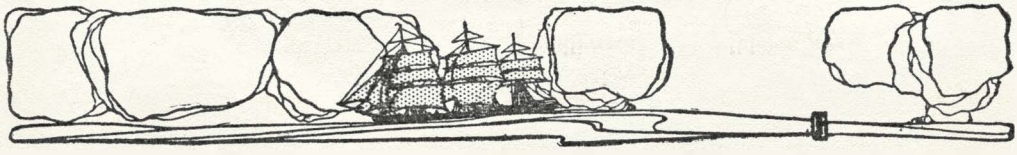
I suppose I've told you how it is with me—I am jailed on this hot dry valley for the days of my life and never may go beyond its dry confines for more than a breathing space. My old lungs are all rattledy-rattledy. It's humorous, and me a deep-water sailor by birthright, too. I can't look at the sea-mists—or hear the ocean breeze, or watch the white wings of the harbor gulls—my love is all denied to me; but—with God's help—can I write of them? I don't know.

I am not a story-writer, or anything else—just a bit of flotsam on the moon-swung tides of life.

I haven't a story. I haven't a verse. I haven't a thing just now but a hungry soul, hungry for the secret of the key to all of beauty—hungry to forget the hideous things and to know none but the bright.

I don't know what wisdom is, nor does any man, my brother, know it either. Some in their own conceit think that they are wise—and so, think a lie. For none is wise. The best of us are seekers, and seeking but blindly and with very lame feet.

"*Wisdom*," *copyright*, 1923, *by B. M. Adams.*



The CRY from the MINARET

by H. A. Noureddin Addis

Author of "The Sword of Kara Mahmoud" and "The Bitter Egg-Plant."

SADIK the *muezzin* shivered as he stepped out upon the gallery of the minaret, about which clung, in dense masses, a chill river-fog. But the fog which obscured the minaret was not more dense than that wherein Sadik habitually dwelt.

Handicapped from birth by a defect of vision so stubborn as to defy the somewhat primitive art of the local Arab oculist, Hadji Moustafa Abd-us-Selam El-Basrai, Sadik, by his enforced childish solitude, had grown to manhood a solitary, pensive soul, a stranger in his own family. His education, too, had suffered from the same cause, and regrettably so, for Nature had endowed the *muezzin* with gifts far above those of the average Anatolian villager.

But to Sadik himself the resulting timidity, together with the consequent reputation for cowardice, was the most galling feature of his infirmity. For the young Turk knew that his trouble was but the instinctive fear of the unseen—not native cowardice at all—but psycho-analysis is not one of the pastimes of the Anatolian peasantry, and the reputation for pusillanimity stuck.

"What a life for a man!" he grumbled, peering impotently through the thick lenses which in magnifying his eyes seemed to enhance the contrast between their blackness and the pallor of his face—clean-shaven save for a sparse, close-clipped mustache, which streaked across his features like a line of smudge. "Any beardless boy or shambling graybeard could serve as *muezzin* as well as I.

"But for my affliction," he went on gloomily, drawing the worn stambouline coat closely about his slender but powerfully built figure, "this very day I would take my beloved Nigyar and the little ones and go out from the village of Su-Kenari into the great world, and another should 'read the *ezan*' in my place."

His mind upon last evening's discussion with old Selim, the *muezzin* of a near-by mosque, Sadik placed his thumbs behind his ears and approached the railing. Over their sweet black coffee he had listened as old Selim discussed pitch of voice, intonation, method of voice production, and many other subjects of vital interest to their common profession—a profession that, save for an occasional revulsion, was a passion with Sadik.

From a distant minaret he heard the "God is great." Selim had beaten him. At the same instant his feet struck against something solid, yet yielding.

Sadik looked down. His mouth was open, the first phrase of the "ezan" trembling upon his tongue. But, as his myopic sight fell upon the object at his feet, the cry he emitted was not the familiar "Allah *ekber;*" it was, or sounded suspiciously like something entirely different. The object

"The Cry from the Minaret," copyright, 1923, by H. A. Noureddin Addis.

at his feet resembled a human body. He bent down. It was the body of old Andronicos Stavropoulos, retired Greek army officer, and leading Christian resident of Su-Kenari. Cautiously he bent lower and touched one of the Greek's hands. It was stone cold. Sadik recoiled as from an electric shock.

"Dead!" he exclaimed aloud.

The *muezzin* hesitated a moment longer. His distant rival was well-advanced in the ritualistic chant. Forcing himself to be calm, Sadik began the "ezan." There habit befriended him. He finished the ceremony, not even forgetting the closing admonition belonging to the call to the morning prayer alone—"prayer is better than sleep."

The ceremony complete, Sadik shrunk from the gallery, and, without joining the worshippers below, hid beside the minaret stairway to see that no one mounted the stairs.

Ever timid of the obscurity which the handiwork of the Arab spectacle-maker assisted him but slightly in penetrating, each succeeding incident of the morning brought new terrors for the *muezzin*. The Greeks then occupied Asia Minor, and he was specially fearful of the conquerors who had recently taken over the government of his district. A squad of Greek soldiers, a sudden bugle-call, even a solitary Greek citizen now sufficed to send him shrinking back into his corner.

He had long since evolved his theory of the tragedy. Yanni was at the bottom of it—Yanni, the boatman, the tobacco smuggler. Yanni, notoriously against the authorities, whether Greek or Turkish, could have conceived of no revenge more perfect than to make way with old Andronicos, then place the body upon Sadik's minaret; thus disposing of two grudges at the same time.

Once Sadik had had an argument with the boatman about an overcharge, and the latter had cursed him with such vile brutality that the *muezzin* had been glad to abandon the quarrel. More recently Yanni had been haled into court at the instance of old Andronicos on a charge of smuggling, and had—according to certain of Sadik's intimates who enjoyed a joke at the *muezzin's* expense—attempted to involve Sadik in the charge. This report had so incensed Sadik that he was driven to express the wish that both Yanni and Andronicos were at the bottom of the river.

Now that he realized the sinister import certain to be imputed to his hasty words when he should be accused of Andronicos' murder, he felt that Kismet was indeed against him.

As he hesitated, still watching the entrance to the minaret, Sadik's mind turned to his wife and children, in their small house on the outskirts of the village. The Greeks had brought with them many new and strange legal doctrines. No longer were eye-witnesses necessary in order to secure conviction of a crime. To Sadik, as to many Turks, this seemed an inescapable fatalistic practise. Apparently suspicion, if pursued to its logical conclusion, meant conviction.

He shuddered when he thought of his position on discovery of the body, which must come sooner or later. He must make his escape, yet if he did so he must leave his wife and children, perhaps forever. Still it was suicide to wait in Su-Kenari. And to make his escape he had neither extra clothing nor funds.

As he hesitated a Turkish friend came up.

"*Vai*, Sadik Efendi," he exclaimed wonderingly. "Thou art still here, and in health? In truth, I feared lest thou hadst suffered at the hands of old Andronicos."

Sadik paled visibly.

"Andronicos," he repeated hoarsely.

"Allah is my witness," protested the Turk, "last evening at the Xenophon Café, many Greeks drank and made merry, old Andronicos among them. One, a city merchant, cursed our village, saying he could never sleep in the mornings, because the cockerels spoil his rest, but old Andronicos said that since his home was near thy mosque, he suffered more from thy 'reading the *ezan*' than from the crowing cockerels.

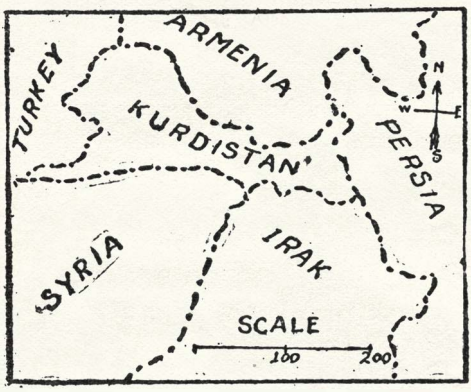
"Later I heard some of the others teasing old Andronicos, challenging him to wring thy neck if they would wring the necks of the fowls, and I heard Andronicos swear, in his cups, he would mount thy minaret and wring thy neck."

The Turk entered the mosque smiling to himself as he noted Sadik's terror. Immediately the *muezzin* slipped from the shelter of the doorway and hurried noiselessly in the direction of the river.

YANNI, the boatman, suddenly awaking, sat up and rubbed his eyes. Then he came to his feet upon the river bank with a curse: his boat was gone.

"Sadik, curses upon the souls of his ancestors!"

Throughout the first day and night Sadik alternately drifted and paddled downstream, or lay quietly under the dark shadows of the trees bordering the river. His plans were made: he would go to Smyrna or Constantinople, and from there take ship to some European port.



Soon after daybreak by dint of much anxious survey through his heavy-lensed spectacles the Turk became aware of a long, low-roofed building shouldering against the hillside at some distance from the river, and as his hunger became more insistent—for he had fasted almost forty-eight hours—he decided to investigate it. Carefully mooring his boat he proceeded to the deserted roadway, beyond which he crossed a rough fence of poles, and took a narrow footpath leading in the direction of the house on the hillside. At a turn in the path he collided with a large man, very dark, and mustached like a brigand, who was carrying with some difficulty two bags on his back.

"Greetings!" exclaimed the stranger gruffly in Turkish that smacked strongly of an Armenian tongue.

"*Akibetiniz-khayr-olsoun.* May your ending be good!" returned Sadik, forgetting that his was no longer the dominant race and religion.

"Ha, a Turk! What is thy name, Turk? And thy business here?"

Sadik touched lightly upon his name and affairs, but dwelt upon his need for food.

"Ah, a *baldiri-chiplak.* A hobo!" laughed the Armenian. "Thou art fortunate to have met with me, since old Kevork, the *papaz* of the village yonder, has just given me two sacks of provisions from their storehouse. A division of Greek soldiers is to be quartered upon the countryside soon, and that means the food will disappear whether we have a part in its consumption or not. Perhaps that is why old Kevork was so generous."

Then, curiously noting the Turk's pallor, he continued:

"Thou also hast fled the Greeks, Turk, thou canst not deny it. I do not love them—nor they me. Once I killed one of them in a quarrel, and at that time the Turkish courts held me guiltless, but the relatives of this man have not forgotten me, and I am told they have already demanded my life of the new Greek authorities."

Sadik, emboldened by the confidence of the Armenian, whose name it appeared was Bedros, imparted some of his own troubles to him.

"But," exclaimed Bedros, when he heard of the boat, "thy boat is gone! As I passed the last eminence from which there is a view of the river, another boat came down the river, and a man from it unmoored thy boat, and both have now returned in the direction from which they came."

"Then they will know where I am now," worried Sadik. "Yanni will notify the authorities, and by tomorrow morning at latest——"

"Tomorrow morning we shall be far from here," replied Bedros, shouldering one sack of provisions and motioning to the Turk to follow suit. "I know a village beyond those hills where we may find safety. No one would think of looking there for a Turk. It is a genuine Armenian village, not Turkish-Armenian, as I am. The village has remained unchanged for centuries, a relic of another age. Come, thou shalt see it."

During the journey Sadik told his companion of Andronicos' peculiar threats (which greatly amused Bedros) and how the body was left lying on his minaret gallery. On his side the talkative Armenian told his story—how his mother, now very aged and wise, had been a famous herb-doctor and had performed many wonderful cures in their village. He had learned much of her art, he said.

Only a few of the younger men were

stirring in the village when they reached it in the early morning. Those few eyed them suspiciously and sought the advice of their elders, not knowing whether to receive them in a friendly manner or not, but those wise ones, with much gabbling of harsh Armenian and much wagging of honorable white beards, had decided not to do so.

"The hills beyond are full of Greek patrols," confided Bedros when they were again clear of the village.

"We can not go back," returned Sadik. "Perhaps the Greek troops are even now traversing the mountain passes through which we came."

Bedros laughed.

"No Greek knows the secrets of the Armenian mountains. We are in no danger from that side; but on this, these men have told me, the Greek soldiers sometimes enter the village."

THE next few days they passed in the wooded foothills that surrounded the Armenian village. As long as their food lasted it was not an unpleasant experience. But the villagers, suspecting them of all evil intentions, were doubly zealous in guarding their growing crops, thus forestalling every attempt at foraging.

Once or twice Bedros was able to snare a rabbit, and a bird or two; but game was scarce, and they began soon to feel the pinch of hunger. Matters were coming to a crisis.

In their wanderings Sadik had often observed that the Armenian kept pulling up herbs, conserving the root of one, the top of another, breaking twigs from certain trees, and tearing strips of bark from others, until at last curiosity drove him to inquire into this strange behabior.

"They are medicines," replied the Armenian. "I have decided to make thee a physician, Sadik Efendi."

"But why?" demurred the Turk. "I know not the healing art. Thou must be the doctor, and I will be thy assistant."

"By no means," replied the Armenian. "You speak no Armenian, which is as it should be, since you can not reveal your ignorance. I shall be your helper and interpreter. You have the habitual expression of gravity and wisdom wherein no Armenian may ever hope to rival an Osmanli, which taken together with your large spectacles, make a most valuable adjunct to an empty head. Not saying, of course, that your head is empty, Doctor Sadik Bey."

"Very well," acquiesced the Turk at last. "But where shall we get our clients? Allah's Mercy, I am hungry enough for anything."

"As to that," counseled the Armenian, "have patience, and watch!"

Bedros spent the day stewing his herbs and bottling the resulting infusions in sundry old bottles which he had picked up near the village. Silently Sadik observed this delicate procedure, intent upon learning what he could. Finally, the medicines prepared, Bedros proceeded to a huge tree bordering a ravine in the bed of which ran a footpath. A heavy branch of this tree which had been partially broken off by the wind hung well over the path.

Completing the wind's work, but still preventing the branch from falling away from the tree, the Armenian waited until a few minutes later a young man of the village came briskly up the path. Still Bedros waited until another step would bring his victim directly under the broken branch, then let it go.

It struck the young man fairly on the head, felling him. They stood a moment to make sure that he was stunned, then hurried to his side.

"By Allah, it was a fair blow," cried the Armenian, removing the young man's cap and examining his head.

"True, O fellow to the ass," agreed Sadik, passing his hand over the fallen man's head. "Fortunately his skull is of true Armenian thickness, otherwise we should have had another corpse to our credit."

"We must thank you," returned the head-man of the village stiffly, when he had listened to Bedros' story. "Give him into the hands of Aram and Yeghia here; you two must be exhausted."

"Vallahi, I am persuaded that these cattle know no Turkish," Bedros observed to his companion, as he noted the effect of their conversation upon the villagers. "What ignorance! But it suits our purpose well."

The injured man, it appeared, was named Krikor, and was the son of Arshag Minassian, the local priest. The young men carried him into his house and placed him upon a couch which his female relatives had prepared. These latter remained standing about in sorrowing attitudes, now and then

giving vent to loud wails and protestations of grief.

"This man is badly hurt," exclaimed Bedros to the weeping relatives, "very badly hurt indeed. But fear not! God is beneficent! How fortunate that He has sent this accident when the great Osmanli physician, Doctor Sadik Bey, is here gathering medicinal herbs from your hills."

The crowd, duly impressed, parted to admit the Turk.

"The fellow has the skull of an ox," whispered the Armenian. "See, his senses return already. Quick! Rub a little of the contents of this bottle on the wound. Then force between his lips a few drops of the other in a cup of water. Hurry, otherwise Nature will cheat us of our cure."

Sadik took the bottle and did as he was told. Meanwhile Bedros ordered one of the young man's sisters to bring a cup of water. Upon her return he took the cup and asked Sadik a question in Turkish. The reply evidently conveyed the desired information, for the Armenian poured a few drops of the liquid from one of the bottles into the cup and passed it to the Turk who held it to the patient's lips.

Just then a short, wizened old man in a high cap of gray sheepskin burst through the crowd.

"You should have called me at once," he cried excitedly, "at once! He might have died—may be dying now—and I have just heard of the accident."

As he approached the bed, glancing angrily at the strangers, Bedros seized his arm.

"Who art thou?" he demanded belligerently.

"Who am I?" repeated the old man returning Bedros' stare with angry malevolence. "'Who am I?' sayest thou—thou great bull-buffalo? Who should I be, but Mihran, the physician?"

"Ha, a physician!" exclaimed Bedros, although he had guessed the old man's profession. "Fall upon thy knees then, old man, and thank Almighty God for the privilege of witnessing one of the most marvellous cures of Doctor Sadik Bey, the famous Osmanli physician!"

As Bedros spoke the boy sat up, apparently little the worse for his experience, while the priest, his father, ran up and seized Sadik's coat, bowing, weeping, calling down God's blessing upon him. There was no mistaking the man's meaning, even though Sadik was totally ignorant of the Armenian language.

"He says that thou art his lord, and he thy servant," interpreted Bedros. "He has always hated Turks. But now he loves thee—he loves thy race—even thy *padishah.* Yes, *vallahi,* he loves thy *padishah,* the Sultan, upon whom it had been his lifelong duty as a *papaz* to call down the curses of Allah. A devout Christian could go no further.

"Whatever he has is ours, he says," continued Bedros, "thine, to be exact, although I think I am entitled to my share. Also he says——"

"Ha, *vallahi!*" exclaimed the Turk, "I like that kind of talk."

"—— that we are to be entertained at the expense of the village as long as we wish to remain."

"Praise Allah! Didst thou tell him of our hunger?"

"I told him that in our professional zeal we had wandered far from our servants, who, it seemed, were unable to find us again. Thus we had had little food for the past few days. I impressed upon him, though, that such things mattered little to us, especially to thee—that thy only interest in life was the art of healing."

"*Aferin!* Bravo! And what said he to that?"

"He said—but here is the answer to thy question. This man comes to lead us to the *khan* where entertainment awaits us."

"How fares it with thee now, O *Hekim Bashi* (Physician-in-chief)?" demanded Bedros as he struggled with a mouthful of *pilav.* "My humble opinion is that this *Kawurma* (a kind of roasted meat) would have been better for slightly less cooking."

"The *keofteh* is excellent," Sadik replied, reluctantly eying the remaining viands. "Allah's Mercy! An hour ago it seemed that I never again should get enough to eat. Now I am satisfied." Then he called out: "Ey, *khanji, khanji!* Khan-keeper! *Allah-seversen!* I had forgotten that the dog knows no Turkish. Call him, Bedros Effendi, I beg thee, and tell him that I require a *narghile* and coffee."

A moment later they lay back among the cushions which the *khanji* had piled high for them, their coffee and *narghiles* before them.

"What now, Sadik Effendi," demanded the Armenian, between inhalations at his

gurgling *narghile*, "dost thou like the life of a physician?"

"*Vallahi!* The entertainment of a physician pleases me. Yet we have always the fear of detection and arrest at the hands of the Greeks."

The Armenian laughed.

"Patience, O Turk!" he cried, "have patience! I told the village tailor that we had gone roughly dressed into the mountains, and since we have suffered the loss of our servants and with them our robes of state, we find it very embarrassing to appear in public in these old clothes. He was overjoyed with the opportunity to serve us. He will bring his old mother for treatment tomorrow."

"Then we will physic the mother in exchange for clothing?"

"*Masha-'llah!*" returned Bedros with a grin. "And in our new costumes and new titles we can defy the recognition of the Greeks."

IT WAS a rather awe-stricken *khanji* that rapped on the door one evening several days later, and informed Sadik and Bedros that Benon the bandit awaited them in the large room, attended by his band of ragged picturesque followers, every man of whom was a walking ing arsenal. And it was a clearly frightened *khanji* that carried back the information that if Benon wished to see them he must come to their quarters. The message amounted to little less than an insult to the bandit chief, who was accustomed to implicit obedience, and the *khanji* had reason to know and fear Benon's wrath.

The bandit turned with a curse and strode from the building. The insult had gone home. The chief who had bullied and terrified the countryside for years had been trifled with and defied—had been made a laughing-stock in the village that was pre-eminently his own. One by one the *narghiles* of the village loafers seemed to become distasteful, as the excited growling of Benon's followers began to make itself heard from the street.

The insane jealousy of old Mihran, the village physician, dated from the day of Krikor Minassian's accident. And, while the professional successes of the new doctors added daily to their long list of friends, the discredited physician lost no opportunity of poisoning the minds of such of the villagers as would give ear to his venomous tales against them. Thus the village was already divided into two fiercely partisan factions; one that was literally seething with hatred and fear of the newcomers, ready at a word to kill or drive them from the village, and another that was just as ready to do battle in their behalf.

The old physician, always alert and awaiting the favorable moment that he knew must come, learned the nature of Sadik and Bedros' reply almost as soon as Benon. Then, when he had observed its effect upon the bandit and his followers, he felt that the moment had come.

In another way circumstances favored the old man's project; a small child, son of one of the villagers, had been reported missing early in the evening. Many of the inhabitants had seen the boy's parents as they searched the streets, and heard their anxious inquiries for their son. Later the child was found asleep in an unfrequented closet in his own home; but Mihran would not have spread this report, had he known it. Long experience had taught him that to his people, almost without exception, medicine savored of witchcraft; also that one of the theories dearest to the ignorant and superstitious mind is that the most potent of all remedies are those made from the blood of children.

Cunningly the old physician gave out his misleading information, scattered his inflammatory messages, well-knowing where they would prove most productive of the results he sought.

"They laughed at Benon. They told him to bring his boy to them if he needed physic. And the Turk cursed his religion."

Such were the expressions that were bandied about from mouth to mouth as the villagers stealthily rallied to the support of the bandit chief.

"No, by the Cross—that I do not believe!" cried an elderly man in a tall sheepskin cap.

He was one who had been a patient from the first—and with great relief.

"Ha, Ohan Sevadjian, darest thou uphold the infidel?"

"Ayo, yes, Turk he may be, and enemy of the Cross, but Sadik Bey is a true man, and learned. I will not suffer a word to be spoken against him, neither against the student Bedros, his companion."

"Harken to Ohan Sevadjian! Harken to

the old fool! He loves the cursed Turks, as do many in this village! Wait until Benon hears the old ass bray! The bandit will give him his deserts!"

Five or six of the villagers ran by with torches.

"Let us set fire to the *khan!* Let us burn out the accursed infidels—the murderers of little children!"

These cries echoed up and down the narrow, darkened streets.

"In the name of Allah, I beg thee," pleaded old Arshag, daring to place a restraining hand upon the bandit-leader's sleeve. "They saved my son!"

Benon pushed back his cap, and a softer look came into his eyes, discernible in the light of the flaring torches.

"It's the boy's life that matters," he muttered.

"Is it thy will that I should speak to these physicians for thee in thy son's behalf?" queried the old priest eagerly.

The bandit replied in the affirmative.

Old Arshag hurried to the *khan.* Without a number of the enemies of Sadik and Bedros crowded about the door, and the tall, gray hat of old Mihran was seen to hover about the edge of the crowd, then disappear. But inside the *khan* the friends who had gathered for their protection still outnumbered the enemies without. These latter refused to let the priest pass.

"Behold, the fiends have cast a spell upon our good priest," some one cried.

"Yah!" taunted another, and spat upon the ground, "cursed be their fathers and their religion, and that of those who side with them!"

"Here, then, O eater of filth!" exclaimed the tailor from within the *khan,* as he flung a stone striking the speaker fairly upon the mouth.

A volley of sticks and stones answered this outbreak on the part of the impatient tailor. A flat saucer-lamp was broken, and old Ohan Sevadjian's sheepskin cap was knocked from his head. Otherwise no damage resulted. But the beleaguered men hastened to barricade the door.

AT THIS moment some one in the crowd outside caught sight of Bedros and Sadik, who had descended from their chamber, quite unconscious of the cause or import of the tumult.

"Ho, infidel!" cried the besiegers, "ho, Turk, murderer of babes, where is the infant son of Vartan Gulenian? The child is missing since nightfall. Where is he, I say, O renegade Armenian that callest the Turk 'friend and master.' "

A babel of cries arose. The infuriated besiegers began a concerted onslaught against the *khan* door. A heavy log in the hands of some of them threatened havoc to the defenses as an improvised battering-ram. A number of others, torches in hand, ran to the walls, attempting to set fire to the almost fire-proof old building.

"By the justice of Allah!" shuddered Sadik blinking suspiciously as he studied the little gathering. "What means this uproar?"

Bedros chuckled reassuringly.

"Old Mihran, the wise, could tell us if he would I think," he replied, "but the immediate cause, they say, is that we requested Benon the bandit to come to our chambers in the *khan,* and the proud old outlaw, curses upon the souls of his father and his grandfather, took offense at our independence."

"*Vallahi,* our hope is in Benon, then!" cried Sadik, clutching at the arm of Bedros, "call to him, O Bedros, and make thy bull's voice carry above the noises of the mob. Ask the old devil of his son, and say that we are ready to serve him."

Bedros ran to a window.

"Benon!" he called, "Benon! What wouldst thou of us?"

His voice rang loud above the cries and hammering as the attackers prepared for the assault.

"What a voice for a muezzin!" exclaimed Sadik in a momentary rapture from which he was speedily distracted by the voice of the bandit chief from outside the window.

"Who art thou?" called Benon.

"I am Bedros the physician, friend and assistant to the great Ottoman doctor, Sadik Bey," replied the Armenian grandiloquently. "Didst thou not seek us a moment since?"

"True, O Bedros the physician," replied the bandit in a voice of sorrow, "but now I seek you no longer. A messenger has just arrived to tell me of my son's death."

With the bandit's words the attack began again. Louder swelled the yells of the attackers, while showers of sticks and stones rained against doors and windows. Those carrying the battering-ram again threw

their combined weight against it as it crashed against the barricaded door, and suffocating fumes of burning pitch poured in at the windows.

"But, Benon," roared the Armenian above the din, "we were ever at thy service."

As he spoke Sadik's hand fell upon his shoulder. A stone flung by one of the attackers had found its target in the Turk's eye, breaking his glasses. His cheek was bleeding from the broken glass, and the eye was rapidly changing color.

"Plead not with the dog." He spoke with even coldness in the Armenian's ear. "On the contrary, defy him, and remind him that safety for him is in his mountain-haunts."

Bedros stared at his friend with open mouth. Then, still with wonder on his face, did as he was bid.

Not for nothing had the old Turkish government forbidden to its subjects the use of firearms. A thorough search of the *khan* revealed no more than a meager supply of knives, useful only for close work, and of little avail in defending a besieged stronghold.

Apportioning these among the little band within the *khan*, Bedros, after a short conference in Turkish with Sadik, informed the others that they had decided it would be folly to remain longer on the defensive, and that since they, personally, were the cause of the attack, they would ask no other to risk his life for them, and that himself and Sadik were going to attack the besiegers.

But old Ohan Sevadjian and the tailor refused to remain behind.

"I know thou art a good man, O Mussulman—and by Allah and by Allah," Ohan knew no other Turkish, "I shall fight for thee!"

"They have given me back my mother," cried the impulsive tailor, flourishing his knife, "should I allow them to fight alone?"

The four rushed from one of the windows in the face of the attacking mob, which fell back, astonished, and hesitated a moment, but as no more followed, the enemies with an eager growl pressed back to the attack. Smarting and more nearly blinded than usual as a result of his injury, his habitual timidity forgotten, the Turk fought with the cool, deliberate intensity which marks his race. The redoubtable Benon fell under his first blow, and the leader of the battering-ram squad under his second.

"Curses upon the soul of thy father," cried Bedros in Turkish as he smashed at another head.

He cried in Turkish to cheer his companion, but Sadik had no need of encouragement. He fought grimly, silently, and with telling effect.

SUDDENLY the sound of a volley of musketry smote upon their ears,—and the screaming of high-velocity bullets. A second volley, and the battle stopped. Then the bright trappings of approaching Greek infantrymen glittered in the garish torchlight. Krikor, the son of Arshag Minassian, the priest, had foreseen the fight and gone for the Greeks.

The villagers subsided immediately. The fighting ardor of Benon's henchmen cooled more slowly, but when they fully awoke to the significance of the arrival of the Greek soldiers, they were even more willing to end the fight than the villagers. Consequently, before the soldiers had succeeded in restoring order and getting an intelligent account of the night's brawl and its causes, every bandit, with the exception of their chief, who was too badly injured to travel, had disappeared from the scene of battle.

Naturally the villagers seized this opportunity to shift the entire responsibility for the fight to their shoulders, and the disappearance of the bandits lent color to the tale.

The *khan* was turned into a temporary hospital, and the professional skill of Sadik and Bedros placed at the disposal of friend and foe alike. All marvelled at the cleverness of the physicians, and it was noticeable that Bedros, under the instructions of his chief, attended to most of the difficult cases.

Benon was technically under arrest, but being unable to move, the Greeks left him in care of the physicians. Finally the soldiers marched away, alternately cursing the fight that had disturbed their rest, and congratulating themselves on being privileged to witness the brawl, which they vowed was worth coming to see.

EARLY next morning two Greek lieutenants rode into the village leading a pair of high-spirited horses, handsomely saddled and bridled. They stopped before the *khan*.

"Are there two physicians here?" the spokesman demanded of the servile *khanji*, "a great one of the Turks and a lesser of your own race? Let them come forth," he added to the *khanji's* affirmative reply, "or perhaps it were best that we seek them, these great ones."

And throwing the reins to bystanders, the two young officers hastened inside the *khan*.

The uninjured and exceedingly vainglorious tailor had arrived with the day ostensibly to bring the new garments of the physicians—in reality to brag about his exploits of the night before. Consequently the Greek visitors found Sadik resplendent in his rich costume, and save for the loss of his glasses and the black and swollen eye, looking as though he had never seen a fight. Still he could not restrain a shudder as the identity of his visitors was borne in upon him.

"Are you the renowned Doctor Sadik Bey?" demanded one, bowing deeply.

"I am a physician, and my name is Sadik," replied the Turk with becoming modesty, "perhaps it is another whom you seek."

"By Allah it is no other," averred the Greek. "We are come for you and your assistant, Excellency. Our chief, the newly appointed governor, is seized with a deadly sickness, so that his servants despaired of his life. Our military physician is unfortunately absent, and the governor has sent for you."

"Allah!" breathed Sadik soundlessly, prey to a sudden accession of his old terror, "suppose some one there should recognize me; it is impossible that they should not have heard of Andronicos."

"What did you say, Beyim?" queried the officer politely.

"I did but invoke the aid of Allah, the great," replied Sadik easily, "without His strength and support my skill is nothing. Permit me to summon my assistant, Bedros, who even now prepares fresh medicines."

A moment later the gigantic Armenian entered. He was arrayed less gorgeously than was his superior; still his clothing was sufficient to attract the eyes of the beauty-worshiping Greeks.

On approaching the large silken tent set apart for the use of the Greek governor, Sadik urged his horse near that of Bedros and whispered—

"If they recognize us here we are lost."

The Greek guides looked inquiringly at the Turk, but before their suspicions could take form the quick-witted Armenian turned them aside with a long, uninteresting medical dissertation.

Then, a little later, he was able to reassure the Turk with a whispered—

"Fear not; they'll never recognize thee with that multi-colored eye and grim jaw."

But the encouragement of Bedros together with his new-found valor failed Sadik when he entered the governor's tent, approached the bed, and found himself looking squarely into the eyes of Andronicos Stavropoulos.

"Allah's mercy!" exclaimed the Turk, as he sank almost fainting upon the rugs that floored the tent.

"Now, by the blessing of God, the Bey is seized with a sudden indisposition!" cried Bedros, turning to assist his chief.

But Sadik motioned toward the bed, signing him to look after the governor.

The Armenian turned to the governor, by his questions and examinations managing to attract and hold the sufferer's whole attention. In a moment Sadik's mind began to clear. If Andronicos was alive and governor of the Greek territory he could not have been dead when Sadik found him on the minaret gallery. Thus Sadik was free of even the suspicion of murder. Consequently he had nothing to fear, except the doubtful penalty of masquerading as a physician. And that penalty, in a country where even in educated circles an experienced quack is often valued higher than a graduate physician, was not likely to be serious.

The burden that had oppressed Sadik suddenly left him. He went about his duties in a gay, care-free manner, and surprized Bedros with his knowledge of herbs and medicines. The Armenian had not believed the Turk so apt a pupil. His first impulse was to unburden himself to old Andronicos; then he decided to wait. If the old Greek recovered, his gratitude would stand Sadik in good stead—if he died—well, there was nothing to gain either way in that case.

But the old Greek was not destined to die at that time. Before the end of the second day he was much improved, and by the fourth he was able to arise from his bed.

"I CONGRATULATE thee upon thy success as a physician, Sadik," he said one day after all danger was past. "Thou must have studied secretly these many years to have attained such proficiency. I am glad. Such ambition is all too rare in the young men of today. With thy imperfect sight thy attainments are marvelous."

"And you—you recognized me?" stammered Sadik, drawing back.

"Certainly. I recognized thee when thou didst first set foot in my tent and I saw thy uninjured eye squinting and blinking, trying to make me out as I lay there upon my bed. Thy eyes are unmistakable, unique—yet, Sadik, I should like our Greek eye-specialist, Topal-oghlou, of Smyrna, to see thee. By Allah, I shall send for him. It shall be my payment to thee for saving my life."

"Allah's blessing upon thee, Andronicos Pasha," cried Sadik, but half-realizing the immensity of the service the Greek would render him.

He still marveled that he should have been tolerated near Andronicos.

"Still I was permitted to treat your Excellency?" he went on.

"Why not—in Allah's name! Of course, I remembered my foolish threats against thee one night when I had drunken overmuch, also that I went to seek thee and fell asleep upon the gallery of thy minaret. Some said, accounting for thy absence, that thou hadst heard of my threats and fled. Others, enemies, hinted that I had made way with thee, and that, with the fact of my over-drinking, might have cost me this appointment as governor, had it not been for the evidence of Yanni, the boatman, who bore witness to having seen thee on the river next day.

"Naturally I remembered thy righteous cause for anger against me, but I also remembered thy reputation for honesty and uprightness. And, as it came about, my judgment was correct. I am grateful to thee, Sadik. Wouldst thou like the appointment as my private physician?"

Sadik hesitated, his mind wandering back to that last morning when he called the Faithful to prayer.

"I—I can not be sure," he said.

"As thou likest," returned old Andronicos. "At any rate we will return to Su-Kenari, and until that time I pray thee to remain with me, thee and thy assistant, the great Bedros. He also is an able man."

A FEW days later Sadik and Bedros sat before a coffee-house in the very shadow of Sadik's old mosque in Su-Kenari. Before the Turk sat a tiny cup of sweet black coffee, before the Armenian a glass of lemon-flavored tea. Both inhaled deeply from long-stemmed, bubbling *narghiles*. Sadik wore a pair of thin-lensed, dark-rimmed glasses, the fruit of Doctor Topal-oghlou's life-long study of the eyes.

"Who would have thought, O without morals, that at this time we should be associating with the greatest in the land, living like *pashas*, and have nothing at all to do?" Bedros queried lazily.

Sadik remained silent. The new world that Doctor Topal-oghlou's art had brought suddenly within his field of vision still awed him with its unexpectedness, its clearness and beauty. He turned his gaze upward to the minaret gallery where the *muezzin*, his successor, was "reading the *ezan*" in a high falsetto. A stranger to Islamic countries might have found the effect picturesque, the throaty cadences perfect. But to the artist in Sadik the performance was execrable, without a redeeming feature.

He groaned slightly.

"Dost not like the life, O Sadik Bey?"

"Not over well."

"But thou art able to spend much time with thy family, more than in thy *muezzin* days. Thou hast money in abundance, and all good things. Above all thou canst enjoy the blessings of sight, which have been denied thee. Thy children, too, I'll warrant are happier than ever before."

"Thou speakest truth, O mocker at the True Faith! But tell me, Bedros, did we not fight a good fight at yonder Armenian village?"

"Allah is my witness," returned the Armenian with a laugh.

"And Allah knows I should be happy," smiled Sadik, still with an ear open to the *muezzin's* faulty cry, "yet I am not. Wouldst like my position, O Bedros? The position of physician in chief to his Excellency?"

"Not thy position, my friend," reproved Bedros gently. "I seek not thy position—yet the place is a most enviable one."

"It is thine."

THE same afternoon when the shadows lengthened to the westward Muslim and Christian alike stood spellbound when the ancient formula of the "*ezan*" floated down from the minaret of Sadik's mosque. It was the century-old cry, yet it was different. It reminded them of the days when Sadik had been *muezzin;* the clear, bell-toned cadences were the same, but never of old had Sadik's voice vibrated with that intensity of feeling.

It rose and fell caressingly passionate with the very living spirit of Islam—of supreme power, supreme devotion, supreme submission—a trifle sad, perhaps, but pregnant with hope, that universal human heritage.

Moist-eyed Muslims, who habitually neglected their prayers, sought refuge within the portals of the mosque, while everywhere hushed voices whispered—

"Sadik is 'reading the *ezan*.' "

ORDERS

by Ramsey Benson

Author of "Jastrow" and "Slug 33"

THE train picked up the car of horses somehwere between Medicine Hat and Moosejaw—branded broncs billed through to South St. Paul. They were having right warm weather out in that country, for the season. A tame chinook had eaten up the last of the snow and cowmen with sharp eyes and a sanguine temperament discerned a faint flush of green out over the bare ranges. It wouldn't do to say that Spring had come but the signs squinted that way and anyhow there wasn't a thing to complain of about the weather the day the horses started.

The car was an open cattle-car. The company happened to be short of equipment at the moment and could furnish nothing else but even though there had been more choice an open car would serve as well as any so long as the Spring-like conditions held—perhaps better. Nobody ever accused modern methods of transporting livestock of being merciful to hurt, and these horses had an unhappy journey ahead of them whether or no, but so long as it didn't turn too cold they were fully as well off in an open airy cattle-car as they would have been in a dark and stuffy box-car shut up tight.

The hobo's point of departure was farther east—the Devil's Lake region, not to specify too exactly. A blizzard fresh off the icebergs of Hudson Bay frisked down across the Dakotas just ahead of him and the day he sneaked aboard the train was the coldest day of the Winter. Or so, at least, he heard some farmers say. They claimed it was already thirty degrees below zero and still going down. Of course they might have been drawing the long bow to some extent, but the hobo hadn't much reason to doubt them. Certainly it was mighty cold.

These farmers were loading a car with wheat directly from their wagons, the big idea with them being to beat the warehouse

man out of his tribute. They had threshed in a snowstorm and the grain was wet. Too wet to ship, in fact, but they wanted their money out of it right now even if they were certain to be heavily docked at the terminals. The hobo, stealthily watching his chance, overheard them talking with the agent at the station. The agent came out and looked at the wheat and was perfectly frank to voice his disapproval.

"It'll heat in spite of ——!" he predicted, and the farmers hadn't a word to say to the contrary. Nevertheless they were determined to ship.

The hobo, on his part, was very well-satisfied with their decision. He was afraid, for a little, that the agent might talk them out of it and when they stuck to it he was glad. Nothing, in fact, could have suited him better. He watched his chance and when the farmers had gone away and the agent's back was turned he sneaked up into the darkest corner of the car and hid there. Pretty soon the farmers came back with the last of their wheat and they shoveled some of it over him but they didn't discover him. Neither did the agent when he shut the door of the car and sealed it.

The wheat was already heating and as soon as the car was shut up tight that way the ferment of wet grain filled it with steam like a Turkish bath. Steamy and smothery and to these discomforts there was presently added a sour and sickening stench that pricked the hobo's nostrils and made his eyes smart. But withal it was gloriously warm in the car and he went right to sleep, so to forget the drawbacks wholly. He couldn't have slept better in a Pullman. After awhile he woke up hungry and thirsty but he was not without resource. He reached out through the hatch and scooped up a handful of snow where it had formed a little drift and let it melt in his mouth till his thirst was satisfied, while as for food he had only to chew raw wheat until he was in a manner filled. Not a bad manner—the wheat tasted good and while it was slow eating he had nothing else to do and could take his time. He thought he was pretty lucky on the whole—a warm bed and plenty to eat were blessings not to be disdained in his walk of life.

Evidently the train-crew had special orders to keep an eye on the car with the wet wheat in it for they had no sooner picked it up than somebody came along and pried up a hatch in the roof, opening a chink two or three inches wide. That let in a busy little blast of cold which instantly turned what steam it touched to water and sent the drops showering down on the hobo. But he was already so wet that he couldn't be made much wetter and while the rush of cold air caused him to shiver it tasted good and he had only to burrow deeper down into the fermenting wheat in order to be as warm as ever. Everything considered he was glad to have the hatch open a little. He could breathe with more comfort and the bit of daylight it admitted was like good company.

THE coldest day of the coldest Winter in the history of a cold country—that was what it turned out to be. A Winter not likely to be soon forgotten by the Great Central. Between November and April the company spent a million dollars fighting ice and snow—you will see it so written down in the official reports. A cool million, as you may say, and the portion of it that went to keep the drip of the tank at Culp's Siding from piling up and blocking the main track was no trifle. There were spells when the boss of the section had to have a hand at Culp's night and day to chop out the ice as fast as it formed. The proverb avers that drops of water will wear away a stone and just as truly, in such bitter weather, they will pile up and at length, unless something is done about it, put a stop to the traffic of a great system of transportation.

The hobo burrowed deep into the hot wheat and soon dozed off once more. When next he woke the train had come to a stop and he could hear voices. Impatient, angry voices of two men wrangling. The hobo listened and made up his mind that they were the train-crew, or part of it. The conductor and one of his brakemen, he conjectured, from the way they talked back and forth. Further he made out that their names were Billy and Sam. They called each other so.

Sam started it. Evidently he had something on his chest.

"If it was me," he expostulated, "I'd cut out that car of horses and slip it into a round-house somewhere till the cold eases up a little."

"The —— you would!" growled Billy. He

wasn't so vehement but there was something scornful, not to say insulting, in the way he spoke.

"That's what you do with car-lots of potatoes when you're caught in a blizzard," Sam insisted.

"Not without orders," Billy replied.

"To —— with orders! It's —— little I'd wait for orders a day like today."

"Potatoes don't have to be fed and watered. Who'd feed and water the horses if I was to slip 'em into a round-house? Where'd the feed come from? Who's got any? Slip the horses into a round-house and they'd be warmer, but right away they'd be starvin' to death and what then?"

Sam's remonstrances didn't seem to be getting him anywhere.

"It's no better than murder!" he sputtered, his voice breaking.

"Now don't get fresh, sonny!" Billy warned him, harshly.

They drifted away with that and the hobo heard no more of the altercation, if any more there was. But right away he heard something else—a peculiar moaning, whimpering sound that put him in mind of some creature suffering intensely. Some dumb creature or creatures, he could believe, since the sound was wholly inarticulate. His curiosity was aroused—he wanted to know more about it. He stood up and having pushed the hatch open a little further poked his head out, very cautiously.

The cold dealt him a stinging slap in the face—anyhow it felt like a slap. The wind blew a gale and for a little a thick flurry of snow hid everything. But the squall passed and he wriggled up through the hatch until he could see the next car ahead. It was an open cattle-car loaded with horses and the horses were making the moaning, whimpering sound.

The hobo hadn't any sensibilities to speak of. Sensibilities, as a general proposition, were out of place in his economy. But the sound was somehow more than he could bear, now that he knew whence it came and what it meant. He ducked back and crawled to the other end of his car to get away from it. Directly, too, the train started and made such a clatter that he could hear nothing else with his bodily ears. But there were the ears of his mind, so to speak, and with them he still heard the whimpering moans from the car ahead. Imagination, of course, but he couldn't shake it off. He could do nothing to silence the sounds. They haunted him and kept him awake.

"I'll say murder!" he muttered.

IN THE thirty years and more since the weather office began to keep records no Winter so cold, and on the very coldest day thereof Train No. 357 clattered down the grade at Culp's Siding and fetched up at the tank to take water. The wind at that point swept unchecked across twenty miles of open prairie. Intermittently the sun broke through the clouds but it shone only dully at best and to small effect and when the snow blew thickest there was such a smother of it that you couldn't see the engine from the caboose.

It wasn't a particularly long train, either —or particularly heavy. A dozen or fifteen loads and about as many empties.

Old man Hartley was at the throttle with Jack Colby firing. Hartley had run an engine these many years and if experience counted for anything he ought to know how. But the tank at Culp's presented difficulties of an unusual kind, especially when you were coming down the grade and even though you had only a moderately heavy train behind you. Difficulties any day and multiplied difficulties today. You had to get the man-hole of the tender exactly under the spout of the tank and if you were so unlucky as to overshoot the mark at the first trial it was no glad frolic to get back, any day—much less today.

There wasn't snow enough to drift very badly and it was frozen too dry and hard to stick to the rails but it got in the way somehow. Though Hartley was properly liberal with his sand as he slid down the grade the drivers failed to grip as they should in order to make a good stop and the stop they made was anything but that. It wasn't due to any fault of Jack Colby's, either. He wallowed back over the coal clogged with snow and he gave Hartley the signs right as they drew up to the tank but the old man overshot notwithstanding and that meant more grief where there was already grief enough.

For Jack especially—though it had been in no sense his fault he got the worst of the consequences. If the fireman was peeved you couldn't very well blame him. He had to stand up there in the icy wind until Hartley could get back where he belonged

and though it couldn't have been more than a few minutes it didn't take many minutes, under the circumstances, to be a long time. Jack couldn't give vent to his feelings in words to any purpose, what with the exhaust of the laboring valves smiting the air like the discharge of guns and the various gears shrieking and gnashing under him, but he let his resentment clearly appear in his demeanor.

He kicked the cover off the man-hole, he yanked the spout down out of the sling and jammed its awkward nose into the opening and finally, as by way of leaving no doubt about his mood, gave the chain which opened the outlet such a savage jerk that the water boiled up and out like a geyser. No trickling drip now but a gush and a rush that rose high over the rim of the man-hole and sent a small deluge splashing down the sides of the tender to the track.

The hand whom the boss of the section stationed there to deal with the freezing drip had his orders to keep the flanges clear, whatever else he did or did not, meaning the inch or so of space just inside the rails. Nothing was worse to derail a train than flanges choked with ice. The rest of the space between the rails didn't matter so much, nor any of the space outside of them, but the flanges were to be kept clear at any cost.

The hand had done as he was told and the little ditches he had dug along the inner edges of the rails were what the overflow from the tender found first. It converted them into rivulets. Of course no rivulet was going to last long in such weather but the water didn't stop until it had run forward and gathered in pools about the drivers under the engine. There it hardened, first to a thick mush but almost sooner than the telling to solid ice.

The tender meanwhile wasn't long filling and when it was full Jack Colby let go of the chain and flung the spout back up into its sling. His gust of temper had passed pretty largely. He was still peeved but no longer so wrathy that he had to throw things about in order to give vent to his feelings.

"All right here!" he bawled to old man Hartley in the cab, so to signify that the process of taking water was complete and they might go on their way.

He was mistaken, however. They had taken water but all was not right and they didn't go on their way. Hartley released the brakes with a twist of the little brass lever at his left hand and that alone, the grade being what it was, ought to have been enough to start the train. But there was nothing doing. Though Hartley gave the lever the needful twist and the air hissed sharply to show that it was on the job the train didn't budge an inch. He eased the throttle open and let the steam into the valves but there was no answering cough of the exhaust. He opened the throttle further and still no cough.

Any one of several things might be causing the difficulty and what the engineer first thought was that the brake-shoes had jammed somewhere and failed to let go when the air was released. That happened now and then and he tooted his whistle to admonish the trainmen—tooted so lustily and with such a note of urgency that Billy Kilbane, the conductor, with his two brakemen, Sam Avery and Butch Delaney, tumbled out of the caboose in a hurry.

But they found nothing wrong. They ran along and peered under the cars and the brakes were everywhere hanging lax as they should. Kilbane so reported as he came up to the engine.

"We ain't holdin' ya," he informed Hartley.

But almost as he spoke he perceived what the trouble was. From his perch in the cab Hartley couldn't see but Kilbane, on the ground, saw at a glance.

"You're froze down, man!" he cried. "Look at them drivers—you're froze to the track!"

In the old story Gulliver the strong man was bound captive by means of hairs—applied in just the right way the slender filaments were enough to hold him fast. Something like that had come to pass here and now. The strength of the thin sheet of ice was as nothing measured directly against the pull of the gigantic engine but the ice had laid hold of her by the feet and she couldn't stir.

Hartley lumbered heavily down out of the cab and looked the ground over.

"Tied to a post, sure as you're a foot high!" he avowed. "Still it wouldn't take much of a bump to knock them drivers loose. Maybe we can knock 'em loose with a hammer."

The train carried a heavy sledge for emergencies and Sam Avery and Butch

Delaney took turns swinging it against the wheels while Hartley repeatedly jerked the throttle open and jammed it shut, in such wise as to send a succession of abrupt jolts through the rods. But their best devices availed nothing.

"We're tied to a post," owned the engineer, "unless the Limited—the Limited oughta be along——"

"The Limited," chirped Kilbane, with ironical cheerfulness, "is ten hours late at last reports. She'll be along sometime tomorrow morning—if ever."

"The local—the local'll bump us out," Hartley asserted, not very confidently.

"The local is annulled—there won't be no local today," Kilbane made known.

That pretty well disposed of the prospects. Unless a special running wild should chance that way Train No. 357 was due for a long stay at Culp's Siding.

Certain precautions were called for in the premises and Kilbane omitted none of these. That possibility of a special running wild, however remote it might be and little to be relied on, involved a very real danger and to guard against it the conductor sent his two brakemen, Sam Avery back to lay down torpedoes, and Butch Delaney forward to wire headquarters. Thick as the weather was a train might come along and smash right into them, unless warned.

When he had seen the brakemen off Kilbane climbed up into the cab of the engine. His place was back in the caboose but he would be alone there and moreover the cab looked better to him, with its canvas curtains snugly drawn to keep out the wind and the snow and the boiler sizzling hotly; comfort in the very sound.

THE car of wheat was up near the front-end of the train and the hobo overheard most of the talk—enough to give him to understand that they were frozen to the track and that it might be hours until they got away. But he wasn't worrying. The car was warm, he could chew wheat when he got hungry and when he was thirsty he had only to reach out of the hatch and scoop up a handful of snow and let it melt in his mouth.

That is to say, on his own account and considering only his own welfare and comfort. He wasn't worrying on his own account while as for the horses in the cattle-car ahead he had somehow forgotten them. They weren't moaning and whimpering any more, or if they were he couldn't hear them and he had pretty much ceased to think about them until Billy and Sam came by on their way to the caboose to get the torpedoes.

They were wrangling, as usual.

"God help them horses!" exclaimed Sam. "They'll be froze to death—every last horse in the load. There won't be a horse left alive if we stay here till morning. Can you beat it?"

"Well, what can I do about it? You talk like it's my fault!" Billy flared back, angrily.

"You could of run the car into a roundhouse somewhere. We passed three or four round-houses already."

"Oh, you give me a pain!"

To that fling Sam had nothing to say. He switched off the horses and began to curse the tank. The —— tank was in the wrong place.

"Nobody but a bonehead," he fumed, "would uv put it at the bottom of the grade like it is. Anybody with a lick of sense would uv put it at the top of the hill where the water'd have a chance to run off before it could freeze. I bet it's costin' the company more'n the price of a new tank just to keep the ice chopped out."

"You're wrong, sonny!" Billy retorted, sarcastically. "It ain't the tank that's in the wrong place—it's you. You'd oughta be general manager of the system, if not chairman of the board."

The hobo heard no more. He peeked out of the hatch after a little and there was nobody to be seen and nothing to be heard but the voice of the blizzard, howling savagely.

The sun shone at the moment, but right away a smother of snow blotted out everything and under cover of it, for he had no wish to be discovered, the hobo crawled up through the hatch to the roof of the car. His clothing was wet with the steam from the fermenting wheat and the barest touch of the outside air was enough to freeze it stiff as a board, so that it crackled as he stood up. The cold struck through, too—to his very marrow. It fell upon him, so to speak, as he emerged from the warm car, and cudgeled him. His first sensations were like that—as if he had been hit with a heavy club. But the feeling that abode with him was rather that of having been

caught between the jaws of a ponderous vise and of being crushed by them. Cold was no new thing in the hobo's experience but he had never known a cold so fiercely malign, so seemingly bent on destroying him.

But though his clothing was frozen stiff and hard as a board and the cold bid fair to crush the very life out of him he made his way along the top of the car to the grab-irons at the end and let himself down till his feet were planted on the draw-head. The open construction of the cattle-car in front afforded good hand-holds and foot-holds and he worked around the end until he could see in between the slats.

The horses were loaded in the usual way—packed in crosswise of the car with heads and tails alternating in order to save space. The hobo peered through the opening between two slats and there was a horse staring him right in the face. The animal was very still and a glassy film over its eyes prompted him to reach through with his hand. A touch was enough. The horse was dead, standing up, held so by the others crowded against it from either side.

These others were still alive. The hobo laid his hand on them and felt them shiver. Perhaps they had been stronger than the horse between them—anyhow they were still alive.

The hobo swung himself down to the ground.

CULP'S isn't properly a station, though so many trains stop there. No people live in the place and there are no buildings of any sort beyond the tank and the shack that shelters the pump. No village gathers about, nothing but bare, flat prairie for miles in every direction. The siding is mainly for the convenience of meeting trains but now and then material for the use of the trackmen is delivered there.

Today a flat-car loaded with ties had been set out. Oak ties and very heavy. Well up the grade.

The hobo made his way back to the caboose. His manner betrayed a degree of familiarity; he acted as if he pretty well knew where to find what he was looking for. A stealthy preliminary survey satisfied him that there was nobody in the caboose and in that assurance he mounted the steps and entered.

Against the wall the conductor had a kind of desk where he kept his papers and over it hung a large brass key. The key seemed to be what the hobo was after. He took it down from the nail where it hung and went out, disturbing nothing else.

The lower end of the siding joined the main track about a hundred feet up the grade from the point where the caboose stood. The brakes were released the entire length of the train, just as old Hartley had left them when he tried to start, and that being so, with the grade what it was, the couplings were pushed up snug, in such wise as to leave no slack between them.

The hobo started up the hill and a few steps at a dog-trot brought him to the switch at the lower end of the siding. With the key he had found in the caboose he unlocked the padlock that held the lever and that done he threw the points over, opening the switch.

Nobody saw him—the snow came by fits and flurries but always there was smother enough to hide him.

The switch being thrown a few steps more brought him to the flat-car of ties where it stood, sagged down in the middle with the great weight of its burden. Where a car is left standing by itself that way the hand-brakes are depended upon to hold it, the air-brakes ceasing to act when the hose is disconnected. The brake-wheel was at the end of the flat-car and the hobo climbed up to it.

There was a buoyancy about him, as if he somehow enjoyed what he was about.

"Watch me tool her!" he exulted aloud.

He swung his weight against the wheel, still in the manner that betrayed familiarity, pressed the clutch back with his foot and slackened the brake-chains, little by little, till he felt the car stir under him. It picked up speed promptly but he kept it under control, pinching down the brakes as often as it got to going more than about so fast, and they went out over the switch at a walk, or something like that. For the remaining hundred feet, however, he let the car gather practically as much speed as it would.

It struck smartly, with a thrust that lifted the rear trucks of the caboose a few inches off the track. But it was a straight, square thrust so that the wheels dropped right back where they belonged. A well-directed thrust, in other words—the hobo

had shown good head-work and good hand-work as well.

He jumped down off the car and hustled into the caboose, tarrying there just long enough to hang the brass key back where he had found it. He put the key back and hustled out and, crouching low to keep out of sight, scurried along beside the train to his car of wheat. It behooved him to make haste—Billy the conductor would be coming back in a minute or so to see what had happened and it was no part of the hobo's strategy to be found out in what he was doing.

He reached the car and mounted by the grab-irons to the roof. The irons were as cold as frost could make them and his fingers were as numb as living fingers could be but he climbed without mishap until he came to the very top. That was precisely where he stood most in danger of being seen and it might be that he hurried too much. Anyway something went wrong and when he reached out for the last grab-iron he missed it. He missed the iron and lost his balance.

His head crashed against the jagged end of a big bolt as he went down, furthermore he struck the frozen ground head foremost and between the two knocks he was rendered unconscious. He lay perfectly still and the wind sweeping under the cars drifted the snow over him. For a little the snow nearest his head was stained red, but the flurries came so thick and fast that there was shortly nothing to be seen of him unless you looked very sharp.

OLD MAN HARTLEY blew four shrieking blasts of his whistle to recall the absent brakemen. The train was ready to proceed on its way.

Pending the brakemen's return Billy Kilbane investigated. He had been expecting nothing so little as to be bumped out and the shock, plainly felt in the cab, not only astonished him but dismayed him as well. He was persuaded, at first blush, that a wild train had run into them from behind—so well-persuaded that he bounced out of the window by way of saving his neck. Old Hartley would have bounced out likewise only that he was too fat and clumsy. He was fully as badly scared as Billy. It appeared that no harm had been done and Billy went back to see exactly what had come to pass.

He rubbed his eyes, figuratively speaking, when he came to the flat-car of ties behind the caboose. For a moment he was wholly at a loss, but immediately, though he didn't recall having seen it there, he understood that it had come off the siding. There was no other way to account for it. Flat-cars loaded with ties didn't drop down out of the sky.

Still there was mystery enough and the best he could make of it was that the fierce wind had somehow worked the brakes of the flat-car loose. A thing like that could happen—had been known to happen, indeed. The brake-chains might have been tightened up with a kink in them and the wind, swaying the car incessantly, would have a tendency to shake the kink out and loosen the chains.

Billy could account for the brakes letting go much better than he could account for the switch. How had the flat-car got out over the switch without being derailed?

"She must of jumped and just accidently lit on the main track," he reflected, though the possibility of such a thing was very remote.

But when he plodded up the hill and took a look at the switch it stood open, with the target showing red. There could be no mistake about it—the lever was swung clear around and the padlock was locked fast in the hasp.

It wasn't many minutes till Sam Avery, in answer to old Hartley's four blasts, stumbled out of the storm, breathing hard.

"How in —— did that flat get down here?" he panted.

"Oh, you don't know a thing about it!" mocked Billy, harshly.

"What ya mean—I don't know!" bristled Sam.

"The flat got down here without no help from nobody," sneered Billy. "She threw the switch herself and slid right down."

"If you mean I done it, I tell you I never!" protested Sam, hotly. "I would though, if I'd thought of it. God knows I'd of did anything to push that car of horses along. I'd of did it in spite of——!"

"If you didn't who did?" Billy demanded.

"I don't know. How would I know?"

"I've a good mind to turn you in!"

"Turn and be ——!"

To that spirited declaration of independence Billy Kilbane had nothing to say but

he scowled blackly to show how he felt about it. Sam Avery scowled too—quite as blackly. He worked under Billy but he didn't let that fact abash him in the least. If Billy should turn him in he might lose his job but he would lose his job sooner than keep still when he had anything to say. He was that kind. He would say what he thought and show how he felt though the heavens fell.

The flat-car of ties had to be pushed back on the siding where it had been. Kilbane gave old Hartley the proper wigwag and the big mogul, her wheels free and copiously sanded, shouldered the load laboriously up the hill. Sam Avery wasn't too independent to obey orders having to do with the task in hand and he scrambled up over the ties to set the brakes. The iron wheel was so cold and full of frost that it might almost as well have been red-hot—the touch of it was actually enough to sear bare flesh. Sam wore gloves but they afforded scant protection. His fingers were numb and his hand ached and his arms as he swung his weight against the wheel to tighten the chains were strangely devoid of strength. He cursed the cold. It wasn't often he got that way but a little more today and Sam Avery would be fit to be tied.

The flat-car being duly placed and made secure the train drew away from it and came to a stop when it had cleared the switch. Billy Kilbane with his own hands threw the points back where they belonged and locked the lever and he was about to give Hartley the high sign to clear out when Sam, scuffling along through the drifts beside the train, stumbled over the hobo lying senseless in the snow.

Senseless and as still as if he were dead. Sam turned him over and caught sight of the red stain.

The harassed brakeman forgot his own trials on the instant.

"Hi—man hurt!" he shouted and beckoned to Billy frantically.

The hobo was limp as a rag. Sam lifted up his head and shoulders.

"You ketch him by the feet and we'll heave him into the caboose," he proposed as Billy Kilbane came up.

Billy scowled down at the hobo.

"I don't know about that," he objected, doubtfully.

"What ya mean—don't know?" demanded Sam.

"He was tryin' to bum a ride—that's how come him to fall and cut hisself."

"Well, what of it?"

"He's a hobo."

"I say what of it?"

"We got orders——"

"Oh, ——!"

Billy blazed up all of a sudden like a torch of greasy waste.

"Look here, Sammy boy!" he roared. "I've been takin' your lip all day and I got enough of it—see? I don't want to hear another word of back talk out of your head. Get me!"

It was fair warning but Sam Avery was less than ever dismayed.

"All right!" he roared right back, blazing up just as fiercely. "Here's where I hand you something besides lip."

He let go of the hobo as he spoke and the limp body rolled over face down in the snow. Billy sensed what was coming to the extent that he drew back in a posture of defense but he wasn't quick enough. Sam flew at him like a fury and at the first onset landed a punch that bowled the conductor clean off his feet.

But though Billy Kilbane went down in such wise it didn't take him long to get up. He bounded to his feet instantly and an enraged bull could not have been more eager for the fray. There was no further talk back and forth between them—not a word. As for the discipline of the service which made them master and man they forgot it wholly, Billy as well as Sam, each confronting the other as man to man. They were mad as men could be, berserker both. A hard day, storing up hard feeling until there was a flood of it and here and now the flood had broken down its barriers.

They were not badly matched. Neither had much science whereby he might the better give and take. They would class, roughly, as light heavyweights, with not to exceed ten or fifteen pounds difference between them either way. Their thick Winter garments were no small encumbrance—their coats especially, of stiff ducking lined with sheep's pelt, and scarcely less their great boots, of rubber and felt. But the handicap, though no trifle, was substantially equal and the scrap they put up in spite of it was in no sense slow.

Not much science about it or much observance of the strict usages of the professional ring. They hit in the clinches and in the

breaks and wherever or whenever the opening offered. Once Billy got his hands locked under Sam's leg to upset him, whereupon Sam countered by jamming his knee into Billy's anatomy well below the belt and that was about the way it went throughout, rough and tumble, no quarter asked and none given, kicking, gouging, anything and everything short of actual murder and not much bar but luck even to that.

But Sam got the edge, so to speak, with that first smashing blow and he made shift to keep it. Though it was only by a shade at first, more and more he had the better of the argument and it ended with Billy down for the count, his face to the ground, his left arm pinned under him and his right so crooked and drawn upward over his back as to bring his shoulder joint to the very verge of dislocation. Sam had him foul, in short.

The pain couldn't help but be intense. Sam held his adversary's wrist in an iron grip and he gave it a wrench that was about as near an approach to the tortures of the rack as modern experience is capable of affording. Yet Billy bore the agony without a whimper—he was just that gritty. But another wrench and his fortitude failed him—he howled right out. Of course there were limits to what any man could stand.

"You're the kinda wooden stiff that can't do nothin' without orders," cried Sam, his face aflame with unrelenting wrath. "All right—here's where you get your orders. Kilbane, conductor Train No. 357—take hobo into caboose and shove car of horses into first round-house you come to—signed, Avery. Now repeat 'em back to me to show you got 'em right."

"I'll never!" shrieked Billy, with a frightful oath.

"I'll break your neck if you don't!" snarled Sam with a twist that bid fair to make good the threat.

Billy screamed but he didn't yield.

"Repeat them orders!" Sam insisted.

"Not——"

Another twist and the torture was more than flesh and blood could endure. Billy Kilbane's spunk crumpled. He begged for mercy.

"After me!" Sam commanded, inexorably. "Take hobo into caboose——"

"Take—hobo—into—caboose——"

"Shove car of horses into first round-house you come to——"

"Car — horses — first — round-house—— Good God, don't! Don't!"

"You'll obey them orders—to the letter?"

Billy was crying like a baby.

"Yes, I'll do it—only let up!" he sobbed.

The psychology of the fighting man is more or less of a problem—it works out rather curiously sometimes. Especially the fighting man who has fought and lost—who has been good and plenty licked, in other words. He may be so gritty that he will refuse to knuckle under till the last ditch and yield at last only under compulsion such as absolves him, in law or morals, from keeping any promise he may have made in order to avoid further punishment, nevertheless he is more likely than not to keep his promise. When he knuckles under, however against the grain it may go, there is a kind of finality about it. You see the same thing among dogs, likewise fighting animals. The dog that wins a fight remains the acknowledged master of the dog that loses.

The battle out there in the snow didn't last long—only a few minutes in fact. Old Hartley was watching out for the high sign but it was snowing hard just then and he couldn't see a car's length away. When the smother slackened and lifted a little Sam Avery and Billy Kilbane were hoisting the unconscious hobo into the caboose.

BUTCH DELANEY, the other brakeman, was still absent. He had gone on to make his way to the next station and wire headquarters. Or rather he was to inform the agent that No. 357 was frozen to the rails at Culp's Siding and the agent would inform headquarters.

Butch footed the six miles or so in fairly good time with the wind at his back to push him along but he had no more than reached the station and delivered his message to the agent than he heard a whistle up the track and right away No. 357 plunged out of the bosom of a squall and slowed up with every brake-shoe screeching for a testimony to the intensity of the cold. Billy Kilbane leaned out from the rear platform of the caboose.

"I didn't wire yet—I was just about to call the dispatcher when I heard you whistle," the agent shouted up to him.

Billy's bearing wasn't exactly that of a man happily released from a predicament

that entailed serious inconvenience if not downright suffering and danger. Much more was it in keeping with the weather—sullen and bitter.

"No need—we got loose," he mumbled.

The train had slackened speed to pick up Butch Delaney and that purpose being accomplished Billy waved his hand. Old Hartley answered with two toots of his whistle and they were off once more, pounding through the blizzard as fast as the big mogul could turn her ten drivers.

The unexpected turn of events put Butch in good spirits and he sprang lightly up the steps of the caboose. The hobo had so far recovered that he could hold his head up but he was still far from clear in his mind—there lingered a dazed look in his eyes and every little while he lifted his hand and touched the gash in his scalp uncertainly, as if he were trying to remember how it came there and not having much luck.

Butch chose to be amused.

"Hullo—passenger traffic pickin' up! 'Count of the mild, open Spring weather, I reckon," he guffawed.

The sally wasn't especially witty and it elicited no response from anybody. The hobo stared stupidly, comprehending nothing. Sam Avery finished polishing the globe of his lantern with a handful of old newspaper and climbed to the lookout, where the regulations required some member of the crew to keep constant watch when the train was in motion. Billy Kilbane fumbled with his way-bills at the dinky little desk against the wall. No laughter save Butch's own and not a word out of anybody to save the poor joke from falling flat.

The next round-house was at Ringbolt, twenty miles farther on. It wasn't any great shakes of a round-house—only a wooden shell of a thing with two stalls for the uses of a jerkwater local which ended its run at that point. There was a turn-table but it was a short turn-table—just long enough for the little old four-wheeler that pulled the jerkwater.

They thundered through the yards at Hokum without slowing down and Ringbolt was the next station. Sam Avery, in the lookout, kept his eyes straight to the front, watching the swaying cars ahead through the whirl of snow.

Billy Kilbane called to Butch Delaney to take an order to old Hartley out in front—it was too thick to depend upon signals.

"Tell him to stop at Ringbolt; we're goin' to cut out a car and shove it in the round-house," Billy directed.

Small engines of the four-wheel type were all the turn-table at Ringbolt was called upon to handle—it wasn't long enough or strong enough for the big mogul with her ten drivers. The best Hartley could do was to cut the load of horses out of the train and push it on the turn-table. It had to be worked the rest of the way into the stall with pinch-bars. A slow and laborious process. Old Hartley swore like a pirate though he had the easy end of the deal and Butch Delaney's high spirits were so far dampened that he swore like ten pirates at the lowest calculation. But neither Sam Avery nor Billy Kilbane opened his head.

The hobo stayed in the caboose. Though on the way to recovery and mending as rapidly as could be expected he still had no very clear notion of where he was or how he came to be there and he was too weak in the knees to help much even if he had got down.

The watchman whose duty it was to look after the round-house came over from his shanty near by and built a fire in the rusty old cannonball heater.

"They won't no more of 'em freeze to death," he promised.

NIGHT fell and it was cheerless enough. Sam Avery scurried along the foot-board on top of the cars and caught sight, in the light of his lantern, of the open hatch in the roof of the car of wheat.

"Now what ya know about that?" he muttered.

It had been left to him in the first place to see about that hatch. He remembered perfectly well—he had pried it up not more than three inches but now it gaped open far enough to let a good big man's body through.

Sam crowded the hatch down to about the original aperture but before he did so he knelt by the opening and peered down into the depths of the car. A puff of steam gushed up and wet his face.

"Phew—ten cents will pay for all the good wheat they'll salvage out of that lot," he commented.

He lowered his lantern as far as his arm

would reach. The surface of the wheat was very uneven. Grain in bulk that way was supposed to be properly dressed and while farmers loading directly from their wagons weren't likely to do a finished job Sam wasn't used to seeing wheat look as if a bear had burrowed in it.

When he got back to the caboose it was time to eat. He dug into his capacious bucket and proffered the hobo a sandwich—the husky kind, that makes no pretense of being dainty. Two thick hunks of bread and between them a hunk of corned beef almost equally thick.

The hobo shook his head. He wasn't hungry.

"I see," Sam mumbled, with his mouth full, "they're advertisin' whole wheat for breakfast food, like it's a good thing."

The hobo stared blankly.

"Once I knew a feller," Sam went on to relate, "that never eat a thing only whole wheat—raw. He always had it in his pocket and whenever he got a chance he'd chew up some of it. He claimed it cured him of indigestion and God only knows what. Ever have indigestion?"

Sam looked hard at the hobo and the hobo looked hard at Sam. Billy Kilbane believed and no doubt always will believe that Sam released the brakes and sent the flat-car of ties down to bump the train loose or off the track—it would be like the reckless fellow not to care which. So far as Billy was concerned that was a sufficient solution of the mystery. Sam Avery knew better, of course, but hereupon, for him as well, the mystery ceased to be such—there was that in the hobo's eyes which served to clear it up.

"Have a bite of pie," urged Sam.

It was mince pie, deep and substantial. The hobo didn't mind if he did. He hadn't anything to say, but he ate the pie.

CROPS, CRADLES AND CONSEQUENCES

AN INCIDENT IN THE AFFAIRS OF MOHAMED ALI

By George E. Holt

Author of "The Master of the Djinnoon," "Pro Patria," etc.

MOHAMED ALI, outlaw, walking restlessly back and forth along a narrow yellow path in a village lost among the Atlas foot-hills, had been thinking of many things and many people; but the one of whom he thought most was his elderly friend, Sid Achmed Baghdadi, the former vizier whose fall had carried Mohamed Ali's bashaship into the category of Things That Have Been, and whom Mohamed Ali had saved from death when his head seemed ready for the Fez gate. Still proscribed by his Majesty the Sultan, the former vizier remained in hiding among the safe mountain ranges, less than a day's ride from where Mohamed Ali found his own haven. Meanwhile his successor wrought evil to the Sultan and to the empire.

Now in Mohamed Ali's heart were two

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things which are not too common in this practical world—gratitude and patriotism. It was the former of these which caused him to think deeply of Sid Achmed, and it was the other which caused him to desire to see his friend once more at the Sultan's right hand, in a position again to offer the same good advice which before had lost him the viziership. For his majesty, as Mohamed Ali was aware, now realized to some extent the wisdom of his former vizier. But even while he desired his counsel, Shareefian pride and the false advice of those about him, prohibited him from withdrawing his proscription and again extending the hand of friendship in the clasp of confidence.

Moreover—as no man's thoughts can be entirely altruistic—Mohamed Ali realized that his friend's restoration to power would go a long way toward ending his own outlawry, for one who had the Sultan's ear and trust could do much to allay his majesty's anger with even such as he. Although he had found plenty of excitement to repay him for his exile, and Allah had graciously aided him in preserving his head, Mohamed Ali lacked not in wisdom; he knew that one must not expect too much personal attention from his god, lest that god become annoyed and withdraw the mantle of his protection abruptly and without warning. Wherefore as a man of sense it behooved him to consider somewhat the future, and, as opportunity should offer, a way out of his present situation.

Now although Allah assuredly had had Mohamed Ali in His immediate keeping for the past year, it shortly became manifest that He was in no wise displeased with the activities of His protégé, nor ready to cease to smile upon him and his aspirations. Perhaps that was because Mohamed Ali's impulses of gratitude and patriotism were really very much greater than his thoughts of self-advantage. One must suppose that these matters have weight among the gods, even though their recognition is not always so immediately apparent as in this instance.

Scarcely an hour passed before the little village was set astir by the return of its head man from a journey to a brother living a score of miles across the hills to the southeast. With him came a tale which at the first possible moment he told to Mohamed Ali, being well aware of that person's interest in what was taking place in the world.

The story concerned the activities of one who called himself Mulai Achmed, and who claimed to be the rightful ruler of Morocco by virtue of being the oldest brother of the present Sultan.

Now as the Sultan of Al Moghreb al-Acksa invariably is a worthy competitor of King Solomon in the matter of wives, lady friends and offspring—that great Sultan, Ismail, had two thousand wives and eleven hundred children, the peace of Allah be upon him!—claimants to royal descent are almost as common in the empire as congressmen in our own land—and perhaps would be more so except for the affectionate custom of each new Sultan to kill off or imprison as many male relatives as he can manage to lay hands upon. And although these various claimants, or pretenders, who are constantly arising, are as a rule of little menace to the established order of things—"like snow upon the desert's dusty face, lighting a little hour or two," are gone—now and then one arises who becomes as a thorn in the flesh of the reigning sovereign.

Because of this possibility pretending, even in the most modest and unostentatious manner, is not looked upon with approval by that descendant of the Prophet whose head is temporarily shaded by the sacred white umbrella. Nor are the pretenders themselves held in high esteem; there used to hang in the royal palace at Fez the rifle with which a still living ex-Sultan himself excuted the famous pretender, El-Rogui.

Wherefore when Abbas the head man began the tale of him who called himself Mulai Achmed, Mohamed Ali listened with little interest; but shortly he was startled into attention.

"And so this Mulai Achmed limps about," said Abbas scornfully, "trying to secure a thirteenth follower to add to the twelve he already has. And I am inclined to think that he will get aid from——"

"Limps about? Limps about? He is lame then?"

"*Aiwa, sidi.* He is lame in the right leg."

"And, perchance, his face is marked somewhat by small-pox?"

"That also is true, *sidi.*"

"A big man with eyes set close to his nose—as one without wisdom?"

"The very man, *sidi.*"

"Hmph!"

Mohamed Ali spat in the dust.

"So he is Mulai Achmed now! Some years ago he was called by another name, I think—and his Majesty desired his head to the extent of a thousand duros. Whereupon he fled to Algeria. Hmph! Algeria! No doubt he has been sent back from Algeria by the French to stir the waters of truth with his own little stick and thus aid in the confusion of the empire."

After Abbas had gone, Mohamed Ali sat for a while wrapped in the *sulham* of reflection. A grim smile put a period to his thoughts, and he rose.

"Each event in life has its purpose," he philosophized. "And I think I begin to see wherein Mulai Achmed may have his."

Now the little village of half a dozen stone-and-clay huts where the pretender rested was only a few hours' ride from that one of which Abbas was head man. A most unimportant village, with no more than half a dozen men of fighting age. But the wise pretender secures his first following as quietly as possible among the humble and simple-minded hill-folk, who are ready to believe any tale which is told to them in the right way—and to whom any reigning Sultan is a symbol of oppression.

Mulai Achmed had worked industriously with the men of the village—and with the women as well, for even in Morocco a contented man may be driven into indiscretions by a wifely tongue. Into their ears he had poured the usual tale of unjust imprisonment, escape, persecution and suffering—with the necessary embroidery of miracles performed by Allah in order that he might survive and some day recover that throne of which he had been unjustly deprived. And the good but simple-minded mountaineers, who entertained no angel unawares, but a self-confessed Sultan, Prince of Islam, Commander of the Faithful, were as much flattered and confused as Gopher Prairie would be should the ex-Kaiser come to it to discuss with its people plans for the restoration of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

But although the simple-minded of earth are easily influenced, it is difficult to keep them of one mind. Just as many millions of voting Americans want a certain chief executive at one time, and shortly thereafter greatly desire some one else, so the six fighting men, and a number of militant wives, at one moment were all for backing up the aspirations of Mulai Achmed and at another moment were deterred by thoughts of crops, cradles and consequences.

Wherefore the ambitious Mulai Achmed, knowing the hypnotic power of example, was greatly pleased to be summoned from his house by the head man to greet a party of half a dozen mountaineers who desired to pay their respects to him and to acquire wisdom concerning his right to the throne. The leader of the little band of truth-seekkers wore a bandage over one eye and across his jaw—the result, he explained, of a recent unpleasant encounter with a wild boar. —and named himself Attar ibn Omar. And while Attar ibn Omar and his five companions, reenforced by most of the inhabitants of the village, sat upon the ground in a big half-circle, Mulai Achmed walked about and expounded his claims.

When he had concluded, the bandaged one spoke.

"It was foretold to me by Sidi Hassan ibn Ali, the Wise, that the rightful Sultan would bear upon his right knee a scar in the form of a crescent moon, and that by this sign should he be known."

Mulai Achmed stared a moment at the speaker; then his hand flashed upward for attention, and his spine straightened.

"To Sidi Hassan ibn Ali, the Wise, has Allah sent a revelation. Glory to the holy name of Allah! For it is even as you have said. Behold!"

He raised the skirt of his brown *djellaba* and revealed upon his tanned right knee a white scar shaped as the quarter moon.

There was a gasp of surprize from his audience, a grunt of wonder, and for a little Mulai Achmed permitted them to sit in spellbound silence, gazing upon the vision as another audience in another land once gazed hypnotized upon the vision of a cross of gold. Into his hands, at the moment of his need, Allah had sent a bandaged stranger to prove by a revelation the virtue of his claims.

Mulai Achmed was not the man to overlook such a weapon or to fail to use it—even though he himself was as much surprized as any of his audience. He had not yet come to believe his own lies, as many pretenders and demagogs do, but, like pretenders and demagogs, he was an opportunist of ability.

Letting his skirt fall, he stood for an

impressive moment drawn to his full stature, his eyes flashing from one man to another; then—

"Greater than all words are the revelations of Allah to the Faithful."

And he strode swiftly away, leaving the group of villagers to come out of their trance and to inundate the bandaged stranger with questions.

To their words Attar ibn Omar gave courteous attention and made thoughtful replies. A wiser people might have noted that, in some mysterious manner, and in spite of the wonder which they had just witnessed, the matter of crops, cradles and consequences remained just as important to them as before; the stranger who had brought about the revelation seemed to be a very cautious and practical person with a penchant for looking at all sides of a matter.

Besides which, it was perfectly true that three of the six village women were about to present their lords and masters with—if Allah desired to smile upon them—male children; that the golden fields of barley were almost ready for the sickles of the women; and that any one with sense knew that in all probability if Mulai Achmed were to become Sultan their taxes would be still higher, and that if he did *not* become Sultan his head and the heads of his followers would no doubt hang upon the iron hooks over the gates at Fez. Thus the desire to become king-makers chased the desire to play safe in a mental giddy-go-round which left these simple folk very much as they were.

SHORTLY the man with the bandaged head rose and wandered away by himself. He seemed much interested in the plan of the little village and its environs. But he did not approach the person of the pretender—who had sought solitude in a tiny olive grove at a little distance from the houses—until he had completely circled the village and returned to hold a brief talk with his men. Then he sought Mulai Achmed with a question upon his lips, and absent-mindedly led the pretender for a stroll along a yellow path which ran toward the golden barley fields, out of sight of the village behind its high hedges of cactus and Barbary fig.

In the course of half an hour he returned, but the pretender was not with him.

His return was the signal—or seemed to be—for his five men to rise from the shady nooks they had found, and to pursue the path formerly taken by their leader, who now seated himself beneath a giant cactus and turned a pensive eye upon the followers of Mulai Achmed, lying about in the half-sleep which the afternoon sun brings to Morocco.

After a time long enough for his men to have gone quite a little distance from the village, he called to one who seemed more awake than the rest.

"Your master, Mulai Achmed," he said, "asked me to request you and his other followers to come to him at the place of the threshing of the grain. It lies a little walk in that direction. And not all of you at once; he desires to speak with only three or four at a time. No doubt concerning matters of which you are aware. I leave the matter in your hands."

The mountaineer studied for a moment as if in doubt. Then—

"What his Majesty desires shall be done," he said, and roused three other fellows to go with him, yawning and only half-awake.

A quarter of an hour passed. Then came one of the men of the bandaged one's party.

"Mulai Achmed desires now that four others come," he said loudly.

The remaining eight of the pretender's following came to their feet. The messenger quickly indicated four of them.

"Come with me," he said.

And to the man with the injured face:

"Will you, O *sidi*, send along the other four in the course of a quarter of an hour? Mulai Achmed, I think, introduces his men to certain secrets of state—a few at a time, that each may be tested."

The bandaged head nodded assent to the request and watched them shuffle away. And in due course it gave the word which sent the remaining four shuffling after their fellows.

Shortly thereafter his own handful of men returned, sweating and dusty and a little disheveled, but smiling with satisfaction.

"Truly," one said with a chuckle, "it is like the old tale of the Forty Thieves— except that then there was a jar for each. Whereas——"

But their leader cut him short.

"Take horse now," he commanded, "and carry a message to the south with all haste. The message——"

He spoke swiftly for a moment. The man nodded understanding and strode off to his horse. Soon his companions heard the clatter of hoofs galloping down the hill.

Thus it came about that the ex-vizier, Achmed Baghdadi, taking his ease in the little village a dozen miles away, was suddenly confronted by a sweating horseman, who told him in twenty words what was desired of him.

"Mohamed Ali a prisoner!" exclaimed Baghdadi. "And of Mulai Achmed! I can scarcely— However, call my men; we ride at once!"

Now the good and simple people in the village which had sheltered the pretender, began, as the sun sank low in the west, to question each other as to the disappearance of Mulai Achmed and his followers. And also to question, eventually, him of the bandage and those who accompanied him.

"No doubt they are engaged in their own affairs," offered Attar ibn Omar. "Or—perhaps they fear that the Government troops, which we passed this morning, are coming this way, and so have gone elsewhere."

"Government troops!" exploded the head man to the accompaniemnt of surprized grunts from the villagers. "You passed Government troops—near here—this morning?"

The bandaged head nodded disinterested affirmative.

"Why—why did you not say so before? Allah! If they learn that we—that we have sheltered— *Aweely! Aweely!*"

"*Aweely!*" echoed the villagers.

The head man turned upon them fiercely.

"Hear me now, and understand—all. We know nothing of this man who calls himself Mulai Achmed. If he returns we will drive him away from our village."

Further grunts indicated that the head man's plan met with approval.

"Also, if we are questioned we will say that we but waited our opportunity to send him about his business. Now get to your houses and warn your families concerning what I have ordered."

They slunk away to do his bidding. The head man followed them. Attar ibn Omar's bandaged face twisted into a grin.

"I," he said to himself, "shall never aspire to the white umbrella."

He rose and walked to a spot on the hilltop whence the valley below could be viewed. A few miles to the south he saw a dust-cloud, and half-hidden by it, a score of horsemen. Quickly he returned and summoned his men—and very shortly thereafter he who called himself Attar ibn Omar, and who had been unfortunate in an encounter with a wild boar, seemed to have met with further misfortune. For he stood tied securely to the trunk of a great gnarled argan-tree, while his own men made sure that the ropes were strong and the knots tight. And, having so made certain, they mounted their horses, clattered down the hillside and made off across the valley in full view of the former vizier and his men.

Sid Baghdadi and his followers swept up the hillside and into the village like a blast of the sirocco into the quietude of a mosque. Their foam-covered horses crashed against each other in the narrow lane; their rifles, held high, spat lead at the clouds, and from their lips came the shrill raid-cries of the mountains. At their head rode the ex-vizier—venerable, white-bearded and clad in snowy white robes that trailed out over his horse's rump, swinging his rifle and shouting with the youngest of his followers.

They crashed through the village, but no villager was abroad to welcome or oppose; half a dozen closed doors in blank-faced houses indicated that consequences, if not crops and cradles, had conquered.

Coming out on the other side of the village, the former vizier pulled his horse to its haunches—and at that nearly slithered into a tree to which was tied a man who wore a bandage upon his head. Sid Baghdadi slid from his horse.

"What—" he began; but the man on the tree also spoke.

"You are very welcome, my friend," he said. "And now if you would kindly untie me——"

"Mohamed Ali!" cried Baghdadi, springing to the tree and starting in on the knots. "Mohamed Ali—and what—how——"

"Did you by any chance see some riders going swiftly away as you came?"

"*Aiwa;* four I saw, even as I rode up. They went in haste."

"There was reason," explained Mohamed Ali, as with a freed hand he removed the bandage from about his head and threw it aside. "If you had been ten minutes later my earthly affairs would have been ended."

He stretched and chafed his wrists where the ropes had held.

"And not only that," he added, "but in all probability you would have lost a very valuable thing. As it is, I am not sure—but let us see."

"I do not understand," said the ex-vizier. "Your man said you had been seized by the followers of that infamous one who calls himself Mulai Achmed, but who in reality is none other than Mustapha el-Zurgi, whose head the Sultan greatly desires."

"My messenger spoke truth—as you see. After I had—hm!—after I had successfully attended to a certain matter with the aid of Allah, I grew careless. And sent my few men on to another place to perform an errand. Then came upon me four of the pretender's followers—those whom you saw riding swiftly away—and seized me and tied me here with the intention of shooting me. Your opportune arrival frightened them away. So you have saved my life and—what is perhaps more important still—are justly entitled to—to a profit on the transaction."

"What are you talking about?" asked Baghdadi.

"Come, and we will see."

He led Sid Baghdadi down the yellow lane which ran to the place of the threshing of the grain. Baghdadi's men followed, having tethered their horses. Mohamed Ali went to a spot where a number of what seemed to be round wooden covers some three feet in diameter lay upon the ground. To these Mohamed Ali pointed.

"You know, of course, what these are," he said.

"Assuredly," returned Baghdadi promptly. "*Matmoras*."

Now a *matmora* is really nothing less than a great, a very great, jar in the ground, for the purpose of storing grain. A big jar-shaped hole is dug, sometimes ten feet deep and six or seven across, having a three-foot neck, after which concrete and plaster are applied to the inside and the bottom. This protects the grain from rodents and rain.

"And no doubt you remember the story of a certain Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves?"

"Naturally," assented Baghdadi.

"Well——"

Mohamed Ali bent over, slipped the crude lock upon the *matmora* cover, and threw it back.

"Here, I think, is your Ali Baba."

A deep groan came from the bottom of the *matmora*, empty of grain at this season.

Baghdadi kneeled and stuck his white beard into the jar's mouth. He saw a bound and gagged figure lying on his back.

"Mulai Achmed!" exclaimed Baghdadi. "Or, rather, Mustapha el-Zurgi. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

His old face crinkled like Japanese crêpe.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! Mulai Achmed in a *matmora!* The Sultan Achmed in a jug! Ho! Ho! Ho!"

Dignity fled, the former vizier rocked on his toes and flapped his hands helplessly, gasping to his men:

"Come—come—and see his shareefian Majesty—on his throne! Come and witness—the Commander of the Faithful—under the white umbrella! Come—come, all ye Faithful—and look upon the Prince of Islam in—" his voice cracked—"in a jug!" he howled.

"His followers," said Mohamed Ali after a little, pointing, "are in those other jars."

The men scattered to pry open the lids of other *matmoras* and to vent their humor upon those they found inside. And while they were engaged in that delightful pastime Mohamed Ali drew the ex-vizier a little way off and spoke to him swiftly and earnestly.

"But—but he is *your* captive," Baghdadi objected. "It would aid you to send him to the Sultan."

"Not in the least," countered Mohamed Ali. "I am too far out of his Majesty's good graces. But you—Mulai Achmed will make you vizier again. And besides, had you not arrived—where would I have been by this time? In Paradise without a doubt. Wherefore even your friendship for me must show you that the pretender would then have become *your* captive. No! No! It is you who shall send him to Fez. And perhaps when you are again vizier matters will not be so difficult for me."

"But why did not Mulai Achmed's followers release him after they had bound you?"

"I suspect," answered Mohamed Ali with a grin, "that they did not know just where to find him. It is unusual for a pretender to—to seek seclusion in a *matmora*."

Thus he spoke, beating down the objection raised by his elderly friend and rescuer,

and at last the ex-vizier gave a shrug of assent.

"So be it," he said. "But unless a pardon for Mohamed Ali be shortly thereafter forthcoming, there assuredly will be further trouble."

And, calling to his men, he ordered that Mulai Achmed and his men be bound upon one long rope in preparation for the march southward.

Mohamed Ali rode with him to the foot of the hill. There he bade him farewell and struck off into the western hills. He had not ridden long before he came upon four horsemen who manifestly were awaiting him.

"I trust the bonds were not exceedingly uncomfortable," offered one.

Mohamed Ali laughed as they rode on.

"A little pain for the sake of friendship is not to be regretted," he observed.

And so it was that his Shareefian Majesty, the Sultan of Morocco, on a certain day had brought into his presence one who had called himself Mulai Achmed and claimed brotherhood with him. It was an unfortunate day for Mulai Achmed. But more fortunate for the ex-vizier, Baghdadi; for the Sultan some time thereafter restored him to favor. And on a much later day his Majesty was amused at the picture drawn by the vizier of Mulai Achmed in a jug and in the part Mohamed Ali played in getting him there.

The vizier also had gratitude in his heart.

OLD MISERY

A FIVE-PART STORY

PART III.

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Long Rifles," "Red Autumn," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

"GOD help me!" groaned Joseph Gilbert to Maria the monte dealer as he saw her sweep in his last dollar. "It was not my money I lost. I am a thief!"

The young Vermonter had lost fourteen hundred dollars belonging to friends in Coloma, a mining camp in southern California.

To Maria his was simply another ludicrous case. She was accustomed to seeing men losing other people's money in gambling halls. In these flamboyant days of 1853, when the wild hilarity of the '49 gold rush had not yet checked itself, San Francisco saw many things that a more conventional time would have been shocked over.

The girl's laugh died out. Joaquin Murieta, Mexican bandit, and five masked men had entered the gambling-hall. On their heels came "Old Misery," the Man from the Mountains—Old Misery, who was the most expert knife-thrower in California.

In a twinkling Murieta had shot the lights out. In the darkness men grappled with each other helplessly. Gilbert, shaken and trembling, endeavored to escape; groping blindly, his hand found a window curtain, and he drew it back. Before he could stir, the bandits leaped through the window, each carrying a bag of gold.

In a moment Gilbert had also cleared the window sill. As he landed on the ground his hand encountered a bag, dropped by the bandits. Concealing it under his coat, he fled.

Inside, the lights on again, Old Misery faced the girl Maria.

"You ain't bad at heart, Maria," he said. "Just a trifle wild. Your grandpap won't lambast you again."

When he left he took her with him. Old Misery was accustomed to taking care of other people's troubles; this girl was going to be taken back home again.

The next morning Joseph Gilbert took the bull by the horns. In his pocket was a ticket to Sacramento. From there he would take the stage coach

"Old Misery," copyright 1923, by Hugh Pendexter

to Coloma. Afterward he would have to let fate take its course. In the bag he found three hundred dollars, which for the present, he felt entitled to use.

THE landing at Sacramento left Gilbert confused. Therefore it happened that he took the wrong stage coach, and as a consequence found himself bound for Nevada City. And opposite him sat Old Misery and the girl, Maria. He resigned himself to the situation; he was not anxious to reach Coloma.

In Nevada City Gilbert met Mr. Peters, the gambler exquisite. Talk concerning the raid of Joaquin Murieta and his fellows on the gambling-hall in San Francisco ran feverishly. It was being said that Murieta had been aided in his escape by a greenhorn Yankee. In desperation Gilbert confessed the whole affair to Peters.

According to Peters, there was only one thing for Gilbert to do: lay low until the thing had blown over. And after Peters had persuaded Old Misery it was decided that Gilbert should seek refuge with the Mountain Man in his home in the foot-hills. Old Misery had finally been prevailed upon to accept the commission after his tame bear, Ben Williams, fawned upon the young man.

Just as Old Misery and Gilbert were riding out of Nevada City bound for the foot-hills, Manuel Vesquio, half-Chinese, half-Mexican, rode up behind them.

Hurriedly the breed told them that excitement had broken out in the city and a posse was being formed. Why, he said he could only imagine.

"They're after me!" gasped Gilbert.

BUT they reached Old Misery's cabin safely.

The next morning Gilbert's panic was resumed when he beheld a crowd of men coming up the slope. But they were not concerned with him. Phelps of Grass Valley, at their head, intimated strongly to Old Misery that he suspected him of having built his cabin in a gold mine.

Old Misery grinned broadly.

"What give you boys the notion I'd struck pay dirt up here? You know I never fuss with gold till some one else has dug and cleaned it."

After a discouraged search the invaders departed, Old Misery's mocking laugh ringing in their ears. As Gilbert and Old Misery were returning to the cabin a masked man thrust a pistol into Misery's face.

"He robbed you!" gasped Gilbert, as the horseman galloped away.

"No. Just took a peek at my medicine," was the Mountain Man's reply.

He exhibited a small bag in which he carried, about his neck, a monte card. Scrawled across the face were two words:

Joaquin-Amigo

Old Misery explained how he had once rescued Joaquin Murieta from drowning and the bandit had presented him with the card.

"I'll spoil his hide the next chance I git," Misery commented humorously.

To Gilbert's surprize he discovered that the girl Maria and her half-blind grandfather, Dom Miguel, were living in a cabin in Old Misery's clearing. Two lone prospectors also dwelt not far away. During the next few days Misery was gone on mysterious jaunts. Left alone Gilbert received hints from Maria confirming his impression that something strange was stirring in the clearing.

There also came word that Joaquin Murieta and his marauders were raiding again. Old Misery home at night, weary and lame from his curious pilgrimages, brought this news. It also amused him to know that his Nevada City neighbors suspected him of having discovered a gold-ledge. Gilbert had the impression that Misery, in spite of his queer Indian superstitions, was not quite so child-like as he appeared.

One day Misery left his little colony and went down into the valley. In time he entered Coloma. In a barroom he found a crowd of men having fun at the expense of "Pretty Soon" Jim Pipps. Misery, who had known Pipps in the old days—days when he was first trying to scrape together enough money to go back home in the East, defended him.

That evening Stacy, the storekeeper was found murdered. The bartender endeavored to lay suspicion upon Pretty Soon Jim Pipps.

"Let's take a peek behind the bar," Misery suggested suspiciously.

A blood-smeared bottle was found. The bartender leaped through the window, the crowd after him. Misery departed alone. He was anxious to find Pipps and discover how he had become associated with the crime.

That night as Misery slept alongside of a cabin just outside of Coloma, he was suddenly awakened by the noise of horsemen approaching. In the dim light he saw they were Murieta's men. From their talk he knew they were after gold, buried at this spot by one of their former comrades. As they were lifting the last bag of gold from the hole they had dug, a mysterious figure loomed in the doorway of the cabin. The bandits fled, dropping one bag.

It was Pretty Soon Jim Pipps. He had been sleeping off a carouse.

Old Misery decided he would see Pipps safely on his way home. The contents of the bag would defray his expenses. They walked to the edge of the slope, where Misery said they would part for awhile, to meet later. Misery was becoming disturbed over the fact that his gold possessions were becoming known to the public at large.

REACHING a point where rocks showed in the channel above a narrow bend, the mountain man worked his way down over a faint trail. The path had been used by aborigines, but never by miners, Misery decided. Gaining the edge of the river, he decided he could cross by leaping from rock to rock if, not for an opening in mid-channel. Hiding his rifle and the bag, he searched the shore until he found a section of a young pine.

Then followed the tedious work of resting it on two rocks and leaping the opening and advancing it again. He repeated this maneuver, falling into the water only once, until he managed to push the trunk over the gap in mid-stream. Returning to the shore,

he took his rifle in one hand and the bag in the other and nimbly sprang from rock to rock to his rude bridge. Without a pause he made the crossing.

"*Haul*" he exclaimed as he left the bridge and commenced bounding over the last half of his perilous journey.

Once started, he needs must keep moving; and his momentum was considerable as he neared the north bank. He discovered he had been deceived as to the distance between the last foot-hold and the shore. There could be no hesitating now, however, so he swung his arm and hurled the bag ahead and leaped as far as possible.

He landed in the water up to his waist and quickly scrambled ashore. Recovering the bag, he found a faint trail leading to the heights. An hour later he stepped from behind a tree and fell in beside Pretty Soon Jim, much to the latter's astonishment.

"Now you tote this —— stuff for a while," were Misery's first words. "Come near losing Solid Comfort along of my foolishness. We'll keep clear of the Grizzly Bear House and strike for Kelly's Bar. We must keep going till we reach Illinoistown. Then I allow we'll be all right."

The journey to Kelly's Bar was without incident, although they were thrilled at sight of a reckless horseman riding his mount down to the river. He made the descent in zigzag plunges, the intelligent animal pivoting and shifting his course when his momentum threatened to hurl him hoofs over head.

"Rides like a greaser, but he's 'Merican," remarked Old Misery as he admired the headlong recklessness of the man.

They had to wait until the dugout had ferried the rider across, the horse being towed behind. When Misery and his companion reached the bar the horseman was half-way up the opposite slope.

"Don't git into any talk here," warned Old Misery as he led the way by some ragged tents and a few huts, "and keep that bag outer sight."

"You think we're in danger?" uneasily asked Pretty Soon.

"Mebbe. But once we reach Illinoistown, four miles along the ridge, we can take it easy. I'll try to rig you up a belt, so's you won't have to bother with the bag."

Pretty Soon groaned and complained much as they ascended the mountain trail but refused Old Misery's offer to carry the bag.

"It's mine," he panted. "I risked my life for it. 'Most scared to death in getting it. I can still feel that flour in my lungs."

Old Misery's bearing became more buoyant as they entered the path to Illinoistown. Now he felt he was almost home, his business finished. A day's delay and he would have Pretty Soon Jim off his hands and would be free to return to Grass Hollow.

When they came to the three cabins he led the way to the one where he had met Tom Tobin. The round-shouldered Pike County man appeared in the doorway. On recognizing the mountain man his bearing became hostile, yet tempered by a recollection of the old man's ferocity in combat.

"You back ag'in?" he querulously greeted. "I was hoping——"

"No use. My medicine won't let me git killed yet a while," completed the mountain man. "But I ain't blaming you. This is a free country for wishing. It's them stewed squirrels that fetched me back. They was so prime I must have more. I've talked a heap 'bout 'em. Bimeby folks will be coming from all over the world to eat 'em."

"That'll be a pretty howd'y-do for me," bitterly complained the man. "And you two fellers busted a prime stool with your fooling."

"Always leave a friend as good as I found him," declared Old Misery, and he fished a nugget from his pocket and tossed it into the ready hand.

The man examined it suspiciously; then thawed out and admitted:

"I've got some squirrels in the kettle. All you two will want. And there's a damper of bread inside somewhere. Think I'll go over and eat with the mill-men so you two can have the place to yourselves. After you git done fighting just see what you've busted and leave what you think the damage's worth in one of my old boots."

His departure was immediate, and suggested a fear that Old Misery and his companion would fall-to on the spot and enjoy themselves in savage strife.

The cabin was in filthy condition. Old clothes, soggy boots and empty bottles were scattered over the floor. But in the fireplace, opening into a stick-and-mud chimney, bubbled a kettle that gave off a pleasing aroma.

"Faugh!" exclaimed Misery, wrinkling his nose. "I'd like the squirrels more if we'd kept outside. Tom Tobin must 'a' been awful drunk to sleep in here."

Pretty Soon was less fastidious and lost no time in examining the bottles. All were empty. Misery found some deerskin hanging from a peg and promptly set to work fashioning a belt. He worked rapidly, and with his moccasin awl and threads of sinew sewed two thicknesses together and divided them into pockets.

"Mighty clever," praised Pretty Soon. " 'Most done?"

"I'll have it finished in a minute if my stomick holds out. This place is worse'n the wind from a Injun Summer camp," growled Old Misery.

A step sounded outside the door, and he brushed his work under the bunk and came to his feet.

"Who's at home?" asked a man, standing in the doorway and trying to wink the sun-glare from his eyes.

" 'Mericans. Two of 'em. Come in and squat if you can stand the gineral smell."

The stranger entered and tested the air with his hooked nose and decided: "Smells a bit stronger than my cabin, but not much. I must have come in just ahead of you. Hoss went lame. Had to stop."

As he spoke his dark eyes darted about the room and rested for a second on the bag at Pretty Soon's feet.

"But you do have something cooking that tickles the appetite," he added.

He walked toward the bubbling kettle and stubbed his toe against the bag.

"—— dark in here," he grumbled.

Old Misery's eyes narrowed. He recognized the stranger as the daring horseman at Kelly's Bar.

His voice was hearty as he cried: "Stewed squirrels, lots of 'em. Bring what fodder you've got out front and we'll have a feast. If you ain't got any, come just the same. 'Mericans oughter share with each other; and you're 'Merican all right."

"Yes, sir. George York, born in the State of New York. I'll be glad to share some cold meat and bread from my saddle-bags, Mr. ——"

"Not any mister. Just Old Misery, the feller Old Man Trouble has been chasing for years. My friend here is Pretty Soon Jim. We're bound for the Yuba."

"If I was afoot and not in a hurry I'd like to travel along with you," said York. "Trail's getting unsafe for honest folks. Mill-men tell me there's been three murders within ten miles of here within the last twenty-four hours."

"Good Lord!" gasped Pretty Soon. "What be we coming to? A man with property——"

"Never can cover the trail," broke in Old Misery. "That's one thing to be thankful for: When you ain't got nothing you can't lose nothing." And he pressed his foot heavily on Pretty Soon's toes.

"The squirrels oughter be done in less'n twenty minutes."

"Then I'll look at my hoss and be back by that time," said York.

The moment he passed through the door Old Misery was watching from the window. He saw the stranger make for a small corral beyond the third cabin.

Turning about, he commanded:

"Off with that shirt so I can fix this belt round you. I'll have to sew it on."

Pretty Soon removed his coat and ragged shirt, and the mountain man quickly made the belt fast and proceeded to fill the little pockets with coins.

Finishing, he commanded:

"Don't let on to nobody you're wearing it, or your ha'r'll be in the smoke. I'll keep the bag."

"Seems to be a lot of secrecy."

"Mighty good chance for you to git your long throat cut if you don't do as I say. My medicine tells me there's going to be trouble. When I give the word to-night for you to light out for Grass Valley you start without a yip. Reaching the valley, you're to make believe you're busted and almost ready to go to work. You're just Pretty Soon Jim, down on his luck. Toward night you hoof it to Nevada City and go to Kelly's lodging-place. If I don't come along inside of two days you hunt up Mr. Peters, honest gambler, and tell the whole thing. When he knows I sent you he'll git the coins changed into dust. That'll break the money-trail. Then the 'spress office will see it's waiting for you back home. No matter when I say, 'Go,' you scoot."

"If I'm man enough to find a bag of gold I'm man enough to turn it in to the express office. Seems as if too many folks was mixing up in my business affairs," retorted Pretty Soon.

"All the four bags held the same kind of stuff," patiently replied Misery. "Already Murieta's spies along Deer crick have been told to watch out for any one carrying a bag of fifty-dollar slugs. That flour trail back in the valley has been follered. Right now they're prob'ly trailing us to this spot. It's known you left Coloma same day as I did. It's known I was in Greenwood. Most likely I'll be suspected of knowing something 'bout the bag. You've got to promise not to take a single snort of liquor till I show up and give the word. If I don't show up, not till you're on the boat, sailing for home."

Pretty Soon frowned and scratched his chin. It was no way for a capitalist to behave. Possession of gold called for a jollification. The rôle of a penniless vagabond was abhorrent. If he gave his promise he must keep it; for somewhere alive among all his weaknesses was that one great virtue.

As he hesitated, visualizing the tedious stage trip to Sacramento and the beautiful drinking-places along the way, the mountain man drew the edge of his hand across his throat and whispered—

"Within forty-eight hours if you git drunk."

Knowing that one drink would mean a drunk, Pretty Soon groaned and surrendered.

"Good Lord! I ain't as stubborn as that. I promise. Say the word and I'm off."

Old Misery stuffed the bag inside his shirt and went outside. He saw nothing of York. He wandered aimlessly up the slope and after making sure he was not being watched he cast about for something to put in the bag. The first piece of rock he picked up had one side covered with aborescent coats of manganese. His eyes filled with awe as he gazed on it. He saw the outlines of pine-covered hills, and it resembled the bridge north of Grass Hollow.

"Picter of the ridge to a dot," he whispered. "If that ain't strong medicine then I never heard of any. If that don't mean I'm bound to make the holler with a whole hide then all medicine is a liar."

He felt mightily lifted up as he placed it in the bag. His head was high and no thought of an assassin's bullet troubled him as he returned to the cabin and placed the bag on the floor and half under the bunk.

Pretty Soon Jim's eyes asked questions concerning the filled bag, but the mountain man warned:

"Keep shet! You'll see me in Nevada City. I've had a sign. Comp'ny coming. Take that kettle of stew outside. I'll hunt for some bowls."

"All ready to eat?" asked York from the doorway.

He saw the mountain man's moccasin push the bag under the bunk.

"Trying to find some clean bowls," mumbled Old Misery.

"I've brought three that'll do," rejoined York. "Washed them myself to make sure."

They seated themselves around the kettle and dished up the stew and supplemented it with cold meat and bread from the stranger's stores.

York proved to be a most interesting companion after they had finished the meal and had lighted their pipes. He informed them he was a gambler and was on his way to try the northern camps.

"And I'd be mighty glad to have your company as I'm carrying quite a bit of gold with me," he confessed.

Pretty Soon Jim was fascinated by his entertaining talk and expressed the wish they might travel together.

"Mebbe we can," said Old Misery. "Depends on how long your hoss is laid up. S'pose we have a look at him. I used to know something 'bout hosses when I was living over the ridge. Mebbe we can keep along together."

York rose to lead the way.

To Pretty Soon Jim the mountain man directed, "Take the kettle inside," and under his breath he added the one word, "Scoot!"

Pretty Soon surprized him by yawning sleepily and announcing:

"Think I'll turn in. Dead tired."

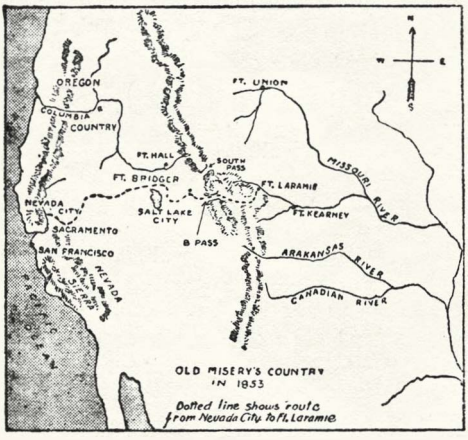
"Didn't s'pose the fool would have sense 'nough to say that," Old Misery told himself as he followed York.

It was growing dark as they reached the small corral. The horse came to the fence to be petted, and as the mountain man ran his hand over the sleek coat and limbs he knew it was one of the best horses money could buy in California. The intelligent animal nuzzled his master. York spoke sharply, and it moved away, walking with a decided limp. But when it approached the fence it had not, so far as Misery observed, walked lame.

"Sorry we can't wait for you," regretted

Misery. "But it'll take several days for the nag to git into shape. Wonderful critter!"

They returned to the cabins and stretched out on the grass and smoked another pipe and talked for more than an hour. York was the first to plead sleepiness, and retired to his cabin.



Old Misery, humming a medicine-song, entered his cabin and swept his hand over the bunk, fearing lest his companion had failed to catch his warning. The bunk was empty. Instead of taking his blankets and making his bed outside, the mountain man drew the bag with the medicine-rock from under the bunk and placed it under the window. Then he threw off his shirt and wrapped a blanket about him and stuck his long knife in the floor between his hunched-up knees and waited.

One hour, two hours, three hours passed. It seemed foolish to keep awake any longer when his medicine was standing guard at the window; and he rested his head on his knees and dozed off.

A STEP at the window, as soft as an Indian's, brought his head up with a jerk, but he continued breathing heavily and snored slightly. When the doorway darkened he drew his heels under him and released his knife. He was conscious of something passing toward the bunk.

The intruder, now missing the deep breathing he had heard from the open window, was suspicious.

In a low voice he said:

"It's York, Mr. Misery. Wake up! There is danger."

Standing erect and dropping the blanket from his shoulders, the mountain man murmured:

"I'm awake. What's the trouble?"

He heard York spin about on his heel.

"The mill-men plot to steal your bag of gold. Where are you?" whispered York.

"Here," softly answered Misery, crouching low and whipping the blanket around his left arm and noiselessly moving several feet to one side.

"But your friend?"

And as he put the question York shifted his position.

"Gone these hours. I stayed to meet you, you —— murderer."

And again a noiseless shift of position.

Neither was visible to the other unless lined against the open door or window.

"How'd you guess?" murmured York.

"Hoss trained to act lame."

And as he spoke he stepped wide to his right and heard York's heavy knife end its flight in the logs.

He worked along the side wall, trying to get his man between him and one of the two openings. After a minute he decided York was making the same maneuver and that in a few seconds they would meet. Each was trying to catch the sound of the other's breathing. Then a slight noise at the window warned him York had attempted to pass that opening by keeping below the sill but had hit the bag containing the medicine-rock.

He leaped toward the window, straightening out his form, his outstretched hand sending the point of the long knife against something. Instantly the quiet of the place was shattered by a ferocious curse and the heavy bag struck the mountain man in the chest; and the next moment the bandit was closing in. Their knives found each other and slithered blade to blade until locked at the hilt. Now neither dared to release his weapon until he had forced the opposing blade to one side. It became a test of endurance, the bandit assuming he possessed the superior strength and being willing to bide his time. Suddenly the mountain man began shouting his war-whoop.

"Weakening, —— you!" panted York. "No help for you!"

Old Misery shouted again, then chuckled and informed York—

"I'm just calling in some witnesses afore sending you among ghosts."

And with extra pressure he pushed the bandit's knife a bit aside.

York brought the blade back and gritted—

"I'll overtake him!"

Old Misery taunted:

"They'll find you fighting me in my cabin. They'll know you come to rob me."

And he renewed his shouting.

York tried to work him to and through the doorway, but the knife was ever barring the path. Suddenly the mountain man's knife gave way and the point pricked the bandit's wrist; then it was back, hilt to hilt. For the first time it flashed into the bandit's comprehension that the old man was playing with him and holding him there until the mill-men came.

Whereas he had been supremely confident he was now afraid. He leaped back several feet and with his left hand pulled a revolver and fired, as he thought, point blank. The detonation of the heavy weapon sounded like a thunder-clap. Men outside were crying excitedly and making for the cabin. York shifted his aim a bit and fired again; then went down clawing at his throat.

"Ho! Ho! You men out there!" cried Misery from the doorway. "Bring torches! A man tried to rob and murder me. Scared my partner away. Step smart. I've killed him. He's one of Murieta's band."

One of the men, bolder than his mates, lighted a pine bough and held it up at the small window.

One glance and he was calling to the others:

"Dead man on the floor! Come on!"

They followed him inside. The smoky light revealed York, the heavy revolver clutched in one hand, the other hand grasping the handle of the knife buried in his throat. On the floor was his knife, and in the logs was stuck a second knife.

"He come loaded for b'ar," puffed Old Misery. "'Lowed he'd need two knives to butcher two of us while we slept. Didn't want to use a gun and wake you folks up. That's why I hooted so."

Then he picked up the buckskin bag and added:

"Keen to rob me. One of Murieta's men."

"What'll happen to us when Murieta heard he was kilt here?" whispered the Pike County man.

"Hide the body in the ground. Saddle the hoss and lead it back to Kelly's Bar and turn it loose. That'll break the trail. Hoss'll be found on the ridge above the bar. Folks will think the rider was thrown off. Then all of you keep your mouths shet. I'm no hand to talk."

The men retired outside the cabin and whispered for a few moments; then the spokesman told Misery:

"See here. You've brought trouble here. We want you to clear out before it's light. We'll swear neither of you stayed here longer than to eat a snack."

"That's a medicine-talk. I'll go now. Just waited for you folks to come and git the right of the fuss," readily agreed Old Misery.

IT WAS late in the afternoon when Old Misery reached Nevada City. He made direct for Hotel de Paris and found Mr. Peters in his room, just completing his street toilet.

"How's our Injun-medicine man?" he heartily greeted, his fresh-shaven face beaming welcome and his thick hand extended in greeting.

"I've got a mighty strong medicine since I see you last," gravely informed Old Misery. "Medicine-picter of the ridge north of my camp. Mebbe I'll show it to you some-time; after I find out if it's willing. Some medicines are mighty techy. Some don't seem to care how much they're looked at. Now, Peters, I'm going to s'prize you. I'm trying to dodge trouble and need a little help."

Mr. Peters was more than surprized; he was amazed. His portly form dropped into a chair, and his broad face grew serious.

"I'm taking cards," he briefly replied. "Deal!"

Old Misery lowered his voice and rapidly explained the situation. Mr. Peters' face cleared, and he chuckled in deep amusement.

"Trouble? That's a joke. Fetch along your loot and I'll have it changed to nuggets before a cat can wink an eye. I thought it was something with guns and knives in it."

"Like —— you did!" growled Old Misery, his beard bristling. "How long since I couldn't take care of that brand of trouble all by myself? If it was my gold I'd blow it just as it comes from the bag, and be —— to any one that tried to stop me. But Jim's cur'ous. Most medicines don't work

for him. All the way here from Illinois-town my new medicine's been trying to tell me that something is wrong. I won't feel safe 'bout that cuss till he's on the Isthmus boat.

"I ain't had time to git well acquainted with my new medicine. I can't figger out just what's wrong; but something's missed fire."

"Nonsense, Misery! It's all as simple as cold-decking a greenhorn. That reminds me; how's your young friend getting along?"

"Good. He's a well-meaning younker. Has something busted in his head. Thinks things can happen afore they happen. Tells about his home folks in Vermont eating supper at six in the afternoon, but sticks to it that's three hours afore something happens out here at six o'clock. Sorter *heyoka* that way. It bothered Bill 'n' me a heap at first; but Bill says it don't do any harm, and we let him go it. But he's honest as sunshine; and when it comes to rubbing panther ile on sore muscles he's all ——."

"I don't think there's any trouble waiting for him down here," slowly said the gambler. "Two strangers up from the bay, come separate, who didn't gamble or care for mining. Prosperous-looking. One was hunting for a 'nephew,' a young man. Other man was keen to find track of a young Englishman. Says he's hired by the lad's folks to find him. He described our young friend better than the 'uncle' did. Both have left town; but I learned from Yuba, the stage-driver, they was hunting together in Marysville. Up here they pretended not to know each other."

"Meaning the committee's trying to git track of him?"

"The one bet on the table. But I figure they're off the trail. They still think the youngster in the El Dorado is an Englishman. Nothing can break here without my knowing it in time to send word to the hollow in time for you to hide him. He never could explain it away, unless they believed him to be an idiot."

"He's a *heyoka* man," stoutly insisted Misery. "If they come into the hills I'll take him over the ridge and p'int him east. I'm going to call Grass Holler 'Camp Trouble.' I'll be Old Man Trouble-Mender. I'm s'posed to be trapping and taming b'ars. Instead the camp's all cluttered up with *heyoka* folks. Besides the younker there's Weymouth Mass and Sailor Ben, and old Miguel and Maria——"

"Better ship that girl out. Send her down into Mexico," tersely broke in Mr. Peters. "Heard a man claim that the monte-dealer in the El Dorado was Ana Benites, one of Joaquin's band."

Old Misery shook his head stubbornly.

"I'll never drive her out. She's living straight in Grass Holler. She'd never run away if old Miguel hadn't lambasted her one day when I was up the ridge. Why send her back to live as 'Ana Benites'? Natural she should think Joaquin's a great man. Calls him the Great One. All the Mexicans on the coast think the same. He's the first greaser to scare a whole army of white folks. But she's living straight up there, and I won't turn her loose to be trapped any more'n I turn them panther kittens loose while they're babies. If you'll finish with your war-paint we'll go down and trail Pretty Soon Jim. Time he was showing up."

"Tom Tobin's in town. Licked two toughs in front of Kelly's. He was asking if you'd got back."

Old Misery's eyes sparkled.

"The little pestiferous cuss! He's had a snort of liquor and thinks he's carrying a war-pipe. Said I bit him! At Illinois-town, where we got to fooling. Never bit him. 'Least, never went to. Had my eyes closed and my mouth open to give my sculp-yell and he had to flop a big ear atween my teeth. If it wa'n't for that *heyoka* Jim Pipps I'd catch up with him in liquor and then see how playful he is. He's awful good comp'ny when he's well primed and having war-dreams. Last time we met afore I come over the ridge to this side we fought all of two days. But it can't be." This very sorrowfully. "I've got work to do. My new medicine says something's wrong."

Mr. Peters, immaculate in appearance and benovolent of visage, accompanied his friend to the bar for a bracer and then started for Kelly's lodging-house. They had gone but half-way when they met Pretty Soon Jim, and at first glance Old Misery believed the derelict for once had broken his promise and was drunk.

Pretty Soon walked smartly enough, much better than usual; but there was an air of importance in his bearing, a light of

confidence in his weak eyes, that as a rule only rum could give him. On beholding Old Misery he grinned patronizingly. He was entirely at his ease when presented to the gambler.

"You tall, thin sucker! Where's your blanket roll? At Kelly's? You've been hooting!"

"Threw the blankets away," was the cheery response. "Tomorrow I shall buy clothing that does me justice. I'm dry enough to drink the crick dry, but I ain't had a swaller."

Old Misery stroked his beard in deep perplexity; and sniff the air as he would there was no aroma of "Double Rectified."

Then he hopelessly mumbled:

"Plumb *heyoka!* The new medicine was trying to tell me that. If he was drunk he could be sobered up. But there's no cure for a *heyoka* man."

Then to Mr. Peters, who was eying Pretty Soon Jim sharply—

"He's been took by some new fit afore we could load him on to a stage."

Pretty Soon Jim chuckled contentedly and quietly announced:

"I ain't so simple as you think, Mr. Misery. I had a chance to invest some gold and make millions. Offer had to be took on the spot. No time to change the stuff into dust as we'd planned. And the price was so dirt cheap! Good Lawd! I can hardly believe my good luck, Mr. Misery! If the feller hadn't been busted I'd said he was crazy. There he was mooning round his claim and cussing his luck and bleating about all sorts of awful things that would happend to him 'less he could get some money together quick. And inside a minute my experienced eye was seeing color *everywhere.* And the poor fool was missing it. Greenhorn, of course.

"I sweat blood, thinking he would sell to the man he was talking to. Lucky for me the man was a Cornish miner and never at home 'less deep down in the ground. I wasn't noticed any more'n if I was a hunk of dried mud. And I dug *that* out the side of the hole with my fingers."

He gleefully held up a six-dollar nugget. "And the place was lousy with as good or better!" he added. "When the other backed away I just waded in, and said: 'See here, mister. I'm a greenhorn and ain't got much money. But I'm keen to make a start; and if you say this claim's all right I might buy it. But it'll have to be dirt cheap.' "

"Go ahead!" choked Old Misery as Pretty Soon paused to breathe.

"Well, sir! I never see such a look of salvation and thanksgiving in a man's eyes as was in his when he turned on me. I don't look like ounce-diggings, of course. He just took me one side and with tears in his eyes asked me how much I could raise. Said he just had to have ready money. I wasn't fool enough to name every cent I had; so I said twenty-six hundred dollers. He seemed all broken up. Probably he knew he was a fool to sell, but he needed money most mortal. At last he said he'd trade for spot cash. I'd feel mighty mean this minute for making a profit out of him when he was so hard-pressed if I wasn't feeling so good. By and by I'll feel ashamed of myself. Maybe after I've got some of the exposed stuff out tomorrow I'll give him a little present of a thousand or two extry."

"Have you traded yet?" hoarsely demanded Old Misery.

"Signed, sealed and delivered," triumphantly cried Pretty Soon Jim. "I'm going to bust into it tomorrow. When's that agreement about no drinks to end? I feel like celebrating my luck."

"Peters," the mountain man said to the gambler, "you see how it is. All *heyoka* where most folks pack their brains. We won't have to bother you after all."

And he turned to leave the surprized, yet amused gambler. Mr. Peters, however, wished for further entertainment, and he followed the couple into an empty corner of the nearest saloon and joined them as the mountain man ordered drinks.

After the glasses were emptied Old Misery casually inquired—

"Who's the galoot that out-Injuned you, Pretty Soon?"

"I don't know just what you mean," stiffly replied Pretty Soon. "The gentleman I bought the claim of is called Phelps. He's located at Grass Valley."

"Whoop!" roared Old Misery, banging his fist on the table.

Glaring at Mr. Peters' weeping eyes, he hissed:

"Find Tom Tobin. Tell him I need his help. Tell him not to fetch me any warpipes till after he's pulled me out of a hole.

Bring him down to Kelly's. We'll be waiting."

As the three passed from the room the bartender told a newcomer:

"Mighty glad he finishes up somewheres else. He breaks so much stuff. Always pays something han'some, but he takes notions when he gits on a spree. If a man can't handle it right he oughter leave it alone. Have another on the house."

"Make it a small one. He's an old mountain man, isn't he? By the way, did you ever happen to hear of a girl called Ana Benites up here?"

The bartender shook his head and began—

"There's Annie Romaine, a French girl, and there's Anna—"

"Never mind. It doesn't matter. Good night."

And the stranger went out, leaving his drink untasted.

CHAPTER VII

A MINING TRANSACTION

TOM TOBIN, beguiled into a truce on a solemn promise of a long and soul-satisfying battle later, finally consented to participate in Old Misery's scheme. His rôle was not onerous and consisted of keeping Pretty Soon Jim away from Grass Valley until the mountain man advised to the contrary. Having signed the pact with a drink, Old Misery made a hurried trip to his camp in the hidden hollow.

Old Miguel came from his darkened doorway, bowed low and gave respectful greetings to *Señor Comandante.* Bill Williams lumbered forth for a chew of tobacco. The cubs, seemingly grown much during their master's brief absence, were ready with a rough welcome.

"Where's the young folks?" asked Old Misery.

"The *señorita* is near, somewhere. The young *señor* went with the two miners."

As her grandfather finished speaking the girl Maria came running from the pines and with a little cry seized Old Misery by the arm and swung back and forth.

"You young limb," growled Old Misery as he patted her high-piled coils of blue-black hair, "how you behaved yourself since I was gone?"

She threw out both hands in a little gesture of weariness and answered:

"There is no monte. There is one man, my grandfather. There are the animals. The squirrels fight each day with *El Carpentero.* It is hard to do wrong up here."

"Sounds like you was sorry and was wanting excitement. Young Yank been behaving?"

And he stared at her sharply.

She shrugged her shoulders and complained:

"He is all ice. Yankee-e snow fills his heart. He is a mos' polite *caballero.* Such cold people, those Yankee-es!"

Old Misery surveyed her flushed face and lively eyes thoughtfully and muttered:

"More sense in him then I'd believed. Knew 'nough to clear out and dodge temptation."

He dismissed her with a pat on the shapely head and walked to Gilbert's cabin.

To Bill Williams at his side he confessed:

"You're right, Bill; it won't do to leave 'em alone too much. He may be cold-blooded, but she's all fire, and even ice will melt. The younker's medicine is from Wakantanka to make him see the danger of living alone with that young streak of scarlet in this holler. But you know, Bill, it was a case of have to. I'll take him with me next time. Got to go down the ridge for a day or two. No; you'd best stay here and look after things, such as them cubs."

In the cabin he procured a hammer and a pick and hid them in the pines up the slope. It was dark when he returned and found the girl Maria had cooked his supper. After eating he went to the cabin and found the story book that told of the three amazing Frenchmen and took it back to the fire and threw on pine cones. As he worked his way laboriously through page after page his pipe went out and he did not know it. At last his watery eyes called a halt, and he restored the book to the cabin shelf and rolled in his blankets by Bill Williams' side.

"Bill," he sleepily confided, "I begin to like the big feller most. Young blood is all right, but luck helped him a heap. Big feller is sorter slow and thick-headed and ain't as *wakan* as the bookish galoot that gits writings from young women, but he's most like us humans. And stronger'n ——. But don't ever try to read it, Bill, less you find it set down in a Dakota Winter-count. ——est trail you ever see. Every t'other word is a brier or a bramble or a boulder.

It's climb up and fall down. Lost my bearings a thousand times and had to guess at lots of landmarks. But I got the drift. I'd like to tell Jim Bridger that yarn. He'd swear I was as bad a liar as folks said he was when he told about his first trip to the Yallerstone Valley."

IN THE morning he was up early and cooked his own breakfast. He called for Maria, and she came running, hungry for companionship.

He told her:

"I'm going up back a piece. Be gone all day. I'd take the younker along but he ain't come in. Wanter go along with me, or stay here?"

He was sure from the flashing light in her eyes that she would be for the adventure up the ridge.

She sighed and explained:

"I mus' stay. My grandfather is ver' bad in his mind. Ching-a-ling come two days ago and talked with him. Something Ching-a-ling said made him bad in his mind. Since then he spen' much time making his long knife ver' sharp."

"That yaller breed come here again when I'm not to home and I'll heave him so far he won't strike till he hits Marysville. Be a good gal and don't bedevil the younker."

"He is so ver' polite he would not know if one tried to bedeveel him," she demurely replied. "You will come back, when?"

"Tonight, if *Tunkan*, the Big Rock Medicine, helps me."

And, securing his rifle, he called to Bill Williams and entered the timber. He thrust the hammer through his belt, tied the pick on the bear's broad back and followed along the slope to the upper end of the hollow.

Soliloquizing on various problems that puzzled him, he would break off to endorse imaginary comments from the bear.

"Bill, never was a more *wakan* word spoke, and here's a chaw of terbacker for the same. You're dead right; human lives are just so many broken trails. They seem to start from nowhere and run wild. Seasons come roun' reg'lar 'nough. Some medicine fixes it so's seed is scattered and trees spring up, but we poor humans start from nowhere and travel blind. As you say, Bill, there must be some medicine that straightens out crooked trails and patches out broken ones till they git somewhere."

He worked his way some distance up the ridge until he could look down on the timber flanking the slopes of Grass Hollow. He halted in a thick growth of evergreens and ate a cold lunch and fed his companion. Then for fifteen minutes he studied the country below him.

Satisfied that he had that portion of the ridge to himself, he passed through the evergreens into a narrow defile overhung with bush growth and followed it up until it opened into a cuplike depression. Surrounding this to the height of a hundred feet rose the naked walls of rock. Through it trickled a tiny stream of icy water, fringed with grass. In ages past the rivulet must have been a rushing, brawling stream, strong enough to eat a channel through the hollow. Bill Williams curled up on the warm turf and fell asleep.

Old Misery advanced toward the upper end of the depression and fell to work with his pick. He detested the task although he was working in ancient alluvial soil and encountered no obstacles. He had brought no shovel with him and was forced to paw out the loose dirt with his hands. At last he exclaimed aloud in relief and straightened to glance about. Bill Williams still slept and he knew the bear would never slumber if a two-legged intruder was near.

Working more carefully the mountain man proceeded to uncover a pocket of small nuggets, round and worn just as they had been left by the vanished torrent ages before. He put them in a bag and estimated their value at about two hundred dollars.

He was impatient to call it a day and be returning down the ridge, but with a groan decided:

"Mustn't half-do it. Ain't so hard as cracking rock for t'other parcel of dust. Got to have 'nough for a mess."

And he resumed digging and kept at it until he found another pocket and enough of the nuggets to make the total value of his work more than five hundred dollars.

Concealing the pick at the lower end of the depression, he spoke to the bear and descended the ridge. As he entered the upper end of Grass Hollow he could hear the stentorian voice of Weymouth Mass commenting on the fortunes of gold possessed by the different ancients mentioned in sacred and profane history. His voice

was that of a schoolmaster, and the mountain man could picture the small audience scattered around him. Moving along back of the cabins, he halted by the third and spied on the group. Gilbert was sprawled near the fire, the light revealing a wobegone face. The girl Maria sat behind him, pretending to be an eager listener, but with her slumbrous gaze often resting on the melancholy youth. Sailor Ben, flat on his back, was asleep. Weymouth Mass, seated cross-legged, was gesticulating with one brawny arm while the other was rolling up the long beard.

"— and that's why no mining was carried on in the whole world for two hundred years after Mohammed appeared. That proves it's mighty hard on placer-men when some one tries to cram and jam a new religion down their throats. The first man to coin gold was Darius, one of the old kings. All the way round the Horn I primed myself on the history of money till some one stole my books. Money's a good thing, young man, if you use it right. It didn't spoil Isaac, or David, or Abraham, or Job, and they was all thrifty, well-to-do folks. But if we ain't careful what we do in getting it, or what we do after we get it, it's a bad thing. So it's spoiled lots of folks. I haven't any doubt that a foolish use of money is meant by the 'harlot' mentioned in Proverbs, where it says: 'She hath cast down many wounded. Yea, many strong men have been slain by it.'

"Now it would be mighty bad for Sailor Ben snoring there to have all the gold he'd like to have. He'd begin a watch below-decks and stay drunk till he died. Worst of all is the wicked rich. Doesn't God say of them, 'Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl, for the miseries that shall come upon you?' Just see how love of money worked mischief to Judas and Ananias, and Achan and Gehazi. So we don't want to be like them, young man."

Old Misery now advanced. Gilbert leaped to his feet and fairly embraced him.

After the greetings were over the mountain man seriously asked:

"Weymouth, have your medicine tell me this: Will a decent amount of gold hurt Pretty Soon Jim? I heard some of your powwow 'bout gold. And you know Jim."

Weymouth Mass pursed his lips and pondered deeply, and finally decided:

"Jim Pipps is a most unfortunate man without gold. I can't see as it would make him any worse off to have some. He'd never use it to hurt any one but himself; and some one's sure to cheat him out of it before he went far doing that. But he never will get hold of any gold, Misery. Some folks is foreordained to get it; some ain't."

Sailor Ben awoke with a snort and staggered to his feet to roll sleepily away to the third cabin.

Weymouth Mass rose to follow him, pausing only to inform Old Misery:

"His luck is beginning to crop out. Ain't mentioned rum only twice today. Led me to some dry diggings, and I panned out eight or ten colors. Not much in itself, but proves his luck is waking up. Mighty soon he'll nose out a pay streak, a fat one! Inside of a month he'll hound a vein right back to the mother-lode. But I have to watch him like a cat, or old Satan will be tempting him to quit the deck and steal down below."

As he strode after the sailor the girl Maria rose and smoothed out her skirt and with a quizzical glance at the sober-faced Vermonter suggested—

"Señor Gilbert is one who would not be spoil' by too much gold now he says he will not gamble again."

"No, never again!" cried Gilbert. "Old Misery, *when* do I begin to earn day wages and begin paying back?"

"You've been earning 'em right along," was the prompt reply. "Stop fretting. I do that for this whole outfit. 'Cording to what Weymouth said once it took the Almighty six whole days to make this world. You oughter be willing to work a season to make up for your fool mistakes. I want you to go down the ridge with me tomorrer. Maria, you make out a grub-list. I'll take the mule and leave Bill Williams at home. We'll start early."

"You go away; you come back; you go away," muttered the girl. "Only Maria and her grandfather, *Señor Squireel* and *El Carpentero* stay. Is it not? Do I never go down the ridge again and see people and hear them talk?"

Old Misery hesitated; then admitted:

"That's a good talk. You oughter see something besides this holler. My medicine tells me there ain't no danger in your taking a peek at the world below. I picked this up in Nevada City. Some sort

of a show at Grass Valley. No harm in your dropping down there to see it two nights from now. Keep clear of Nevada as folks they still speak about the woman monte dealer of the El Dorado. You can make the valley late in the afternoon and come part way up the ridge after the show busts up and camp."

As he talked he pulled from his shirt a soiled handbill announcing the appearance of the "Beautiful and Famous Lola Montez as *Julia* in 'The Hunchback.'"

Gilbert's steamer acquaintance Roger was cast as *Master Walter*.

"By George! I'd like to see her on the stage!" cried Gilbert. "She must be a very clever woman. You'll like her, Maria."

"I do not theenk I care to see it or her," the girl surprized the two men by announcing.

She ran to her cabin, and Old Misery tossed the handbill on the fire and muttered:

"I can tell what an Injun, or a b'ar, or a buf'ler is likely to do. But only *Taku Wakan* can say what a woman will do. Anyway, younker, you can see it, as Grass Valley is where I'm bound for. They've been asking 'bout a young Englisher in Nevada City, but the trail was blind. It'll be all right for you to go along with me. How long was Ching-a-ling here?"

Gilbert shook his head, explaining:

"I was out with Weymouth when he called. Didn't see him. One day I forgot about not being allowed behind old Miguel's cabin, and cut through the pines. Got an awful scare. He stood there in the shadows, big hat almost hiding his face, his cloak muffled around him; and he had a long knife in his hand. I don't think he saw me, but his ears told him where I was. He never said a word; neither did I. Maria laughed at me when I told her. She scares me at times. She's the kind that would never forgive any one she got mad at."

"Comanches 'n' gineral run of Injuns that way. Have no idee of forgiveness. Do 'em a bad turn and only blood will rub it out. Pines back of the cabin is Miguel's medicine-place. Keep clear of it. No; the gal wouldn't forgive any one she got mad at."

He carried the thought with him as he went to the ledge to say good night to Bill Williams; and he muttered:

"She'd never forgive anybody she loves if her love wa'n't give back to her. Ruther bring up a whole tribe of panthers then one woman."

AVOIDING Nevada City, they arrived at Grass Valley late in the afternoon.

Old Misery directed:

"You take this grub-order to the store man and tell him I'll pay when I call for it. I'll take the mule to the stable. You'll prob'ly find me at Burton's Eating-House."

Gilbert took the list, made out by Maria, and noticed it called for flour, tea, beans, saleratus powders, sugar, coffee, codfish, potatoes, dried apples and a can of molasses. After leaving it at the store he set out to find the theater before rejoining Old Misery. He would have been content with walking around the structure had he not glimpsed Phelps parting from a woman at the door. The woman was Lola Montez, and as Phelps walked away Gilbert advanced to make himself known.

There was diffidence in his bearing, and he felt much embarrassed as Miss Montez stared at him haughtily and without a sign of recognition. He was attempting to find an excuse for retiring when she happened to observe that Phelps had turned and was watching her. The transformation of her cold face was quite remarkable. Warmth and welcome beamed in her wonderful eyes, and the straight, hard mouth became soft and smiling as she stretched forth both hands. The cordiality of her greeting threatened to complete the young man's gawky confusion, but when she linked her arm in his and insisted he escort her to her boarding-place he was ready to proclaim her divine.

She did the talking, chatting gaily and rapidly and recalling their meeting on the boat as something precious bestowed on them by a kindly fate. He was not in love. Too well was he remembering one of the Walker girls back home. But he was hungry for companionship and a bit of womanly sympathy. He had invited sympathy from Maria, only to draw back, fearing an outburst of her volcanic nature would consume him. But Miss Montez was less primitive. She was older and safer.

When they turned in at her boarding-place she saw Phelps still in the road, watching them; and she cooed and exclaimed nothings while Gilbert struggled with monosyllables.

Just as he was conquering his bashfulness and was eager to talk Phelps turned away, and the actress suddenly became reserved and casually inquired—

"Mr. Phelps is a very successful man, they tell me."

"He's said to be worth a million. When I saw your name on the play-bill——"

"You must not come in. It would not be proper. Good-by."

"But I may see you again," he pleaded. "I'm coming to the theater tonight. At least I'll see you once more."

She made some nice calculations. Phelps would be there. He was one who enjoyed flying near the candle, but not too near. She suspected he assumed an air of proprietorship when talking with men.

With a rare smile she patted his arm and half-promised:

"Perhaps you shall see me to talk to me. You poor boy, you are lonely. I can see that. But my work tires me much. If I'm too nervous I shall refuse to speak to you. But if I'm not whimsy I shall let you walk home with me. Now trot along before folks begin to talk."

Marveling at having found such a friend —such a fine, handsome, attention-compelling woman—Gilbert almost swaggered as he slowly made for the eating-house. He wished the distance were greater, that he might have more time to enjoy his thoughts. Suddenly his way was barred, and, returning to earth, he beheld Phelps, the millionaire ledge man. When he last saw Phelps the man was good-natured and smiling although disappointed at not finding gold in Grass Hollow. This was a different Phelps, hard of visage and hostile of eye.

"Hold your hosses a minute, Ounce-Diggings. How do you come to know Miss Montez?" he curtly demanded.

The tone more than the question irritated the Vermonter.

"What business is that of yours?" he countered.

"Now, see here, my young greenhorn; none of that to Phelps of Grass Valley. 'Specially when you're in Grass Valley," warned the miner.

"You've no right to ask me how I happen to know any one," hotly returned Gilbert.

"I have every right," insisted Phelps. "Miss Montez has just the same as said she would be my wife."

Gilbert was nonplused. Added to his sense of shame was his sense of loss. Friendship with the charming actress was denied him. In a dull sort of a way he wondered why, if pledged to Phelps, she could have as good as promised him the pleasure of escorting her home. In Vermont engaged couples were very punctilious in their deportment. Both man and woman shut out the world on surrendering to love. Gilbert began to feel as if he had been caught trying to steal that which belonged to another. His demeanor changed from resentment to a desire to exonerate himself.

"We met at San Francisco when boarding the boat. Today she happened to remember me. Said I might do as juvenile in her company. One of her company, Mr. Roger, introduced me to her."

Phelps' stormy brow cleared.

"Of course. I might have known," he murmured. "Lola is bound to have many admirers and friends." Then with a flash of jealousy he added, "But from now on I'm keeping cases on 'em." Apologetically he hastily went on: "I didn't just mean that. But so few women out here, *good* women. And so many men. Don't mention anything I've said to her. Stage folks are finicky, I dare say. Different from other folks. And you probably won't see her to speak to her again anyway. I don't mean to say I've filed my claim on her yet, but she's as good as said it's to be a partnership for life."

"I'm not interested," stiffly rejoined Gilbert. "We only met while traveling to Sacramento. If she's good enough to notice me I can't run away."

"Of course not," slowly agreed Phelps, furtively eying him. "Any time you feel like earning mighty good wages I have a fat job for you. Not hard work, either. That's what I really stopped you to say. You're still with that queer old coot?"

"I'm with one of the best men on earth. He's called Old Misery."

"No harm meant. Fine old man," hurriedly agreed Phelps.

"And now I must go and find him. He came down to buy supplies," and Gilbert hurried on.

When he turned a corner he glanced back, and there was Phelps, looking after him.

"Darned fool's jealous," chuckled Gilbert; and somehow the thought was no longer displeasing.

Surely it was something of a compliment to have attracted the attention of such a wonderful woman as Lola Montez. Then he all but bumped into the girl Maria.

She was a day ahead of the time set by Old Misery. As he gaped at her in surprize a round spot of red glowed in each cheek and there was a peculiar fixed look in the half-closed eyes.

Before he could collect his wits and inquire how she happened to be in town a day early she was saying in a low voice—

"Señor Gilbert loses no time in running to fin' his lady-love."

"Nonsense, Maria. I scarcely know the lady."

"Lady? *Nombre de Dios!*"

And with hands on her hips she threw back her head and closed her eyes to the hot sunshine and laughed shrilly.

Suddenly sobering, she thrust her head forward and hissed:

"She is a play-acting woman. She is a living lie-e!"

The last was fairly hissed between the small white teeth.

Gilbert blinked and defended himself:

"Well, even so. What's that to me? What do I care?"

Instantly she was all smiles, and her beautiful eyes were very friendly.

"Señor Gilbert is a Yankee-e. He looks on life too sober. He theenks every one means what is said. The play-acting *señorita* is to marry a ver' rich man, Señor Don Phelps. So! She marries a ver' rich mine, ver' much gold. She is not for a young *Americano*—who owes much gold."

"You don't need to tell me that," he bitterly cried. "It was your cursed monte game that took the gold. No, no, Maria. That was cowardly for me to say. No blaming the woman. I was a fool. That's all. But while I'm mighty green there's no danger of my falling in love out here."

"Oh-o! So?" she whispered, drawing back from him. "Señor Gilbert is so ver' hard to please."

And although the red lips remained piquantly pouting the eyes were hostile.

"Don't make me out worse than I am," he pleaded. "How can I look any honest woman in the face after what I've done? It's impossible. I'm a ruined man."

She smiled delightedly and softly reminded him:

"You can look a woman in the face if she is not too hones'. Is it not? *Sí.* If a woman takes gold she did not own to her ugly grandfather she is not too hones'. What does love care about being hones'?"

His face burned hotly. He had never dreamed that a woman could take the initiative in love-making. It was not maidenly. It was abnormal. A back-home girl would die before she would advance a step prior to her lover's avowal. He was positive of that much.

"I must go and find Old Misery," he told her. "I am keeping him waiting."

"You are a ver' bold *caballero*," she observed with a little sneer, and yet with a touch of pathos in her voice. Then very sprightly, "But luck is in your face, *señor*, if you be lucky in love. If not, there is danger. *Adios.*"

And she was flitting on through the hot sunlight and causing men to turn their heads and look after her and her red slippers and red stockings.

With his thoughts somewhat mixed and his state of mind disagreeable Gilbert entered Burton's and stared about for several moments before realizing his patron was not there. The room was practically deserted.

A large fat man behind a long counter lazily inquired—

"Lost your hat, sonny?"

Gilbert decided the inquiry was intended to be ironical, for he was wearing his hat. However, he was in no mood to resent trifles.

"I'm looking for Old Misery from up the ridge," he explained.

The fat man came to his feet and earnestly advised him:

"Then go through the back door and run as fast as you can, or you'll find him. He's two doors below, drunker'n a blind owl and hunting for something tough to chaw on. Thank God he took a notion to quit this place. But you run toward Nevada City and you'll lose him."

Saddened that his friend should be a victim of weakness, but feeling no fear of him, Gilbert returned to the street. Three men violently erupted through a doorway. One landed on his hands and knees and scrambled around the corner of the building without bothering to get on his feet. From inside the saloon rang out the well-known war-whoop of the mountain man on a spree. Gilbert advanced to the door and waited

a moment to accustom his eyes to the shadowy interior.

OLD MISERY stood at the bar alone, his long knife sticking in a slab before him. He held a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. Several men seated at tables along the wall were pretending to be engrossed in card games. The bartender, rather wild of eye, was torn between a desire to quit his post and wisdom's prompting to pacify his unwelcome customer by catering to his whims. The mirrors behind the bar had cost much money.

Old Misery saw Gilbert as the latter started for the bar, and roughly demanded—

"What you want in this den of sin?"

"You," said Gilbert without being conscious of having spoken. Then he found himself at the old man's side, and removing the bottle and glass from his hands and plucking the knife from the bar.

He heard himself saying:

"He's had enough. What's the score?"

"Score? Good ——! Nothing! And welcome to go," exclaimed the bartender.

"Come!" commanded Gilbert, clapping a hand on Misery's shoulder. "A little sleep will fix you all right."

The mountain man made curious sounds in his throat, flung a small nugget on the bar and meekly permitted the young man to escort him from the place. As they took to the street the doorway behind them was filled with surprized faces.

"Lodging - house right above eating-house," Misery informed in a muffled voice.

"Good. But you know you oughtn't to do this way. Some day, when you've had too much, some one will harm you."

The mountain man was seized with a coughing spell. After Gilbert had pounded him on the back he managed to mumble:

"You're *wakantanka.* Your medicine's stronger then the neck-hide of a buf'ler. Show me a bunk. I'll be all right in the morning. Mind's sorter filled with fog. Prob'ly water in some of that whisky—You come down here to go—to see——"

"I was going to the theater. I will stay with you."

"No, siree! I'll sleep like a baby till morning. I'm saying it on a pipe."

Postponing his decision until after he had eaten Gilbert saw his charge tucked into a bunk and the rifle and medicine-bag checked at the small desk. Then he hurried back to the eating-house for his supper. The trip was a ghastly disappointment. He was homesick for Grass Hollow; for any place except this.

He was not conscious of the fat proprietor's hovering attentions and the double portions heaped upon his plate. He was oblivious to the staring and whispering his presence seemed to excite among the other diners.

Finally he was aroused by the proprietor creasing his fat stomach against the edge of the counter as he leaned forward to whisper:

"Sonny, how'n —— did you do it?"

Gilbert stared at him blankly.

The man elucidated, "Taming that old he-bear. Gitting that old hellion to bed. Bartender below told me how you snaked him away. Boys spied a bit at the bunk house. But how'n —— did you do it?"

"I thought he had had enough, and told him so. I don't see why it should interest anybody," Gilbert answered as he endeavored to mend his broken train of melancholy thoughts.

"Not interest anybody!" ponderously cried the proprietor, tossing up his hands helplessly. "Good ——! A man has a heaven-given gift and let's on as how it don't interest nobody! Fellers, that beats the Dutch!" Then to Gilbert he eagerly offered. "Your gift interests me to the tune of eight dollars a day. All you do is just loaf in here and hint to folks when it's time they was leaving. Eight dollars a day, your meals and bunk and washing. When any one can make that old hellion back down——"

"See here!" broke in Gilbert, beginning to realize such characterizations were unwholesome: "none of that. He's my friend."

"I'm born dumb, Sonny. You can't pick no argument with *me.* Your friend is a ark-angle, and nothing less. Have some more hash? Steak? Eggs? Coffee? Anything. No charge. I owe it to you. I figger you saved me about eight hundred dollars' worth of mirrors. That old—gentleman—let on he was going to drop in here later and learn me how to run a eating-house. Wish you'd come here and live."

Gilbert paid his score without understanding much of the talk. Nor did he try to understand it. The fat man impressed him as being drunk or crazy. That

a man, starting to leave ahead of him, should skip to one side with grotesque haste and give him the right of way, impressed him fleetingly as being a bit of crude horse-play.

To kill the time he bought a New York *Herald*, the favorite with northern men, and then balanced his purchase with a New Orleans *Delta*, the first choice of southerners. Thus armed he returned to the bunk-house and read until it was time for the theater to open. Then he tried to decide whether it would be wise to leave his patron. The proprietor, as if possessing a mind-reading gift, assured him the old man had slept all the time during his absence and would wake up sober.

"Anyway, I won't let him get out if he wants to," he added.

"Then I'll go. I won't be gone long," decided Gilbert.

Before leaving he went to the bunk and placed his hand on the sleeper's forehead in search of fever symptoms. The forehead was cool and moist.

He took his newspapers to the theater.

When attempting to pay his way in he found himself facing Roger, who grinned broadly and informed:

"Money's no good. Queenie says you're her guest to-night."

This was an unexpected courtesy and he felt a flash of pleasure. Then he saw Phelps' gloomy face just inside the door and knew he had overheard Roger's words and was resenting Miss Montez's display of favoritism.

As Gilbert passed through the doorway the mine-owner curtly remarked:

"You git in free. I have to pay."

Making no reply Gilbert secured a seat under a lamp and resumed reading. Scarcely a dozen were present when he opened his papers, and he managed to lose himself until the house filled and the play began. From the moment when the curtain rose he was in a new world. He was greatly fascinated and charmed by the girlish innocence of Julia before she was brought to London to marry Sir Thomas Clifford. It seemed impossible that Julia's guardian, the hunchback, could be the man who, in another world, had passed him in free. But his heart was torn with fear when Julia became a votary of pleasure, threw over Clifford and pledged herself to that wretch, the earl of Rochdale.

As it did seem the miserable wedding must take place he wanted to cry out for her to withdraw. Then he went limp and happy as the girl came to her senses and implored the hunchback to prevent the marriage. He cheered wildly when it transpired that Walter was the girl's father, the real earl of Rochdale, and all the time had wanted his daughter to marry Clifford.

He was only half-freed from illusion as he edged his way to the door and the real world. Lola Montez was the most wonderful woman in the world. He knew it. She was not the sweetest and most desirable, however, as the girl back home must always be that. It was incredible that the famous Montez had paused to bestow smiles on him. She would never do it again; and he stumbled into the street.

Some one jostled against him and said something, but the young man's mind was back in London and his eyes were reviewing the rivalry between the dissipated imposter and honest Clifford.

"Wake up! Asleep or dead?" impatiently repeated Roger, tugging his arm. "Lola says you're to walk home with her. Here she comes."

Before he could adjust his mind to Roger returned to life, minus his deformed back, Miss Montez was sweeping down on him from the doorway, ignoring the admiring glances of her worshipers, and beaming upon him in a most amiable manner. Like one in a dream he found himself squiring her to her boarding-house. She may have seen Phelps following some distance behind, undoubtedly did see him, but Gilbert did not. Nor did he see the girl Maria standing in a doorway, watching with burning eyes, as they passed close to her.

He never recalled that they talked much. He was bewildered by her condescension in accepting him as an escort. But there was no sentiment in it. It was much as if he had been requested by one of the Fine Arts—say, Music, Painting, or Sculpture—to beau it home. For simple heart-interest it was too lofty and remote to compare with the ecstatic human joy of walking beside a maid from singing-school on a crisp Vermont winter night. It was distinction. One might feel that way while being knighted, and yet return to kiss a serving-maid.

He said "good-night" as one who completes a tremendous bit of ritual. She said something that sounded like "stupid" and

closed the door ungently. Then Gilbert recalled Old Misery and became objective. He almost ran to the bunkhouse and was greatly relieved to find his charge still asleep.

"Ain't moved a muscle since you went," sleepily informed the man at the desk.

Gilbert took one of his newspapers and wiped fresh mud off the moccasins, but never paused to wonder how it got there. He turned in and endeavored to analyze his feelings and emotions. Out of the welter of impressions emerged the stark reminder that Joseph Gilbert had dropped from sight and that the east and singing-schools were sealed against him.

THEN he opened his eyes and found it was morning and that Old Misery was genially urging him to stir his lazy bones and make ready for breakfast.

Back of the mountain man stood two strangers. One was tall, and cadaverous of face. His long features were accented by a thin, wiry beard. He looked to be rather simple. Indubitably he had had a hard time in life as his hand trembled as it caressed the whiskers and his eyes were weak and watery. The other man was short and stocky of build, and of a brick-red complexion that suggested he had been baked by the sun. His eyes, while inflamed, were belligerent, and stared stonily at the young man. Like Old Misery he wore buckskin and was carrying a rifle.

"May do, but his fur's scurcely prime yet," he told Old Misery.

From his steady gaze Gilbert suspected he was the object of the remark. Yet this seemed very illogical. Only animals had fur.

"Just a mild snifter to settle my nerves," the tall man pleaded.

"Not even a smell till you've ate your breakfast and worked four hours on that new claim of yours," Old Misery firmly replied. "This is the young feller I spoke of. Younker, this tall sucker is Pretty Soon Jim. Just made his fortune by buying a rich claim. This old he-devil is Tom Tobin, who let's on he can lick any man in the mountains but me."

"But you?" exploded Tobin. "Remember your promise, you old landmark. And next time you bite me——"

"You're mistook, Tom. And I've said it a hundred times," solemnly interrupted Misery. "I was trying to sound——"

"Yah! And your teeth 'slipped,'" growled Tobin. "But this ain't no place to settle it. Let's git busy and have this mining over with."

"That's medicine talk. The claim is s'posed to be very rich——"

"Richer than spatter!" cried Pretty Soon Jim.

"And I'm sorry I can't go along and see the big chunks of pure gold come out the dirt. But Tom and the younker will go with you, Jim. They won't let any one jump your claim. And if any one tries to buy it Tom'll see you git a good figger and——"

"Sell? Sell that claim?" shrilly cried Pretty Soon. "I'd as soon think of selling my granddad!"

Old Misery grabbed him by the front of his shirt and growled:

"Now you hark to me. If any one makes a offer that Tom says is good you snap it up, or you'll go back home. By this time some of Murieta's band has heard about gold-slugs being fetched into this valley. If he goes to cutting up, Tom, stick your knife right through his in'ards."

"I'll cut him up *wakan* way, just like a Dakota cuts up a buf'ler," was the gruff assurance.

Confused by this exchange of advice and threats and not having the slightest idea as to what it related Gilbert hurriedly washed and dressed. Old Misery had all the appearance of being sober except that his talk was irrational. But, also, was the talk of the stranger's puzzling. The three of them appeared to be in a hurry and, accompanied by Gilbert, were soon in the eating-house and ordering their breakfast.

Gilbert was greatly annoyed by the proprietor's secret signals to him. He interpreted them to be a plea for him to hold his friends in check. Old Misery developed an inclination to chuckle and laugh, which might be taken as symptoms of imbecility. Tobin for most of the time remained dour and silent, but there were moments when a wide grin split his homely face and his inflamed eyes lighted with a warmth of humanism.

As they were filing out to the street Old Misery drew Gilbert one side and hurriedly explained:

"Tom and Pretty Soon are going to tap a claim and see how it pans out. Think you'd better go along with them, but you're your

own boss. You can tell me all about it afterwards. I'll get the mule and be packing the grub. Find me at the store."

Gilbert scented a strategem to get him out of the way until the interrupted spree could be resumed.

His eyes put the question, and with a foolish grin the mountain man promised:

"Just simon-pure business from now on, younker. Won't tech a drop. Mizzle along and don't fret. I'll yet do credit to your bringing up."

"After this funny business is over there's that little argument 'tween you and me, Misery," mumbled Tobin.

"All right, all right, old hoss-fly. I'll comb you so good next time we git to fooling that folks will travel all the way from the Snake River to look down on what's left of you. That's a promise."

And he hurried away, laughing as if vastly amused.

Tobin stared at Gilbert for a few moments, then smiled slightly, and said:

"You must be all right if Old Misery takes to you. Great old cuss. Couldn't ask for a stouter friend— But,—— him! Say what he will, he bit my ear a-purpose at Illinoistown."

"He never could do such a thing!" indignantly denied Gilbert.

Tobin swallowed, breathed hard, then meekly surrendered:

"I pass. You win. Hi, you Pipps. Come away from that saloon winder. We'll mosey down to that claim of yours and watch you earn a honest four-bits. Signs look like lots of folks is keen to see you work."

Armed with pick and shovel Pretty Soon Jim led the way for a mile from the business center. Trailing along some distance behind the three men came a score or more of citizens. Phelps brought up the rear with a group of personal friends. Until he glimpsed Gilbert he had laughed much. The young man's presence dulled his sense of the humorous, however.

Arriving at the claim Tobin seated himself and lighted his pipe and remarked to Gilbert— "From what I've heard this is pretty rich."

A snicker ran through the line of men grouped along the opposite side of the claim. Pretty Soon Jim jumped into the hole, some six feet in diameter, and commenced extracting several tiny nuggets in the sides.

He called out to Tobin—

"Thicker than spatter!"

The onlookers cast off all restraint and shouted in glee. Pretty Soon paused and stared at them; whereat they laughed more uproariously. One man pounded Phelps on the back and declared he could not be beat for "funning." The Georgia man, vastly amused, told a neighbor that it was the clumsiest bit of "salting" he had ever seen. The free gold was soon collected and Pretty Soon began shoveling from the sides.

After some minutes of fast work he stopped and commented—

"Appears to be farther apart then I'd supposed."

This threw the spectators into a paroxysm of laughter. Phelps grinned modestly under a shower of compliments.

Tobin softly suggested to the perplexed Pipps—

"Take a whack at the bottom."

Pretty Soon seized the pick, struck a dozen mighty blows, and then began excavating. The onlookers were too weak by this time to make more than gurgling sounds. After half a dozen shovelfuls Pretty Soon gave a hoarse cry and dropped on his knees. The miners summoned more laughter; but Phelps, who knew he had not salted the bottom of the hole, craned his neck and peered down to detect what had aroused Pretty Soon's emotion.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Look here, fellers!" wailed Pretty Soon.

"The man's stuck the pick in his foot!" cried Gilbert.

"He was using the shovel," corrected Tobin, rising.

"Look here! Bed of an old river! Reg'lar nest of them! Just like tiny little eggs! Rich as spatter? I wouldn't sell it for a million!"

"Hold on there! What are you yapping like that for?" cried Phelps, running to the edge of the hole and making to drop in.

But Tobin pushed him back, growling,

"This is private property. Welcome to watch the man's good luck but don't use that tone of voice while on his land, or jump down in there to bother him. Ain't that right, Pipps? You don't want this cheap-looking cuss bothering you, do you?"

Still on his knees and pawing out the

pocket of smooth, worn river nuggets, Pipps cast a glance up at the two men and cried:

"Good Lord! Don't lay a hand on *him!* Why, he's Mr. Phelps, that sold me this claim. If it wa'n't for him I'd only have twenty-seven hundred dollers to my name! He's more'n welcome to watch. It's just as you vowed, Mr. Phelps. It's lousy with nuggets. No fine stuff. All in pockets worn deep into the old river bed. Jump down and take a peek."

With a snarl Phelps leaped into the hole and roughly pushed Pretty Soon back and examined the pocket carefully. He could scarcely credit his senses. What he had believed to be a worthless claim was resting within two feet of an ancient river bed.

"Try it again," he huskily urged.

Pretty Soon swung the pick and then fell to shoveling. He soon uncovered a second pocket. It was larger than the first. By this time the hole was fringed several deep by excited miners, and there was no laughter now in the strained, gold-hungry faces.

"Good ——!" yelled the Georgia man. "It makes to the north. It runs under old Hicks' abandoned claim!"

And he turned and ran as if only speed could save his life. The adjoining claim had been used as a dump for two years.

Others took the hint and endeavored to outrace the Georgia miner.

While Phelps wiped the sweat from his forehead and stared stupidly at the nuggets Tobin refilled his pipe and lazily remarked:

"Always the way. Man digs a hole a few feet deep, then quits, when ten minutes more work would fetch him a fortune. Go ahead, Jim. Next pocket oughter pan out a bushel."

"Stop! Wait a minute!" gasped Phelps, raising a trembling hand. "I sold this claim. I'll buy it back. I sold it for a song. I'll buy it back for a good price."

"More he uncovers the more you'll pay," chuckled Tobin.

"No! I don't have to have it. I've got enough without it. But it was mine. I was a fool to sell. I'll buy it back if you'll sell now, Jim."

Pretty Soon did not wish to sell. For the first time in his life, aside from finding the one small pocket below Coloma, he was realizing his dreams of digging up wealth. Gold in pockets! Each pocket richer than the preceding one! He visualized the ancient river bed leading him up into the foothills, up to the ridge of the mother-lode, where even the most avaricious must weary of digging up huge chunks of pure gold. He stood staring at Phelps.

Phelps had trouble with his breathing.

"I'll buy it back if you'll sell now," he managed to repeat.

Tobin reached down and slapped a hand on Phelps' shoulder and said: "No place to make a bargain. Git out. Talk to me. What I says, Pipps will do. I'm his friend. He's easy to best in a bargain. If he wants to sell I'm going to see he gits a decent price. And a square chance to clean up this claim if he wants to hold it. You talk with me."

Phelps hesitated, then climbed from the hole and went aside while Tobin stayed to talk rapidly and earnestly to Pipps. While waiting Phelps twisted his hands and clawed at his throat, and all but exploded because of the curses he inwardly was hurling at his own stupidity.

"Jim, you must sell and go home, or you'll never have a cent. I'm repeating Old Misery's talk. I'm talking for him. We agreed on that figger and added to it what you paid for the claim. Now you go ahead and name your price. Don't hear anything he says till he says 'yes.' "

Pretty Soon, sad of countenance for a millionaire in the making, beckoned for Phelps to join him, and wearily informed:

"My friend says I ain't fit to stay out here. He says this is my chance to go home, and that a little is as good for me as a million. Maybe he's right."

"God has blessed you in giving you such a friend," fervently cried Phelps. "Right? Never was a righter word said. Why, Jim, some one would jump this claim, or git you drunk and cheat you inside of a week."

"If I had my say I wouldn't sell for a million," bitterly assured Pretty Soon.

"Ha! ha! You're a wild boy. But I know how you feel. As it is, Jim, what'll you take?"

"Well, not to put too fine a point on it I want my twenty-six hundred back——"

"Done! It's no more'n right you should have it back."

"And thirty thousand dollers to boot."

"Thir-thirty thousand!" spluttered Phelps. "Why, you only paid twenty-six hundred."

"But you own a rich ledge that didn't cost

you anything. You just located. Anyway, that's the figure, unless some of the men coming on the run, are willing to pay more."

"But it's ridiculous! Ask your friend there——".

"That's his figure for sixty seconds," snapped out Tobin. "I want this man on a stage bound for the Bay; then on a boat sailing for home. With thirty-two thousand in the 'spress office to meet him back home, and six hundred to travel on, he can go back like a king. That's his figger and he won't lower it. And the minute is most up."

The miners were quite close, some carrying picks and shovels, and all betraying the madness of a gold stampede.

"I'll dig a little more," eagerly suggested Pretty Soon, jumping down into the hole. "Maybe I'll uncover such a big nest——"

"Drop that pick and climb out! You've sold it to me for thirty-two thousand, six hundred dollers. These two men are witnesses to the bargain. We'll go back to town and I'll deposit the price to your credit in the express office," shouted Phelps.

"Well, Jim, I 'low a bargain's a bargain. He took you up at the price named. Mebbe our young friend here," and he glanced at Gilbert, "is thinking it's pretty works we didn't hold out for fifty thousand——"

"None of that! I bought at his figure. Here, Wilks, Thomas, Gardner! Stand guard over this claim. I've bought it. Now we'll fix up the other end of the business."

CHAPTER VIII

THE WHISPERERS

WITH only a few hundred dollars on his person Pretty Soon Jim took the stage and commenced the epochal journey home. Gilbert was depressed. Luck had favored the vagabond. His shiftless life had led him to pockets of gold. Then his sense of fair-play intervened and arraigned him before the brain cell which enthrones the Judge men call Conscience.

According to Old Misery the wandering prospector possessed the great virtue of being honest. He would not break his word once he gave it. Joseph Gilbert, well-reared and thoroughly trusted, had used money not his own. The unhappy comparison made him so morose he told the mountain man he would take the mule and go on ahead, avoiding Nevada City.

Old Misery read something of the Vermonter's thoughts and kindly said:

"It was my new medicine that pulled Pretty Soon out of his mess and sent him back the biggest Injun in the home-tribe. Lawd! If it wa'n't for smothering in them places I'd like to go along just to hear the stories he'll tell. I mean to say younker, my red medicine is aching to be to work. I can feel it tugging to bust loose, just like a young buf'ler pony in the Fall hunt. Go along to camp and keep in mind how my medicine is sorter sizing you up and thinking how you can be helped."

"Good-by. Try not to get drunk," muttered Gilbert.

Old Misery was thoughtful for a bit after his young friend had left him. Then Tom Tobin came up, an anticipatory gleam in his bold eyes, and expressed himself by spitting on his hands and unfastening his buckskin shirt and starting to remove it.

"You little *heyoka* runt!" exclaimed Old Misery admiringly. "You still have war-dreams. But our little rinktum can wait a bit longer. I ain't in fettle just now. That younker got under my old hide. Lawd! but it was funny seeing him taking care of me, thinking I was drunk! That is; it was funny at first, then it was funny with tears in it. I don't know as it was so —— funny after all. No more then when a squaw goes up in the hills to yowl for her dead buck."

"You're gitting old and soft," growled Tobin. "You're backing down. You don't seem to sabe that that Illinoistown rumpus busted up before it was finished."

"It can wait a bit and be all the better for waiting, Tommy," soothed Misery. "As I feel now a baker could slap my face and I'd take it without a word. No fun fighting with a man who feels like that. You see, the younker took care of me. *Me.* Watched over me and put me to bed. Why —— your iron hide I ain't been took care of since you dragged me, shot full of holes, from the 'Pache Pass fight and gambled my rifle and blankets away while I was gitting well!

"That touched me, Tommy, when you packed me from the pass and lost my property, but not so much as what the younker done. Of course you had to do it; but I didn't expect nothing from him. You'll have the fight I owe you, and it'll be a humdinger. If you make it a fine p'int we'll

have to have it now, I s'pose, but I'm telling you I can't git much fun out of it today."

"Wait till you feel more like then," grumbled Tobin. "I don't fight with no sick men, or cripples. Just now you 'pear to be the one that's *heyoka*. Let's have a snort of whisky and then plug along to Nevada City."

"I was sort of hankering to lay 'round till Phelps gits tired of digging," mused Misery. "I went to some bother to fix things. Must be 'bout time for him to be knocking off work. You see, I wanted every one to think I was drunk and asleep afore I dared to sneak out in the dark and salt that place as she oughter be salted. I'd given the price of a prime b'ar to have seen and heard him when Pretty Soon uncovered my nuggets. But I knew if I was there I'd git to laffing and he'd s'pect something. In here."

They entered the saloon where Gilbert had rescued the mountain man the night before. To the bartenders' surprize and great relief they were subdued and quiet in ordering drinks. They took much time in consuming their liquor—waiting. At last a man bawled out something down the street. It was picked up by another man and passed on. It was tossed from mouth to mouth and reached the saloon. The bartender ran to the window. He ran to the door as men emerged from houses and stores. Some were gesticulating and talking violently. Others were doubled over with laughter.

"She's busted," proudly whispered Old Misery.

"I think we're going to have some fun," eagerly decided Tobin, turning his back to the bar.

A group of men halted before the saloon, jostled each other about and crowded inside. In the lead, wild of gaze, was Phelps. He was carrying a pick. Immediately behind him came his friends and henchmen. The rest of the little mob was made up of those who rejoiced on hearing some one had been tricked. They had laughed immoderately when Pretty Soon Jim bought the claim. Phelps strode up to the bar and glared wrathfully at the mountain men. Old Misery whistled like an elk and pretended to be afraid.

Phelps sternly accused him:

"You planned that game. You supplied the nuggets. You went out of your way to make an enemy of me."

Old Misery gazed at him sadly and told Tobin—

"Worked too long in the heat."

"His good fortune has made him plumb *heyoka*," gravely agreed Tobin. "Some folks git upset if they have a streak of luck. How's diggings, partner?"

"How's diggings?" passionately repeated Phelps. "You know —— well there ain't any. You'n your friend fixed it so's I'd be robbed of more'n thirty thousand dollers. You knew all along that claim had been salted. Can't make me believe you don't know who salted it."

Old Misery rested an elbow on the bar, yawned, and told Tobin:

"I said it, Tom, when Pretty Soon Jim came bleating to us about buying a rich claim for twenty-six hundred dollers. Don't you remember how I says to Jim, 'Son, they've shifted the cut on you. The low-grade skunk who took your poor little twenty-six hundred dollers is worth a million and knows pay dirt backwards. But he likes money so much he'd cheat his poor, old, blind grandpap to git the price of a chaw of terbaccer.' You remember me saying that, right to Jim's long face. But 'tween you'n me, Tom, I never s'posed such a *wakan* gold-hunter as that million-doller man's said to be, would ever turn 'round and buy a worthless claim back."

"Never believed it myself, Misery. It shows he's just plumb *heyoka*. Back in the States they have places where they keep *heyoka* folks, I've heard. But we must humor him, Misery."

Turning to Phelps he gently inquired—

"How's it feel, partner, to find yourself sitting on a hornet you caught for some one else?"

"That's right, Tommy. Gentle him," eagerly urged Old Misery.

A roar of laughter smothered Phelps' reply. He stood wrathful and impotent and waited for the noisy merriment to subside. He began to regret parading his loss. As his gaze swept over the sober faces of his friends, and the mocking countenances of those who were amused, he missed Gilbert. The young easterner had been at the claim when Pretty Soon Jim reluctantly sold it.

Steadying his voice he told Old Misery in an undertone, "You win this time, but I'll make it even Stephen."

"Making war-talk, you dog?" growled Tobin hopefully.

Old Misery jammed his friend to one side and thrust his face close to the miner's and demanded:

"When? No time like now."

Phelps grinned wolfishly but backed away, and reminded:

"I'm worth a cold million dollars. I'm too precious to myself to be hurt in a fight with a man that owns nothing but a tame bear. I won't fight less it's with a man worth as much as I be. But inside of a few days you'll admit it's even Stephen. Chew it over."

"Meaning some of your friends will comb my friend," murmured Tobin ominously.

"No, sir! He can live a million years before any friend of mine hurts a hair of his head. But after I've evened it all up he may feel sicker'n if I'd had him pay with his hide."

Before either of the mountain men could digest this vague threat and make a suitable response he had slipped back into the crowd and, followed by his friends, was out in the street.

"Didn't dare raise me, nor even call, as Peters would say," chuckled Old Misery. "Just tried a cheap bluff and skedaddled."

To the men who remained he announced:

"Mighty queer, but I got a few nuggets, just like what your million-dollar man bought from Jim Pipps. They're not much good to me and if you're hankering for liquor here's the price."

And he tossed a couple of nuggets on the bar and the crowd surged forward. But instead of reaching for bottles and glasses the men bunched and jostled in front of the bartender, staring at the tiny pieces of gold. Each man was instantly planning how he could be ahead of all others in profiting someway by the incident. Each had the same thought, secretly to trail the old mountain man and stake a claim.

But as wary, suspicious eyes met those of a neighbor each realized no one man could count the coup. Compacts were made with a sidelong glance: an alliance to secure the mountain man's secret without a word being spoken. Inside of fifteen seconds all personal ambitions were merged in mass intelligence and the unvoiced partnership was perfected.

Then the groups dissolved and became a long line of thirsty throats, and much badinage was exchanged. And there was general rejoicing that Phelps had been caught in his own trap. Many compliments were heaped upon Old Misery, and more than one man earnestly vowed he would "stand by him" if Phelps, through his retainers, attempted violence.

"If it comes to a fuss don't any of you clutter up the ground by trying to help," warned Old Misery. "When I paint for battle I go it alone and hit everything in sight."

"Cleverest bit of salting I ever see!" cried an Ohio veteran, and he struck his ragged hat on the bar to accent his statement. "Phelps would have smelled a rat if it had been ledge gold. He knows ledges."

"And I'll bet this minute he's swallering his pride and is scheming to find out where the nuggets come from," spoke up another. "If you need help in throwing him off the track just say the word, partner."

"I will, and thank you all kindly," gravely assured Old Misery. "Mebbe I could tell him just where I got the gold and mebbe I'd have to think a lot first. I've took gold from so many different towns and miners for meat and tamed animals. Prob'ly would tell him wrong even if I wanted to tell him right."

Wise glances were exchanged. The line of drinkers believed the mountain man was throwing dust.

One man estimated:

"Must been nigh to six hundred dollers used for salt. Wouldn't 'a believed a tamed wild animal would fetch such a good price."

Old Misery snorted in disgust.

"What you don't know 'bout wild animal prices would make the cañon of the Colorado look higher'n the Rocky Mountains," he jeered. "Got more'n that for the cub I just sold at Nevada City. Fetched doller-a-pound as a pet. For meat to eat he'd been worth only a hundred. When I raise a b'ar like Bill Williams I've raised a good fifteen hundred dollers. Been offered that for him, and I could send him East and git two thousand. I'm a animal-prospector.

"When I bag some panther kittens they're just so many ounces of dust. Turned an old bald eagle loose that I'd been offered fifty dollers for in Nevada City. Woth a hundred if sold at the Bay."

This silenced all efforts to dig into his secret but left the men sceptical. Tom Tobin, who had been gloomily considering

his glass, edged up the bar a few feet. Old Misery instantly took the hint and shifted his position to keep close to him.

Tobin whispered—"they'll trail you."

"I'll lose 'em at Nevada City tonight," murmured Old Misery. "All they can do is to pile into Grass Holler, but they won't find nothing. Five of their best men have prospected the Holler up'n down 'n across. It's a medicine-place. No one can find it. Need any nuggets?"

"Not if I have to dig 'em."

"It ain't so awful hard if your will is strong. I'll sneak you there and turn you loose."

"And dig 'em out?"

"Not by a —— sight! Think I'm a root-'n-grass Injun? Let's move on."

They were followed by the men as they left the saloon. On the street the group scattered but found business was taking each individual wherever the mountain men went. As the latter showed no disposition to leave the Valley the espionage became organized, and instead of twenty men chasing them about only two or three held the trail. These were frequently relieved. Old Misery was much amused at the miners' tactics. Tobin took it more seriously.

Late in the afternoon he warned:

"Phelps has organized an outfit. He's chipped in. Feller with the red hair is one of his men. It'll be a race 'tween his men and t'others."

This suspicion was strengthened by a fight between the red-headed man and one of those who had rejoiced over Phelps' defeat. The former lost the battle and disappeared, but was immediately replaced by two of Phelps' followers. These wore weapons aggressively and put themselves in the path of the rival spies as if seeking combat. Misery and Tobin were hopeful that the two factions would soon clash and fill the street with bloody disputes; but again the power of gold was exemplified. The two Phelps adherents were observed hob-nobbing with the Independents in a most amicable manner; and when the defeated red-headed man joined the group he was greeted as a brother.

In great disgust Tobin declared:

"Phelps isn't all *heyoka*. He's holding the ribbons and driving those fools in a double-hitch. And they're not keen enough to know that if they could light on your medicine-place his would be the only crowd to git the plunder. Might's well be traveling to Nevada City."

As they set out for the four-mile walk three of the saloon group and two Phelps men suddenly discovered they had business in that direction. Before they were quit of the Valley they noticed a new man among their trailers. He had none of the dried, white mud of the local prospector on his boots and clothing, nor did his hands suggest an acquaintance with pick or shovel. He was with the Grass Valley citizens and yet was not of them. Old Misery felt uneasy for the first time since leaving his foothills camp. The stranger must be a representative of the Vigilance Committee. And yet he carried no weapons in sight, nor did he look like a gun-man. Misery called a halt and filled and lighted his pipe. The trailers came up and passed on ahead. The stranger halted near Old Misery and bent over to dust his shiny shoes with a spotless handkerchief.

"Got a message for you," he informed the mountain man without glancing at him.

"Erhuh. Does he want to fight with knives or guns?" gently asked Misery.

"Friendly message. My name's Roger. I'm playing at the theater. Message is confidential. Mustn't be seen giving it, or they'd do me mischief. Don't pick it up till after I'm gone."

"Let her flicker," encouraged Old Misery, stooping to tie his moccasin.

"On the ground," said Roger, and turning on his heel he slowly sauntered back to the Valley.

Tobin stepped to the small wad of paper and flirted it with his foot to within reach of his friend. Old Misery's fingers secured it, and rising they resumed their journey. Two of the spies were returning to meet them, pretending to be looking for something.

"What you lost?" innocently asked Old Misery.

"Knife, worse luck," growled one of the men, who was retained by Phelps.

"What sort of a knife?"

"Buckhorn handle with a 'W' scratched on it. Wouldn't a lost it for fifty dollers!"

Old Misery clapped Tobin on the shoulder and cried:

"Didn't I tell you it was dropped by some one going this way? And you was so danged sure it was dropped by some one bound for the Valley. Never say again my

medicine ain't *wakan*. Stranger, you'll find that buckhorn knife, with a 'W' scratched on it, stuck in a tree, this side the road, 'bout quarter of a mile below here. My pard'n me couldn't agree, so I left it there for the owner to locate."

The two men hesitated and exchanged embarrassed glances.

Then the alleged loser mumbled, "Thanks," and walked on toward the Valley.

The other explained to the mountain men:

"Reckon there's no need of me going with him. One man can carry a knife without help."

"Sure he can if one can lose a knife," heartily agreed Tobin. "But it's a mighty fine show of brotherly love when a man'll drop his business and help hunt for a knife."

"But it was a simon-pure buckhorn-handled knife with a 'W' scratched on it," reminded Misery. "And that's different."

The spy hastily said:

"Time I was hurrying along. Got to meet a man in a rush."

And he made off ahead of them.

Old Misery glanced back and chuckled:

"There's t'other feller. We oughter slow down and make him show us the knife."

But the spy behind them had no intention of overtaking them, and when they halted, he did likewise.

Thus with watchers behind and ahead the two entered Nevada City. Tobin urged:

"Let's drop in somewhere and see what that writing is the man give you. Mebbe it's a witch-powder."

"In a minute or two. We'll open it in Peters' room. Probably something he'll like to see."

Giving no heed to their trailers they entered the *Hotel de Paris* and ascended to Mr. Peters' room.

The gambler opened the door and returned to bed, explaining:

"Had a long night. Lasted well into the morning. Two men from the Bay. Cost me seven hundred dollars to learn they're looking for some one. They believe they're hot on his trail. How did your game pan out?"

Old Misery told him, and without giving him time to finish his laughing-spell he produced the wad of paper and informed:

"A stranger, a play-acting feller, slipped this into my hand in Grass Valley. Read it out loud to Tommy 'n me."

Mr. Peters smoothed out the paper and smiled on observing the neat chirography of a woman. He grinned broadly as he caught the aroma of some delicate scent. But once he perused the few line his face grew grave and he swore softly.

"Listen," he said; and lowering his voice almost to a whisper he read:

"Some one has told Phelps that Mr. Gilbert was in the El Dorado the night Murieta was there. It may mean nothing, or much. I understand you are his friend."

The mountain men exchanged startled glances, and Tobin asked—

"Who wrote it?"

"There's no name hitched to it. But a woman wrote it," replied Peters.

Old Misery said: "The younker knew Roger and the Montez woman. Come up on the boat to Sacramento with 'em. Roger is in the woman's play-acting outfit."

"And it's believed Lola Montez will marry Phelps and his million," quickly informed Mr. Peters. "So, Phelps told her. But who told Phelps?"

Old Misery had no idea.

"I'll have to find the younker and take him over the ridge," he decided.

Mr. Peters slid out of bed and hurriedly began dressing.

"You mean young Gilbert's in town?" he cried as he slipped on his waistcoat and dropped a brace of derringers into the wide pockets.

"Went on ahead with a mule-load of grub this morning. Didn't come here. We'll overtake him afore he makes Grass Holler."

"Then you should be traveling without any delay. The two men from the Bay have hit some trail. If they learn as much as is in this note he'll have to go before the committee. And I'm afraid."

Tobin spoke up and reminded:

"A parcel of men have been trailing us. They're curious-like to find out where Misery gits his nuggets. If we quit here before dark they'll trail us clear up to the hills."

"——! Why did you have to show more nuggets?" snapped Mr. Peters. "You can't wait. Every minute is precious. Any minute may be *the* minute. I smelled trouble in that poker game last night. But I didn't think it was so close. Some one

told Phelps the boy was in the gambling place. Told him mighty recent. He's told the woman.

"If word gets to the men from the Bay—Why, they may know it even now! They may be on their way to your camp. You can't wait till dark, Misery. See here: this is how we will play the hand. Tobin is to go down-stairs and order a big dinner for the three of us. He'll talk loud. Then he'll go to the bar and order three drinks and say we'll be right down. The Grass Valley men will keep close to him."

"And then what?" asked Tobin.

"That's all. You stick to the bar as long as they stick. By and by I'll look you up."

"I read the signs. Old Misery is to hit the trail and I'm to stay behind and throw dust. See you up north sometime, old hoss, and settle our little difficulty."

"After this trouble's over we'll have our fun if I have to travel to Hudson's Bay. Don't let anybody damage you afore we meet up again, you little runt."

Tobin left the room to carry out his part of the plan. Mr. Peters stood in the doorway until he heard the order given for the dinner, the stentorian voice carrying far and suggesting whisky-exhilaration.

For good measure Tobin was loudly proclaiming:

"Make it the best. All the fixings. My pard, Old Misery, can buy this lodge and give it away and still have lots of ponies left."

Motioning for Misery to remain, Mr. Peters closed the door. He was gone only a few minutes and when he returned he was composedly shuffling a stack of gold pieces from hand to hand, much as he would shuffle cards, and his broad face was placid and benevolent.

In a whisper he informed:

"The way is clear out the back of the house. Sent a friend to the bar and he reports Tobin is on duty and drinking with the Grass Valley men and acting very drunk. Now go, and don't bring the youngster down this way again. If it was anything except helping Murieta——"

"He's going plumb over the Sierra if it busts up my camp. Took care of me last night like I was a baby. Tell Tom he won't lose anything by letting our fight wait—Little runt thinks I bit him a-purpose!"

Mr. Peters peered up and down the hall and then escorted Misery to the back-stairs and down to the kitchen.

"The help are backing my game. Not one will blab. Through the back door and good luck. If you are trailed you'll have to throw them off the track best you can."

"You're a white man, Peters. I won't forget," mumbled the mountain man; and he glided through the kitchen apparently unnoticed while the gambler returned to his room and threw himself on the bed.

Misery cleared the town without discovering any signs of the Grass Valley men. For several miles he walked rapidly, then slowed his pace, confident none was pursuing him. He came to a halt while passing through Willow Valley as a riderless horse rounded a bush-grown bend, and came toward him. The animal was in a lather and had galloped some distance, and was betraying signs of weariness.

The mountain man stood in the narrow road and the animal slowed down and attempted to go around him. Quick as a panther the mountain man had him by the nose and in the next moment was in the saddle.

"Ching-a-ling's hoss, or I'm a liar!" muttered Misery as he quieted the animal. "No such good luck that the yaller-devil's been thrown and busted his head. Now to save my legs a bit."

And he reined the horse about and rode him up the valley. He covered several miles, then reined in on beholding a man walking toward him.

It was Ching-a-ling and he had his left arm in a sling improvised from a handkerchief.

Sliding to the ground Old Misery called out:

"Here's your nag. Better not ride if you can't keep the saddle."

Ching-a-ling swore fluently in Spanish; then said: "I was not thrown, Señor Misery. I was afoot when this spawn of the —— ran away."

"Thought you was tossed and hurt your arm. There's blood on the hanker. Who done it?"

Ching-a-ling gritted his teeth, then confessed:

"That —— cat, Maria. Knifed me without any reason."

"She had a reason. You talk straight, or I'll finish what she commenced," growled

the mountain man, his frosty eyes displaying lurid lights. "You was troubling her, —— you!"

"I say no, Señor Misery!" cried Ching-a-ling his eyes watching the hand resting on the belt-knife. "That is not the way to talk to Manuel Vesequio. I did but ask the girl to marry me. Is that a crime? Is a man to be killed every time he asks a woman to become his wife?"

"Only once as a rule. But —— your nerve! You've got a Chinese girl for a wife already. Think you can fill your lodge with squaws?"

"It is not so," shrilly denied the breed. "My wife has left me. She took the child and my little savings and went to San Francisco, where she is now hiding in some Dupont street house. I shall never see her again. I am free to marry."

"But not to marry Maria, you scum. Ever bother her again and I'll cut your arms off in the Dakota way. Now crawl onto that hoss and show dust down the road."

Ching-a-ling mounted, and turned his brownish-yellow face to stare down at the mountain man for a moment.

Then he softly said:

"But free to marry Ana Benites, perhaps. Good enough for her, perhaps."

Before Old Misery could make reply the long spurs cruelly raked the tired animal, causing him to squeal in pain and gallop madly down the creek.

Old Misery instinctively threw up his rifle; then lowered it and mused:

"Just his wild talk. Sore's a burnt pup. He's too scared of Murieta to give the child away. Lawdy! But she's a spit-fire! What an old fool I was I didn't find out where he met her. She's prob'bly bound for Grass Valley to see the play-acting. I'll meet her and mebbe she'll talk."

GILBERT traveled very leisurely and at noon made a long halt while he ate his dinner and allowed the mule to graze. Being ignorant of the packer's art he had not ventured to remove the load of provisions and the weight of the same being light the mule had made only a half a dozen attempts to dislodge it by rolling.

"Lucky there's no eggs in it," he told himself after correcting the mule for what proved to be the last time.

He tried to make himself believe he was waiting for the mule to rest, and all the while he knew he was lonely and was hoping the mountain men would be overtaking him before he made the night camp. At last he saw a figure down the trail and his hopes went up. Then he discovered the newcomer was a woman and something told him it was Maria.

Remembering their last meeting he was embarrassed and almost wished she had not overtaken him. She came up the slope with her easy, gliding step and nodded coolly. At first he believed she was angry with him and would have none of his company. Instantly he desired to break down her prejudice and vindicate himself.

"I forgot to tell Old Misery you were down in the Valley yesterday," he greeted.

She halted, seated herself on a rock, and replied:

"Maria was not in Señor Gilbert's thoughts. He is too beeg a *caballero* to theenk of women."

"You know that's not true, Maria. I didn't see much of Mr. Misery. He went to bed very early——"

"Drunk," she listlessly supplied.

"And this morning he was busy with two friends, strangers to me, and sent me on ahead with the mule."

"You have not unpacked. That is ver' wrong," she gravely remarked.

"Afraid I couldn't get the stuff back so it would stay. Too late now as I must be going. But he supposed you were coming down today. You didn't look him up and I didn't know. Well, it was your own business. So I didn't tell him. I had to look after him a bit."

An incredulous smile twisted her red lips; then her eyes were hard as she reminded—

"I thought our gran' *caballero* was taking care of the Montez woman."

"Nonsense! She's good as married to Phelps, the mining man."

Her eyes grew very big and round at this; and for a count of five she stared at him fixedly. Her next move startled him. From her garter she pulled a slender knife and stabbed it several times into the earth. He watched her in amazement. Without glancing at him she quietly explained:

"A snake was in my path. I cut his arm."

"Snakes don't have arms," he began; then decided she must be speaking in metaphor, and added, "Some man bothered

you? By George, Maria! Wish I'd been there! I'd have fixed him."

"You?" she murmured, and laughed silently.

To his consternation her mood changed and she burst into a violent spell of weeping. Dropping the knife she bowed her head in her hands, and her slim body was racked with sobs until the coils of blue-black hair tumbled over her shoulders.

"Good heavens, Maria! What's the matter?" he gasped.

"Oh, I am a ver' bad girl. I have done a ver' great wrong. Señor Gilbert, you mus' go away."

"If you insist," he dully agreed. "But we're both traveling to Grass Hollow. I was hoping we might make it together."

"That is not of what I speak," she moaned. "You mus' go far away from Grass Hollow. Something says that men at the Bay will soon know Señor Gilbert was in the *El Dorado* that night. The Bay has a ver' long arm. In the hand is a noose. It is best Señor Gilbert goes away."

"But I don't understand," he cried, alarmed and bewildered. "It's impossible people in San Francisco should know I am here. If any one found out the truth Mr. Peters at Nevada City would hear it and let us know. Old Misery would surely know in time to warn me. Your nerves are unstrung, Maria. Old Misery will be along tonight. Plenty of time for him to hide me if any one tries to find me."

His talk restored his confidence somewhat. Grass Hollow seemed to be very remote from the world. Reason told him danger could not be imminent without his friends discovering it. If there had been any risk Old Misery would never have permitted him to go down to the Valley. And yet he was uneasy.

She interrupted his musing by rising and saying:

"We mus' be going on. We mus' camp high up. This is too near Nevada City."

And she replaced the knife, deftly arranged her hair and started on ahead.

Gilbert pulled up the picket pin and led the mule. She seemed to be in haste and often glanced over her shoulder, looking beyond him and down the rough way. He called after her to learn if she had eaten.

Her reply was:

"Faster! faster! Something tells me there is ver' much danger."

Wishing Old Misery would overtake them, but fearing the mountain man was indulging in a spree the young man's heart was heavy as he plodded along behind the girl. Their shadows grew longer and longer and stretched far up the slope ahead, and still the girl continued to lead the way. When she did halt and announced they would camp for the night Gilbert discovered they were in the ravine where the miners had overtaken him and Misery and near the spot where Reelfoot Williams had abandoned his purpose of holding them up. There was the little cabin where he had spent the night. He told her to make it her quarters and carried his own blankets to it. But she had left her own blankets there on the down-trip. While she was in the cabin he made a fire and prepared to cook the evening meal. She joined him, strangely humbled, but insistent on cooking the evening meal.

"You are unhappy, Maria. I'm sorry," he told her after they had eaten in silence.

"Ver' unhappy. I have done wrong," she gravely replied.

A soft step sounded in the darkness beyond the fire-glow. The girl gave a thin scream and sprang to her feet, the slender blade clutched in her small hand. Gilbert was incapable of moving because of astonishment at the unexpected presence just beyond the flickering light. A chaos of unfinished questions surged through his mind. How had they found him so quickly? What would they do? Should he attempt flight in the darkness.

"That's right. Kill me. Kill every one," called out the mountain man's voice. "I've hoofed it faster'n Fremont's lost outfit did, trying to overtake you two. Heave the knife and nail me."

"Old Misery! Good!" cried Gilbert, at last becoming coherent. Then, ashamed of his first emotions, he endeavored to appear composed, and added, "Where's Tobin?"

The mountain man emerged from the darkness and grinned at the erect, alert figure of the girl.

"Tobin's skeered of me. Knows I'm going to lick him some day. Stayed behind. Maria, either use that weepin or put it up. And s'pose you tell me 'bout knifing Ching-a-ling. Met him with his arm in a sling."

The knife vanished and the girl was softly explaining:

"He spoke ver' bad. One mus' not let some things be said. Is it not?"

"Reckon that's so. I'll cut his throat if he bothers you again. Younker, I've got a bad talk for you. Some one has blabbed in Grass Valley that you was in the *El Dorado* that night. We may have to go over the ridge."

This bald announcement was like a band of ice closing about Gilbert's heart. He never really had believed he would be connected with the bandit's escape from the gambling-hall.

While he was trying to regain control of himself Old Misery was saying to the girl:

"Sorter s'prized to see you here. Late to be starting for Grass Valley."

"I was in Grass Valley yesterday. I am on my way back to Grass Hollow," she sullenly told him.

The mountain man eyed her sharply, but only remarked:

"You oughter gone along with us. Never knew you was there."

Again she was quick to confess, saying—

"Señor Gilbert saw me and talked with me."

"I didn't tell you, sir, because you'd been—having a good time. Then Tobin and Pipps arrived and the claim was bought back by Phelps, and everything was so hurried I forgot it."

"It don't matter," said Old Misery, his voice sounding absent-minded. "Maria's a free white. How did you like the play-acting, Maria?"

She clicked her small teeth and replied:

"I am ver' queer. I did not go in."

"That's tarnal strange. Went way down there a-purpose to see it, and then didn't. They say that Montez woman's a humdinger. She's going to marry Phelps."

Without a word the girl turned and ran swiftly to the deserted cabin and closed the rickety door after her.

Old Misery idly fed some sticks to the coals and mused:

"Beats all —— how many queer notions can be crammed into one white woman's head. Never can guess what that child will do next. Younker, know of any one in Grass Valley who'd be likely to know you was in the *El Dorado?*"

Gilbert wrinkled his brows and pondered over the question. Old Misery was the only one in Grass Valley who had knowledge of that episode except himself, and, of course, the girl Maria.

"I can think of no one. I can't imagine how any one could know it."

"But some one does," informed Misery, lowering his voice. "The Montez woman sent me a writing that Phelps told her. But how could he know? Some one had to tell *him* afore he could tell the woman. Last thing he said to me was that he'd even up for my salting that claim; and he was careful to say he wouldn't make a move against me pussonally. Sounded sorter blind. Seems clear now. But who told him? Why should he tell the Montez woman? Why did she tell me? There's three puzzlers for you to chaw over. Wish Bill Williams was here to help us."

Despite his efforts to oust the suspicion Gilbert found himself realizing that he knew the answer to each of the three queries. And his gaze wandered toward the cabin. Passionate, and unstable as she was wilful, Maria had betrayed him. She had told Phelps the sinister truth while wrought up by jealousy.

Phelps, while suffering from the same incentive, had told the Montez woman. For some reason, perhaps because she could not assume the responsibility of sending a man to the noose, the actress had sent the warning through Old Misery. Yet Gilbert could not feel angry toward the girl. She was irresponsible as a child.

He repeated—

"I can't imagine how any one in the Valley could have known the truth."

"A blind trail," grumbled the mountain man. "If I knew where it begun I might figger where it would end. We'll sleep on it and perhaps my new medicine will have the answer for me in the morning. You can sleep sound. You're safe this night."

THE sun was up when the two men awoke. Old Misery was impatient to be off, but Gilbert insisted they allow the girl to finish her sleep. The mountain man's reply was to walk to the cabin and rap smartly on the door. Then he pushed it open.

After a glance he turned and called out to Gilbert:

"Vamoosed through the winder. Knew she couldn't be in there sleeping with all them fat squirrels hooting over the roof. Can't make out what's got into her.

Wonder if Tom Tobin is still at the bar with them fools from Grass Valley. He's a master hand with a bottle. Haven't yet thought of any one who could 'a' told Phelps about you?"

"Haven't an idea. Let's eat and be moving."

And Gilbert could not keep his gaze from wandering down the ravine as he spoke. He was beginning to experience the fears of the hunted. Old Misery quickly rekindled the fire, cooked meat and made coffee.

When they sat down to eat he remarked:

"When you took on with my outfit you did as Peters said, told me everything. Sure you've kept up that habit, younker?"

"Everything that matters," muttered Gilbert, but coloring furiously.

"I was wondering how that Montez woman was interested 'nough to send that warning," mused Old Misery. "My new medicine has been prodding me to give it some thought."

In a sudden burst of confidence Gilbert confessed his meeting with her and Phelps' jealousy.

"It meant nothing to me, or to her. She simply permitted me to walk with her to her boarding-house," he insisted.

Old Misery prompted:

"Maria must 'a' known about it. Mebbe she saw you two together."

"I don't think so," Gilbert stubbornly lied.

"Mortal queer. Phelps told the woman so she wouldn't smile on you any more. I've been thinking it was to git even with me. But he'd done it anyway to git rid of you. But who told him? Four persons know you was in the El Dorado: Peters, me, yourself, and Maria. The three of us was in Grass Valley yesterday. Younker, I never blabbed.

"If I was drunk as a b'iled owl I couldn't 'a' done it. You didn't, not being plumb *heyoka* yet. Cabin door closed. Maria gone through the winder. Gone without waiting for us. Had a queer way of quitting our fire last night. Younker, you mean well, but you're a poor liar. Maria said you talked with her in Grass Valley."

"It was nothing. We happened to meet——"

"And she got powerful mad at something, and that's why she wouldn't go and see the play-acting," composedly continued the mountain man. "When she's r'iled 'bout so much she'd do most anything. Phelps saw you and the woman together. So did the girl. Then she saw Phelps watching. That settled your hash with her: she held Phelps up and told him about the *El Dorado*."

"We don't know that. It's all guesswork," feebly insisted Gilbert.

"And that's what my new medicine was trying to ding through my old head last night while you was asleep and that poor child was crawling through the winder. To make a real muss it takes a woman."

Without further words he hurriedly packed the provisions on the mule and they took up their journey to the hidden hollow. They left the ravine and climbed another bench and halted to examine the country below. A faint call caused the mountain man to shade his eyes and Gilbert to tremble with fresh fear.

"Just glimpsed him as he passed through the opening," muttered the mountain man. "Rides alone. He'll show up again in a minute where the trail bends to make this level."

Gilbert was for hurrying on but Old Misery shook his head.

"No danger from one man," he growled. "There he comes! Sighted us afore we see him. He's signaling us to hold up."

The horseman now was in full view, his horse making rather hard work of the path to the bench. He waved a big black hat, and the sun turned the brim of it into a circle of fire.

"Mexican. Got buttons of silver strung 'round his hat. Well, I'm always ready to listen to a talk."

Following the zigzag path the tired horse labored up the slope.

Gilbert saw the man wore a bandage on his hand and wrist and warned, "It's Ching-a-ling!"

"No. Fall back and tree yourself. He brings a talk, but——"

He did not bother to finish. Standing behind the mule, with his rifle ready to shoot across the pack he raised a hand for the rider to stop at a distance of thirty feet.

The man slipped his hand out of the bandage and reined in.

"Three-fingered Jack!" softly exclaimed Old Misery.

Then in a loud voice, and speaking in Spanish, he demanded—

"What does Manuel Garcia want up here, where only eagles live?"

"He rides for one who is the strongest eagle of all," promptly replied Joaquin Murieta's lieutenant. "You are the man called Old Misery?"

"I am that man. What talk do you bring to me?"

"A talk about Ana Benites."

"Open your talk. This is no place for Manuel Garcia to rest his horse."

"A dog has whispered Ana Benites' name in Nevada City," hissed the Mexican. "He said she is called 'Maria.' Nevada City says a girl called Maria lives in your mountain camp. *Americanos* from San Francisco have heard the talk in Nevada. My horse is nearly dead in running to keep ahead of them."

"Then the girl must go to Mexico. California is too small to hold her. I will send her to Mexico where she will be safe. Now give me the name of the man who told her name."

And the mountain man's eyes flamed with a terrible purpose.

"Welcome to the name, *Señor* of the Sierra. But it will do you no good. There will be no names where he will be gone before you can take the girl to the Mexican line and return to look for him. He calls himself Manuel Vesequio. You call him Ching-a-ling. He was one of our spies. He has betrayed Ana Benites and shall die very soon. Just now men guard him against us; but soon, very soon, he shall lose his head. *Adios, señors.*"

And nodding toward the tree where Gilbert was hiding he thrust his crippled hand through the bandage that concealed his loss of digits, pivoted his horse and plunged down the slope into a thick growth.

For a minute the mountain man was so beside himself with rage at the breed's treachery that he could not talk intelligibly.

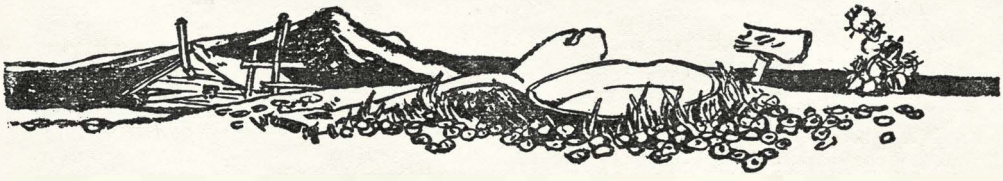
Finally he mastered his wrath and said:

"I killed one of Joaquin's best men at the Bay— That night. I'll kill him if I git a chance. They've overlooked my killing Scar-Face Luis because I was good to the girl. While she was in the Hollow she was a good girl, else I'd never gone to the Bay to hunt for her and fetch her back. I wanted her to quit being Ana Benites and foller a honest trail. Now she must go to Mexico.

"And, younker, that —— Ching-a-ling is the one that sends her to Mexico. I told him what would happen if he bothered her again. I'll pay what I owe him. His mad made him *heyoka.* Made him forgit that Joaquin probably had other spies in Nevada City. For Three-Fingered Jack to hear about it and have time to catch up with us shows a good-sized band of the robbers was near Nevada City, and that some spy didn't lose any time in taking word to 'em. Ching-a-ling killed hisself when he blabbed about Ana Benites. It may be me, or it may be one of Murieta's men that gits him. It don't make much difference which, 'cause he's good as dead.

"Now we'll push on afore some one rides up with word that Weymouth Mass is wanted by some one for finding a gold mine; or that somebody is after Bill Williams' pelt. —— of a name my camp in Grass Holler is gitting. With so much to 'splain mebbe it's high time I was pulling out. One way of dodging trouble is move fast and always keep ahead of it. Mebbe I've beer on this side the ridge too long."

TO BE CONTINUED



THAT CROOKED SMILE

By John Webb

Author of "Strong and Weak," "Fighting Men," etc.

DAVIS, Central American agent for a large English soap company, leaned over the rail surrounding the porch of the Strangers' Club and gazed down toward the harbor.

"Isn't that McGuire's ship I see at the dock?" he asked.

Sprague, the consular clerk, one of the two other men at the table, nodded.

"Yes," he answered, "the *Hawk*. One-Two will be along soon with his papers. Know him?"

"Yes," said Davis. "He gave me a lift down from Limon about three months ago. Peculiar chap—gentleman though, I'll say that for him. I said that I know him, but that's an exaggeration. No one really knows him."

"That's so. Not very friendly, is he?"

"Not exactly chummy. He's polite—he'll listen as long as you talk, nod, agree with you, and excuse himself. All day he sits in his room, smoking his little brown paper cigarets and staring at the ceiling. Something of a dreamer, I think—but great snakes, when he goes into action against some bullying forecastle hand, those long arms of his pumping and driving and his knuckles cutting like knives, he's a demon. And the queer part of it is, he seems to try to avoid trouble rather than look for it. Born under a fighting star, I suppose."

"Born fifty years too late," said Sprague. "He's a pocket edition of Skys'l-Yard Taylor, of the old clipper-ship days. Crews hate him, owners hate him, shippers hate him—but he makes quick voyages and delivers the goods. Gosh, when he looks at you with those jeering eyes of his, black as night they are, and he lifts one corner of his mouth in that crooked smile, you want to choke him."

"Yes, I know. But really, down underneath his shell I believe the man's human. There's something about the little man that makes me feel sorry for him; he's so alone, so friendless. But when he looks at you, and lifts the corner of his mouth, like you say, you hate him. He sneers at the world. The second mate of the *Hawk*, Spears, I think his name is, was telling me about Cap'n Mac's brother. Queer yarn. Seems that this brother chap was a bit of a bounder—a down-and-outer. He was beach-combing in Colon for months, Spears said. Somehow or other he got a berth in the *Hawk*—bound north. In Port au Prince somebody fell overboard, I forget whether it was Captain Mac himself or a sailor. Anyway, this brother went after him and was nipped by a shark. Lost a leg and died in Cap'n Mac's arms. Redeemed himself, you know. One-Two was hit pretty hard—the way Spears tells it."

"I heard something of that too," said Sprague. "Too bad. The brother probably wasn't of much account, but even so——"

" 'E was a bum!" The third man at the table, a big coarse looking individual with bloated jowls and small, pig-like eyes, spat out a piece of loose cigar wrapping and shook his head. " 'E was a bum," he

repeated. " 'E came down 'ere on a cattle-boat and laid around for three weeks. Did nothin' but 'ang around my place and bum drinks."

"Must have been hard up," remarked Sprague with a smile at Davis.

The big man did not grasp the sarcasm of the remark and continued:

" 'E was. Didn't 'ave a whole rag to 'is back. Busted shoes, no hat, sail-cloth trousers, and dirty 'as ——. A no good bum, 'e was."

"Better not let Cap'n Mac hear you talk like that," warned Davis. "He is touchy on that subject, Spears told me. He is a bad man to cross, Wiemans."

Wiemans grinned.

"I got protection. Didja 'ear about 'oo I got workin' for me now?"

"Couldn't guess," said Davis.

"No? Well, I got 'Bully' Shand."

Wieman's leaned forward and said the name again, more impressively.

"Bull Shand! What dya know about that?"

"Nothing," Davis shook his head slowly. "Never heard of the chap."

"What!" Wiemans exploded. "Dya mean to say you never 'eard of Bull Shand? Bully Shand from the West Coast, I mean. Why 'e's the toughest bucko in the—in the world. 'E's the lad what's been raising —— on the Coast for the last two years. Killed a bloke in Seattle with 'is bare 'ands, 'e did. They let 'im go—self-defense. Cleaned out a Barbary Coast joint single-'anded. 'E came 'ere A. B., in the *Jenny Dorsey*. 'Ad a fight—broke three of the cap'n's ribs and the mate's leg. Jumped the ship and I took 'im on as bouncer. I thought ever'body 'ad 'eard of Bully Shand."

"All but a few, I guess," said Davis wearily.

He glanced again over the rail.

"You had better tie Bully up," he said, "because I see Captain Mac coming up the road, and he's tough on bullies."

The barroom owner grunted.

"Don't know 'im," he said. "Never saw 'im—don't wanta. Guess 'e ain't so much. But Bully—say! 'E don't bother with hittin' a bloke, 'e wrastles 'em, 'e does. Tears 'em limb from limb, you might say. 'E'd tear the leg offa bloomin' helephant if 'e got mad."

"Er—the elephant?" queried Sprague.

"No—aw."

The fat man arose disgustedly.

"I'm gonna leave."

He turned to go, but stopped and stared curiously at a man who was coming through the doorway.

The newcomer was a man below the average height, and so trimly built that he looked even smaller than he was. His hair was black; when he glanced around at the occupants of the room his eyes were seen to be the same somber shade. His arms were long, and his hands, large-knuckled and hanging loosely, were extraordinarily large. His body was as slender and easy moving as a boy's. He was wearing a pongee silk suit and a Panama hat, and under one arm he carried a leather briefcase. His manner was shy, almost timid.

"Captain McGuire!" said Davis and Sprague simultaneously, and they arose. Wiemans stared at the little sea-captain in astonishment.

Captain McGuire came directly to their table, shook hands with Davis and Sprague and was introduced to Wiemans.

"I was looking for you," he said to the consular clerk. "I went to the office and the boy said you were here. I wanted to enter the *Hawk*, but there's no hurry, of course."

He smiled apologetically.

Wiemans' expression of astonishment had changed to a grin of amusement. He took in the slight frame, the quiet, almost timorous manner and his grin broadened.

"Ho, ho," he laughed. "So you're Cap'n One-Two Mac. 'Eard a lot about you, cap'n. Yes, ho, ho."

From his standing position he looked down disparagingly at the little man seated in the chair.

" 'Eard a lot. Knew your brother Dan, too, I did. Funny feller— wasn't much good, was 'e? I guess 'e——"

Captain Mac looked up suddenly and Wiemans' words died in his throat. The little man's eyes became two deep wells of boiling ink; black and forbidding and brimming with wordless threats. He spoke one word, softly, but his voice was as cold and chilling as the polar wind.

"Well?" he said, and he waited.

Wiemans gulped and tried to look beyond those eyes.

"S-sorry, sorry," he mumbled thickly. "Didn't know you—didn't know—you see I— Well, I mus' be goin'. So long fellers, so long. See yous again. Gota date."

He backed away, still unable to free his eyes.

Captain Mac smiled. A queer, crooked smile that lifted one corner of his mouth and drew down the other; a smile of disgust, of loathing, of contempt. It spoke volumes.

"Good-by, Mr. Wiemans," said the captain, and he turned his back.

The saloon-keeper breathed his first deep breath for some seconds and made for the door.

"Rotter," said Davis when the big man had gone.

Sprague nodded his agreement. Captain Mac said nothing, but his mouth straightened and his eyes cooled and softened. He was thinking of some one else.

THE tropic sun beat down unmercifully, and Davis dodged into the consulate office to get out of the glare of it. Sprague was sitting at his desk with his feet in an open drawer and a ragged cigar in his mouth. He smiled a welcome and waved languidly at a chair.

"Welcome, Soapy," he said. "Smoke?"

He took a handful of the ragged cigars from the desk and slid them toward his friend.

"Haven't seen you for three days. Been up country trying to talk the natives into cleanliness?"

The soap agent smiled.

"I've been up to Baranquilla. Sold a mountain of soap. What's the news? Anything new?"

Sprague nodded.

"Yes, there is, if what they are saying about town is true. They say that your friend Captain Mac took a calling down from Bully Shand. Side-stepped him, you know."

"Don't believe it," said Davis.

"Well, that's what they say. It seems that the *Hawk's* crew are a lot of bad ones—roustabouts and pier-head jumpers, old Tenny, the mate, calls them—and they forsake the ship for Wiemans' bar. For two days Tenny didn't have enough men to work the ship. He was around town raising the deuce about it, but he had sense enough to stay away from Bully Shand. He went back and told Captain McGuire about it and the little man came ashore for his crew. Went straight to Wiemans', he did, and routed out his crew. Took his men back to the ship all right, but they tell me that Shand cursed him out of the saloon and down the street without a come-back. Bully's all blown up about it, and the whole town is saying that One-Two Mac is afraid."

"He's no such thing," said Davis stoutly. "He's a blooming Yank, like yourself, Spragie, old boy, but between you and me, One-Two Mac is not afraid of all the Bully Shands in the world. He's a gentleman, a ship's officer, and men like him don't fight with every barroom bully that is looking for a reputation. I don't believe that Captain Mac is afraid of anything on earth."

"Shand is a bad actor, though," said Sprague doubtfully, "and I really wouldn't blame the little man if he were afraid. Bully has a terrible reputation for man-handling, and he is too stupid to know what fear is. I would hate to see McGuire get the worst of a fight with him."

"So would I. Men like him don't take a licking easy. It would break his heart."

DAVIS, down on the dock to inquire about a delayed shipment of soap that afternoon, met Captain McGuire, and in a diplomatic way brought the conversation around to Bully Shand.

At the mention of the name the nostrils of Captain Mac's lean, hawk-like nose quivered, but he gazed out over the bay and said nothing.

"Never met him," remarked Davis. "Rum chap, from what I hear."

"Hmm."

Reflectively the captain stroked the knuckles of one hand with the palm of the other. Davis noticed for the first time that there were shadows beneath the little man's eyes and that his cheeks were drawn. He decided to drop the subject.

Captain Mac threw away the little brown cigaret he was smoking, and taking tobacco and papers from his pocket began rolling another. He was evidently thinking deeply, and Davis, at a loss for something to say, hesitated.

"Hmm," the captain repeated, and then suddenly: "I'm tired. Tired as ——."

He looked up at Davis and half-smiled. His mouth was plaintive.

"Why can't they let me alone? Oh, I know what they are saying. 'One-Two Mac's afraid of Bully Shand.' That's it. And what of it? Isn't every other man in

town afraid of the same Bully Shand? Not that I am afraid—but if I were, what of it? Is it a disgrace to be the same as all the rest of you? Anybody can be afraid but Cap'n Mac. And I'm tired—tired as ——. Do you know what it means to have a reputation as a fighter?"

He did not wait for an answer, but continued:

"It means that you have to fight every would-be bucko that wants a reputation. And the more fights I win, the more I add to my reputation, and the more willing the would-bes are to take a chance. Naturally, having no desire to be whipped, I do my best to win. I am a man burdened with a reputation that keeps me continually fighting. There was a time when I delighted in fighting, but now—I am getting old, I guess—and tired."

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled ruefully.

It was the most Davis had ever known Captain Mac to talk. He was surprized. This was not the One-Two Mac he had known on the *Hawk*. That one had been a rushing, tearing lover of battle, quick to fight and apparently devoid of caution; this one was a mild-tempered, peace-desiring man, middle-aged and on the verge of becoming old. Or was the mild manner merely a mask to hide the innate aggressiveness of a born warrior? Davis could not decide.

A stevedore, trundling a loaded hand-truck, came rapidly along the dock. He was laughing and calling good-natured repartee over his shoulder to one of his fellow workers, and was not paying much attention to where he was going. Captain McGuire was looking again out over the bay, and he did not see the man coming with the truck. When almost upon them the stevedore looked ahead, saw the little man in front of him and tried to turn out, but he could not twist the heavy truck aside in time. One wheel caught on the edge of an uneven plank and almost twisted the truck out of the hands of the trundler. The iron front-piece bumped smartly against the captain's ankle, almost knocking him off his balance.

In an instant the little man, startled and angered by the suddenness and pain of the unexpected blow, became transformed. He moved so quickly that Davis, later, was hard put to it to describe what happened. All he knew was that there was a twist of Captain Mac's body, a flash of dark coat sleeve, a *smack, smack!* That was all, and the captain stepped back with lips drawn up in his crooked smile. Then his mouth straightened, his eyes cooled, and became again the peace-loving middle-aged man. For three seconds he had been "One-Two Mac," the bucko.

The stevedore, his hands still grasping the hand-truck, stood with his jaw hanging stupidly. On one cheek a piece of skin had been lifted from his face as cleanly as if done by a surgeon's scalpel. On the other side of his face, above his eye, was a knife-like cut that deluged his face with blood.

The stevedore was surprized, as was Davis, but Captain Mac seemed more surprized than either of them. He was standing with his large-knuckled, cestus-like hands spread fan-like before him, and he was holding them so stiff and strained that the skin, hard and sandpapery as the dried skin of a shark, showed all red and white in blotches. He looked from his hands to the stevedore's face, and his eyes were wondering. Without a word he suddenly turned his back and almost ran to the ship. Davis saw him going rapidly up the gangway.

The stevedore came out of his stupor and began to swear vengeance and curse foully in Spanish.

"He hit me," he said. "Hit me and ran. He is afraid. He ran from me."

"Not from you," said Davis. "He is running from himself."

He walked away and left the man wondering at his words. Davis was trying hazily to remember something he had read some time previously in a magazine. It had been an article on dual natures. He determined to look it up.

THE *Hawk* was scheduled to stay in port five days, and try as hard as he would, the mate, Mr. Tenny, could not keep enough of the deck-force aboard during working-hours to do the work of the ship. When he was forward they slid down the stern dock-lines, and when he was aft they went over the gangway. Tenny raved and cursed, but they paid him no attention and came and went about as they pleased.

"Dang it!" he growled. "Thet's th' worst of sailing with a gang of pick-ups. When they oughta be aboard doin' their

work, like sailormen, they're up in Wieman's swillin' hog-wash."

It was the morning of sailing day, and the mate found himself with but two men and the boatswain.

Captain McGuire, to whom Tenny was complaining, smiled.

"Go up and rout them out," he advised.

"What! Me? With all th' work, I've got to do?" He looked wildly about the decks. "Tarps to put on—hatches to batten—booms to lower—anchors to secure—ports to close— Dang it all, cap'n, be reasonable. Sufferin' mackerel!"

"Oh, of course," answered the captain. With his eyes he was laughing at Mr. Tenny.

"You go, cap'n, ye've got more time then I hev'."

Mr. Tenny's pale blue, washed-out eyes narrowed expectantly. He lived with a perpetual hope of seeing the sarcastic little shipmaster some day receive a beating.

"Don't ye think thet I'm afraid of thet Bully Shand," he said. "Ye don't think thet, cap'n. Heh, heh." He laughed as if to dissolve all thought that he might be afraid of Bully Shand.

"You afraid? Not you, Mr. Tenny." Captain Mac's lips curled slightly. "I'll stop in myself. We could send the second or third mate—or both of them—but I have to go ashore to clear the ship, and I'll stop in on the way back."

"Thet's good, cap'n, thet's good."

Mr. Tenny was delighted and he rubbed his lean hands in anticipation of what he expected to happen.

A LITTLE later in the morning, Sprague, just finished arranging and signing the *Hawk's* clearance papers, came to the door of his office and gazed down the street to where Captain McGuire, walking slowly and with his brief-case tucked beneath his arm, was retreating in the direction of Wieman's saloon. Sprague took his hat from the desk-top, and leaving his office, went diagonally across the street to where the Strangers' Club stood on the corner. From the street he could see Davis sitting in his usual chair on the second-story porch. The soap salesman saw him at the same time.

"Come on up, Yank," Davis called. "Have a drink of something that'll make you forget the heat."

"No, you come down," answered Sprague, and he stepped to beneath the edge of the porch and spoke in so low a tone that no one else could hear. "Captain Mac's on his way to Wiemans' to get his sailors. Let's trail along and see the fun."

"Comin'," cried Davis, and soon Sprague could hear him clattering down the rickety wooden stairs.

"Was he angry?" asked Davis as together they started down the street.

"No—nor in the least perturbed. He just mentioned casually that he was going to look up his crew on the way back to the ship."

"Hmm—Shand will jump at this opportunity to acquire local fame. Wouldn't he like to say, 'One-Two Mac? Sure, I know him. I licked him in nineteen-twelve. Ask so-and-so if I didn't.' "

"He would. He's that kind, they say. But let's hope that it won't come to that. I don't believe Captain Mac is any too anxious to have trouble with Shand."

"No," said Davis, "Captain Mac is not, but One-Two Mac is."

"What do you mean?" asked Sprague.

"There are two masters of the *Hawk*. One is Captain Mac, a peaceful, gentlemanly seaman, the other is One-Two Mac, the fighting bucko that delights in battle."

He told Sprague of the captain's words of earlier in the morning, and of the captain's attack on the stevedore, and he then told him of the conclusion he had come to.

"Bully Shand might call him most anything and get away with it," he said, "as long as Captain Mac's himself. But if he should happen to touch the little man on a sore spot—well, I think our famous West Coast bully would have his hands full."

Wiemans' place was three blocks from the Strangers' Club, but they walked swiftly and were soon at the corner. Wiemans' saloon was in the middle of the block, and Captain Mac, now only half a block ahead of them, had just turned in. They hurried their steps and arrived in time to hear the captain's opening words.

"All right, lads," he said, and he looked about at the half-score men lounging about at the tables and against the bar, "we're going back to the ship."

He stopped and waited near the door.

Bully Shand left the end of the bar and came to the center of the group of tables. He was a short man, probably but an inch taller than Captain Mac, but powerfully

and heavily built. His legs were bowed and his arms were short and so heavily muscled that the biceps bulged his coat sleeves. His neck was thick and corded, and so short that his big head seemed to rest between his bulging shoulders. His mouth was large, and his eyes were so small and beady and transparent that they resembled the glass orbs of a stuffed rabbit. In manner he was assured, and his actions were quicker than is usual in a man of his bulk.

"Well, here's little Bucko Mac," he said, and parted his lips in a smile. "And he says yer goin' back to th' ship. Well, go ahead."

He waved his hand toward the door.

"But before yous go I wanta tell yuh that yer bucko cap'n ain't no bucko atall. He's a four-flusher."

He looked at Captain Mac expectantly, eager for trouble, but the little shipmaster seemed not to hear him.

Wiemans came from the rear of the saloon, and taking care to keep Shand between himself and Captain Mac, laughed loudly.

"Ho, ho," he guffawed. " 'E don't 'ear you, Bully. The blighter's deef. Ho, ho!"

In his delight at seeing the man, who in Wiemans' opinion had purposely gone out of his way to curtail the amount of money the *Hawk's* crew would have spent in the saloon, discomfited, Wiemans' Cockney accent became more pronounced.

"He don't, eh?" Bully Shand stepped forward and held his face within a foot of the captain's. "One-Two Mac, dyuh hear? I said yer a four-flusher!"

Captain Mac glanced up at the fight-seeking bully. For a fraction of a second his eyes flamed and he seemed about to spring. His nostrils quivered and one corner of his mouth lifted slightly, then his expression became one of calm contemptuousness and he turned away.

"Come on, lads," he said, and he took one sailor by the arm and pushed him toward the door.

The man hesitated, looked at Captain Mac and decided to go. The others rose or left the bar and shambled after him, taking their time and grinning insolently as they went. Shand, leering boastfully, was about to give up the attempt to draw the captain into a fight when Wiemans came to his side, put his lips close to the bully's ear and whispered. Shand looked surprized, rubbed thoughtfully at his unshaved chin, and nodded in agreement. He looked at Captain Mac curiously.

"And I never guessed it," Shand said wonderingly.

And then aloud to Captain Mac:

"So Dan the beachcomber was yer brother. Well, well."

He turned to the other occupants of the saloon.

"Dis guy's brother was a beachcomber. He used to hang around here an' bum drinks offa th' spigs. He was dirty and lazy and yella as ——. It runs in th' family, dyuh see?"

Shand, had he glanced at Captain Mac, would have stopped talking and prepared for battle, but he was too preoccupied with his explanation to the others. Davis and Sprague were now well into the room and to one side, and the men of the *Hawk*, undecided whether to go or stay, were clustered about the door.

Davis leaned close to Sprague and whispered.

"The metamorphosis," he said. "Watch the fireworks."

Captain Mac was standing, his feet slightly spread and his hands at his side, in the middle of the floor. His eyes were boiling, his nostrils were quivering and his lips were drawn and twisted out of shape. He was poised lightly on the balls of his feet, like a cat about to spring. His expression was as sinister and threatening as the sky before a hurricane. Somehow the little man seemed to be taller and bigger in frame.

Bully Shand, not observing the captain, continued:

"I used to throw th' bum out about twice a day. Used to kick 'im out into the street. I kicked 'im out in the gutter, I did—with these very shoes I got on now."

He held out one huge brogan for inspection.

" 'Get out, yuh bum,' I'd say, and I'd kick 'im out th' door. He was yella—like Cap'n——"

His monologue ended abruptly. A fist, not heavy, but landing with the sharp impact of a shot-filled blackjack, caught him beneath the ear. The surroundings became misty and indistinct, and Shand's knees buckled slowly beneath his weight. His big body slumped to the floor, but before he reached it four knife-like knuckles had slid across an eyebrow and raked it open, and a red spot appeared upon one cheek

as if painted there by an unseen hand. He went to his knees, and with his head hanging, steadied himself with his finger-tips upon the floor.

For all of his braggart ways, Bully Shand was no coward, and not a quitter, and although his stuffed rabbit eyes showed surprize there was no sign of fear in them. He was of stout heart, and an experienced rough-and-tumble fighter, and he shook his head and stayed down, waiting for his brain to clear.

"I'm comin' up in a minute, One-Two Mac," he growled, "and I'll cripple yuh for that."

The little captain, now One-Two Mac the fighter, waited eagerly. His lips were distorted and writhing and his eyes were flaming. His brows were knotted and a small, round ball was jumping and throbbing above the inner corner of each eye. His face was fearful, and a man less courageous than Shand would have stayed upon the floor.

Wiemans went behind the bar, circled it and came out the other end with a short, wicked-looking club in his hand. His pig-like eyes were fastened upon the back of the captain's head. He started forward but Davis stepped before him.

"Back," said Davis. "I told you to tie your bully up."

He reached out suddenly and wrenched the club from the fat man's hand, then placed one palm beneath his chin and shoved. The saloon owner went backward, collided with a table and fell prone across its top.

"Stay there," commanded Davis.

"And you a Henglishman, like me," whined the fat man.

"No, not like you," said the soap man, and to prevent Wiemans from rising he dug him in the waist-line with the end of the club.

Shand, now on one knee, was inhaling deeply and preparing to arise. A native slipped in from the rear and there was a glitter of steel from his waist-band. Sprague sprang half-across the room and literally threw a heavy fist at the man's jaw. It landed and the native went down in a heap. There was a short scuffle from near the door and a big A. B., from the *Hawk* lifted a dark-skinned man and threw him bodily out on to the sidewalk.

Shand arose to both feet, poised for a second like a sprinter, and then rushed. Captain Mac stepped to one side, and he hooked a snappy blow to the bouncer's stomach as he lumbered past. Shand grunted, but he turned and came again to the attack. Again the little man sidestepped, and one fist flashing out ripped open Bully's cheek. This time the captain did not wait for the other to come to him, but was on the bouncer while he was still in the act of turning. Shand tried hard to protect himself, but he might as well have tried to ward off a shower of hail-stones. The rapier-like thrusts eluded his guard in spite of his best efforts, and soon his face was streaming blood and his lungs were laboring. Half-blind, and frenzied with anger, he lunged forward, trying again to come to close quarters, but the stabbing, swinging form before him easily eluded his clutching hands. A stinging, numbing blow beneath his ear told him that One-Two Mac was now behind him.

Bully Shand's forte was wrestling; he preferred to come to close quarters, seize his opponent about the body and squeeze and wrench until something snapped, but how could he wrestle with a man upon whom he could not lay a finger? Lunge after lunge he made, trying desperately to enfold the captain with his powerful arms, but the little man was always to one side or beneath his clutching fingers, and all the while those stabbing, slashing fists were pelting against his face and body. From his exertions and loss of blood the bouncer was slowly weakening, and to the spectators it was only a question of how long Bully could stand the punishment. Still he fought doggedly, though futilely, on. He would not down. It was plain that he would face the storm of blows as long as his legs would support his body. He was punch drunk and wobbly, but still he lunged and clutched.

When it seemed that Shand was about to collapse Captain Mac eased up. Whether he felt admiration for the other's courage, and relented, or whether he himself was tired, no one could tell, but he stopped hitting, took the bouncer by one arm, and shoved him toward a chair.

Shand straightened from his crouching poise, filled his lungs with air, and gazed at the captain through one partly closed eye. The other eye was sunken out of sight behind his swollen lids. His gaze was at first speculating, then suddenly vicious.

Bully turned quickly, caught the captain

by the wrist with both hands and twisted. There was a snap and Captain Mac's mouth opened in pain. Shand pulled the smaller man to him, wrapped both arms about his waist, and lifted him from the floor. The captain's right arm swung useless at his side. Shand, obsessed with the desire to maim, set himself for the bear-like hug that would end the fight, perhaps leave Captain Mac a cripple for life.

Then One-Two Mac showed that he was more than a mere bucko; he proved that he could fight a losing fight as well as a winning one. He put his left thumb in Bully's good-eye socket and shoved. Shand, mad with the sudden pain of it, threw his head back in an endeavor to get clear of the gouging thumb and almost lost his grip of the captain's waist. One-Two Mac's knee came up and thudded into the big man's stomach. The arms loosed their hold and the captain sprang clear.

The little captain staggered backward until he came to the bar, which he grasped to support himself. He was in agony, one arm was dislocated and his body ached agonizingly from the wrenching of those merciless arms, but he did a strange and peculiar thing—a thing that only the untamable One-Two Mac could have done. He smiled! A smile with the lips that drew up one corner of his mouth and drew down the other. His eyes seethed and boiled over. He started drunkenly toward Shand.

"My ——!" whispered Davis hoarsely. His skin was bathed in cold perspiration and his eyes were a mixture of horror and admiration. "My ——! He's licked and doesn't know it."

Sprague nodded and stared. His breath was coming in great gulps and he was trembling. He was afraid for the little man who, crippled and exhausted, would not admit defeat.

One-Two Mac came on. Shand stared wonderingly, fearfully. That smile! What did it mean? What was this one hundred and forty pound demon made of? He couldn't understand and backed slowly, shaking his head. The smile was making him retreat where the famous stabbing hands had failed. Shand began to tremble and backed faster.

Captain Mac swung his left arm, but the blow, weak and slow, not at all a One-Two Mac blow, never landed. Shand turned and ran! In his haste to get through the doorway he tripped and fell, and the captain lashed out with his foot and kicked him—not hard, but contemptously, insultingly. He reached down, caught hold of Shand's collar, and exerting all his remaining strength, dragged the bouncer to the curb.

"Down, you scum," the little man said, and his lips were writhing like snakes. "Down into the gutter."

He pushed Bully Shand down into the gutter and kicked him again, lightly, but as insultingly as before.

One-Two Mac turned to face the crowd that thronged the sidewalk. His eyes were cooling and his lips were slowly straightening.

"With these shoes," he said, and he pointed down to his feet, "I have kicked into the gutter the man who kicked my brother. With these very shoes."

He staggered and caught himself.

Some one handed him his brief-case and he took it and thanked the man huskily. Sprague offered the captain his arm but the little fighter shook him off, looked around to get his direction and started toward the docks, swaying slightly as he walked.

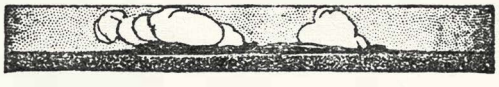
"All right, lads," he called over his shoulder, "we're going back to the ship."

The sailors, their heads up, proud of the man they hated, trouped after in a body.

Bully Shand climbed to the curb and sat there. He shook his head in wonderment.

"I licked 'im," he said. "I broke his arm, broke one of his ribs—licked 'im. An' then he kicks me into th' gutter. What kind of a bloke is dat for a guy to fight wit'. Lick One-Two Mac ——! It can't be done."

He kicked savagely at the curb with his heel and stared into space.



The GUEST of MOHAMMA SANI

by Robert Simpson

Author of "White Man's Boots," "Bad Business," etc.

IN A DEEP recess in one of the thirteen gates of Kano, Northern Nigeria, a caravan donkey-driver squatted and waited—seven days. His name was Awudu.

And on the evening of the seventh day, as the muezzins were calling the faithful to prayer, and the distant streets of the ancient Fulani city within the great pink walls were quieting down to a low respectful drone, Awudu rose slowly to his feet and his right hand slipped cautiously, even in the dark, into the voluminous folds of his *tobe*.

The occasion being a just and honorable one, Awudu's *tobe*—a loose-hanging, embroidered outer garment—was rather better than the best a donkey-driver could afford, and the blade of the knife that was stuck in the inner belt of cloth about his waist was, in truth, long enough and sharp enough to find the heart of any man. The fingers of the hand that closed about the hilt were lean and strong, and the quick, nervous glint in Awudu's sharp black eyes might have been borrowed from the edge of the blade.

Beyond the entrance to the tunnel-like gateway, the thin blue haze of the *harmattan* hung down over the road to Katagum not unlike a curtain of sheerest gauze. And through this curtain—some distance behind a body of Fulani horsemen who tore madly along toward the gate with the usual spectacular display of fantastic horsemanship, to which no one paid any attention—there came five normally indifferent caravan-donkeys carrying salt or coffee or sugar, or some such marketable commodities, accompanied by their driver, who plodded along beside them and tried to see to it that they did not rub off their loads against a convenient palm.

Behind these was a string of carriers, their loads balanced upon their heads and moving gently from side to side with the lazy sway of their bodies.

Finally, a considerable distance to the rear, and something like wraiths that were slowly solidifying before Awudu's eyes, there came, not one man as Awudu had expected, but two. One of them was a turbaned Fulani who was mounted upon a shaggy brown horse. The other wore a sun-helmet and rode a native pony of almost pure white.

Then it was that Awudu knew why he had had to wait seven days. And why——

His hand emerged from the folds of his *tobe* and dropped to his side almost like a broken thing. His shoulders drooped, his broad, dusky brown face took on an expression of unfathomable melancholy, and the glint went out of his eyes leaving nothing but a dull void stare.

"He who waiteth long in the gate," he muttered in his native Hausa, as if he were mechanically repeating a lesson, "will find a needle in his heel."

"The Guest of Mohamma Sani," copyright, 1923, by Robert Simpson.

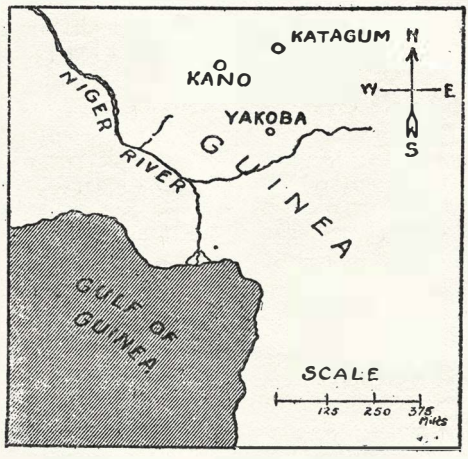
This meant two things; first, that the pain of long and fruitless waiting was keen; and second, that Awudu was not an ordinary caravan donkey-driver or the wisdom of the *mallams* would not have fallen so glibly from his tongue.

He did not wait in the gate very long after that. Only long enough to be sure he was making no mistake about the identity of the man on the white pony. Then, turning his naked feet draggingly in the direction of the city, the quick descending dark gathered rapidly about him and, for another day at least, the heart of Mohamma Sani might beat in peace.

SEVERAL hours later, in the Fula quarter of the city, Mohamma Sani sat among silken cushions, within the safety of his own house, drank much coffee, smoked innumerable cigarets, and spoke in sonorous Fulani monosyllables to a white man who either answered in kind or did not answer at all.

The white man's name was Rudd Haviland.

To almost any one in Nigeria, from the Niger Delta to the shores of Lake Tchad, this was explanation enough, even though, to the vast majority, it explained nothing at all. And in Fula and Hausa country particularly, Rudd Haviland was a man who was known to many people in many guises.



His appearance was as contradictory as his varied reputation. His height was just a shade under six feet, and his body, which looked lean and spare, was suggestive of speed rather than of strength or any great endurance.

At least, such would be the stranger's first impression. Then, all at once, his attention would fasten itself upon Haviland's naked forearms and an altogether involuntary shudder of apprehension would be a logical and forgivable result.

There was no misunderstanding those forearms or the huge, bone-crushing hands that were attached to them, and the stranger's most natural desire would be to try to discover why he had not observed them in the first place. And, with a jerk, his wandering gaze would come back to Haviland's face.

In spite of the broad forehead, the high cheek-bones, the rather long jaw and the straight, lean nose, it did not strike one as being a "fighting face." And then one knew that the eyes were responsible for this.

They were gray eyes—quiet and somewhat quizzical—and they seemed to be patiently engaged, most of the time, in turning everything and anything inside out. Rarely did they betray surprize at what they found. But sometimes they smiled, which was considered to be safe enough.

It was when Rudd Haviland laughed—but, in strictly white and enlightened circles this superstition was not taken seriously. However, be that as it may, in the fourteen quarters of Kano and elsewhere, where a man might speak many times fourteen tongues and still be misunderstood, it was persistently whispered that when the *Bature* —white man—Haviland laughed, a black or a brown man died.

His object in being in northern Nigeria at all was covered by the blanket word "shooting." He had no official or business affiliations, and his rating socially, in white officialdom or in the upper tiers of Fulani aristocracy, was largely a matter of chance, and mostly of expediency.

Just at present he chanced to be the guest of Mohamma Sani, whose abode, built of the same pink, God-sent clay that had made Kano and its gigantic walls possible in the dim beginnings of things, was a place of gloomy, vaulted halls and still gloomier passages that led the stranger nowhere unless it was into the jaws of trouble. But up near the roof the curling blue smoke from Mohamma's cigarets found slit-like apertures and, filtering through to the open air, drifted across the pitch-black courtyard

and out beyond the familiar grunt and odor of camel.

It is almost unnecessary to say that Mohamma was a merchant. For the wealth of Kano was the wealth of its workshops and its market-places. It was northern Nigeria's greatest clearing-house. The endless caravans that crossed the Sahara from Tripoli, the cattle and the salt and the "potash" that came out of the oases of Absen and Air, the kola-nuts of Ashanti and the Guinea Coast, and the slaves that were still garnered wherever the raiders of Mohamma Sani and others could reap with safety—these and many other things that could be bought for a price were drawn toward Kano as surely as the great Mother Niger was drawn to the sea.

But since the resident commissioner of the white man's government had taken up permanent residence in the emir's Summer palace beyond the Nassarawa Gate, many changes had come to disturb a good Fulani merchant's peace. And Mohamma Sani had reason to feel that, in this quarter particularly, he was being misunderstood.

In fact, he was afraid the resident's police were of the opinion—unjustly, of course—that he, Mohamma Sani, had had something to do with the stupid killing of a foolish old balogun who had talked too much.

Also, as Mohamma Sani was well-aware, there was Awudu the caravan donkey-driver.

It had, therefore, been the part of wisdom for Mohamma to wait in Katagum until Haviland had been ready to return to Kano. Not simply because the knife of Awudu was almost as long as his list of grievances, but more particularly because it was just possible that Haviland might be induced to create, on Mohamma's behalf, a different and a better impression at the residency.

"Many things are changed," Mohamma said for the fourth or fifth time, and his stout, but straight-featured red-brown face, did its best to indicate a tolerant acceptance of the altered condition of affairs. "There is no longer respect for the wall that is about the house of a Fulani. Even a donkey-driver may spit upon the authority of the emir and nothing is done."

Haviland knew this was a lie. The emir of Kano, now acting under the supervision of the resident commissioner, was still the judicial head of the native court. But it was because Haviland had always found Mohamma Sani such an interesting and promising liar, that he liked to associate with him now and then.

And always, when Mohamma lied complainingly, he did so with a definite purpose in mind and excitement of one sort or another invariably followed. Therefore, Haviland asked indifferently, and seemed to be giving all of his attention to a thin black cheroot—

"Who is this driver of donkeys?"

Mohamma did not even blink.

"I did not speak of one, but of many," he said smoothly. "Mohamma Sani does not think of the hyena as Awudu or Momo or Matchu. The thief of the night is not named until he is caught."

Haviland puffed on the cheroot absently. He knew several Awudus and Momos and Matchus among the donkey-driver class, but there was only one of them that mattered. His name was Awudu. Also, he was a donkey driver only on a part-time basis. The rest of the time he spent in the vicinity of the old slave-market beside the Jahkara, where a considerable business was still being done in spite of the resident commissioner's police and the laudable efforts of the emir to stamp it out.

Doubtless this was the Awudu to whom Mohamma so subtly wanted to refer, and after thinking it over, Haviland said quietly and cryptically:

"Under the guns of the white man's law, there should be no talk back and forth about price. The sum Awudu names is the sum Mohamma should pay, for the tongue of the donkey-driver is long and his knife is swifter than the swoop of the kite."

"He is the son of an ox, and his mother was a spider," Mohamma announced at once, impatiently, and betrayed neither surprize nor relief that Haviland's intimate study of the Fulani mind had made him acquainted with the most essential fact that it was the things a Fulani did not say that mattered. "And his price for one is the price of three. Always a little more, and a little more, and still a little more. I can not pay."

Thus did Haviland come to understand this particular situation perfectly. Awudu, as was fairly well known, had risked his life many times in the head-hunting country of the Nassarawa province and elsewhere. And, doubtless, upon the delivery of each batch of slaves to Mohamma Sani,

Mohamma had paid less, and a little less, and still a little less; and quite possibly, had concluded relations with Awudu by not paying at all.

To Haviland this was as simple as puffing the long, thin black cheroot. It happened so often. His attitude toward the slave-trade, of which Kano had so long been the center, was on a par with his attitude toward everything else. It was the custom of the country and none of his business unless chance happened to make it so.

But he knew that Mohamma Sani was not so blandly confessing his share in it without good and sufficient reason. So he accepted the confidence for what it was worth and did what was expected of him; thought it over for a reasonable time, then offered his advice.

"It is better to slit open a sack and lose a little money than to put the throat under the edge of the knife and lose much blood."

"But I am Mohamma Sani, the son of Abd-el-Karimi and the brother of Mallam Abdulahi!"

"And Awudu is the son of the Knife and the little brother of the Poisoned Arrow. Even a donkey-driver may learn much of these things south of Jemaan Daroro."

Mohamma muttered something obscene which was directed at the absent Awudu's head, then shrugged his shoulders and descended into thoughtful silence again. He did not want this kind of advice. There was no need for any man to take counsel in the matter of opening a money sack. Any one could do that. True wisdom advised how the sack could be kept closed without the slightest danger.

Besides, there was the matter of the balogun who had died so suddenly because he had talked too much. It would be just and proper, Mohamma thought, if Awudu were hanged by the white commissioner's police for the killing of the balogun. This would simplify matters greatly for Mohamma Sani—if it could be done. He thought Haviland might be able to help him.

"Why should I pay more to one who is already dead?" he asked, sipping his coffee slowly. "The children of a donkey-driver who has killed a chief of the Fulani will not shout from the housetops that they are his heirs."

"A chief?" mildly.

"The Balogun of Kadaja. He died with a knife between his shoulders."

"There are many knives."

"But this was the knife of Awudu."

"And there are many who are called Awudu."

Again Mohamma shrugged his shoulders, allowed the matter to drop for a little while, spoke of the price of French sugar and of the thieving practises of Arabs and Tuaregs and Absenawas and all other peoples who brought their goods to Kano to make an honest Fulani merchant pay too much. Then he added mournfully:

"But there is nothing Mohamma Sani can do. Not even though he knows that the good Balogun of Kadaja died with the knife of Awudu, the donkey-driver, between his shoulders. The white man's police have no ears for the words of a Fulani merchant who would speak so that justice might be done."

"And I, who did not see the knife go to bed," Haviland said simply, "can not speak truthfully to the white commissioner's police of what I do not know."

"But I have a witness—two, three—enough."

"Hausa, Fulani, Arab or Nupe—they will all lie for a price. And the white commissioner is not a fool. It would be cheaper to pay Awudu. For the knife that killed a balogun will not hesitate at a merchant."

Mohamma winced. He did not like that. It was too close to the imminent truth. Also, it indicated a lack of pliability on Haviland's part that was disturbing.

Then, just as he was trying to decide what to say next, the unexpected happened.

There was a commotion in one of the outer passage-ways; a sound of violent scuffling and of voices that were raised in anger.

"Brothers of lice! The maggot spawn of the mango-fly! You are but dust in my throat that I must spit out before I can speak with your master!"

And a second or two later, as Mohamma and Haviland rose to their feet, Awudu the donkey-driver burst into the dimly lighted room, breathing deeply and giving evidence of having had a most strenuous time getting there.

Several of Mohamma's household slaves were just a step behind him, but Mohamma, seeing who the visitor was, waved them out with a gesture. Then, knowing that Awudu was harmless with Haviland in the room, the Fulani assumed his most imperious attitude and turned to Haviland with an

air of patient submission to the will of Allah.

"Did I not say that the wall that is about the house of a Fulani is a wall no longer?"

Then, to Awudu sarcastically—"What is your message, O father of truth?"

Awudu drew a long breath, glanced briefly toward Haviland, then back to Mohamma again. His eyes held a dull, but crafty look, and his purpose was plainly reckless or he would not have come there at all.

"It is a thing that should be spoken, lip to ear," he said deferentially enough.

"Then it is surely a lie," Mohamma decided. "Or the whisper of a price I can not pay."

"It is a price," Awudu admitted suavely. "But it is the white commissioner's police who will seek for payment. At any moment. I have a brother who has no lock upon his tongue. He is one of the white commissioner's police, and with others he will come to the house of Mohamma Sani—at any moment."

Mohamma's eyes became shifty and his hands began to move in nervous aimlessness. Haviland, however, kept his gaze fixed lazily upon Awudu. He knew, just as Mohamma did, that Awudu had not come to warn the Fulani because he liked him.

"The white commissioner's police," Mohamma repeated rather dully, and his voice had become noticeably hoarse. "They are my friends. I will prepare——"

"They are also the friends of the dead Balogun of Kadaja," Awudu suggested softly and significantly. "And they will come with guns. But if Mohamma Sani is swift, I know of a place that is hidden. Even my brother, Amada, of the white commissioner's police, knows nothing of it."

Mohamma Sani, imperious trader in slaves and most careful assassin of baloguns and others who talked too much, seemed to break in the middle. The generous folds of his numerous *tobes* gave an appearance, all at once, of shrouding a body that had shrunk most perceptibly.

His eyes became unusually prominent, his lower jaw sagged, and it was the fumbling right hand of a man who had grown suddenly old that groped toward his waist on his left side.

Haviland's smile broadened just a little. He understood his host's unhappy predicament at once. And unquestionably it was not pleasant to have to choose between the threatened guns of the white man's police, and the long and ready knife of Awudu, who would, of course, derive great pleasure from a killing that would be ridiculously simple if Mohamma Sani accepted his offer of a way to "safety."

When the Fulani drew the knife at his waist, it was doubtful whether he meant to use it upon himself or upon Awudu, until it was seen that the hand that gripped the hilt shook so palpably that he did not seem capable of using it at all.

But it was this threatened action that made Haviland's smile become more pronounced. The dreamy, careless look in his eyes went out and a sharply defined pleasure came in. Simply and solely because the moment of hoped for excitement had surely arrived.

And, of course, in keeping with the custom of the country, it was his, Haviland's, bounden duty to give his host, for the nonce at least, the benefit of his services and protection, regardless of what he might think of him personally.

So he took a quick step to Mohamma's side and placed a huge, restraining hand on the shaking Fulani's arm.

"It is no time for talk or the drawing of knives," he said sharply, then gave his whole attention to Awudu. "I have eaten of Mohamma Sani's bread and salt. Therefore, I say he may go and go swiftly wherever there is safety for his feet. But Awudu is not the guide he would choose to lead him to a hidden place. So Awudu will stay with me until the white commissioner's police have come and gone."

Mohamma whined. It was the only sign he could make just then to express his gratitude, and it was smothered completely by the animal snarl that leaped involuntarily from Awudu's throat.

Then Awudu sprang—not toward Haviland and Mohamma, but away from them—toward the doorway. When he reached it, he spun about and crouched there, not unlike a jungle-cat at bay, the glint of a single, long lean "claw" winking dully in the flickering uncertain light of small, colored lamps.

"I have taken an oath of blood! And Mohamma Sani, whose flesh would stink in the nostrils of a Gannawarri, will pay and cheat no more. I have waited many days——"

Haviland turned abruptly to Mohamma whose teeth were chattering audibly.

"Give me the knife."

Mohamma's fumbling fingers released their grip on the hilt without a second's hesitation, and he at once opened his mouth to shout for his slaves. But it is doubtful if even Awudu heard the hoarse, inarticulate squeak that resulted. Without a doubt the palsy of death was already taking hold upon Mohamma's tongue and limbs.

Haviland ignored this. Balancing the knife in his hand he studied Awudu amusedly for a second or two, then spoke to Mohamma in a low voice.

"Follow at my heel. And softly. This is not a thing for slaves to whisper in the market-place."

Then, as he moved toward the doorway where Awudu crouched, he said definitely:

"Tonight the life of Mohamma Sani is mine. Tomorrow I know not. Go in peace."

Awudu hesitated, then backed cautiously into the deeper dark of the outer passageway. Haviland went straight toward him beckoning Mohamma silently to follow.

A second later, sounds of confusion from the front of the house indicated only too plainly the intrusion of another unusual element that had to be reckoned with. Awudu, apparently instantly aware of what the confusion portended, gave vent to a low guttural, wheeled sharply and vanished into the shadows toward the rear.

But, as Haviland knew only too well, this did not end the matter. It only began it. A slave scurried whisperingly into view, the whites of his eyes showing prominently, and the news he brought did not need any words.

A voice that spoke in English, mixed with Hausa, sounded drawlingly no great distance away, and Haviland had no difficulty in recognizing Tarlton, the residency's staff-officer of police.

So, without a moment's hesitation, he drew Mohamma after him in the direction which Awudu had taken, even though the dark of the passageways and the courtyard beyond them might readily have been filled with long-bladed treachery. For there was no saying how faithless Mohamma's bought-and-paid-for minions might be under the circumstances.

It was resaonably certain, too, that Awudu was not without friends in the Fulani household, and he had doubtless brought with him several sympathizers who were probably lurking in the courtyard or in the street outside the wall that surrounded it.

Haviland tried to follow Awudu, and in that first, most electric half-minute, Mohamma needed no encouragement to follow Haviland. The voice that spoke English was coming nearer and nearer, and the almost indistinguishable scuff of Awudu's feet was going farther and farther away. There was a cold sweat on Mohamma's forehead, and an utter lack of sensation in his body, but his legs moved swiftly enough, and the same instinct that kept them in motion saw to it that Haviland did not take a wrong turning.

They came to an open doorway and a breath of cooler air made the beads of perspiration on Mohamma's forehead colder still. Beyond them were shadows, black as the pit itself, filled with indeterminate shapes, some of which squealed or grunted, none of which looked like men. And this was most ominous, for it was unnatural to suppose that all of Mohamma's slaves had business elsewhere just at that moment.

There was, however, no time for speculation. Almost straight ahead, was the usual tunnel-like gateway that led to the street. Beyond that, if Tarlton's Hausa police did not entirely surround the house, was a vague promise of freedom and safety.

An involuntary whine escaped Mohamma as Haviland stepped out of the doorway; and there was a sufficient reason for it. For that first step seemed to act like a signal upon all of the shadows round about.

A tethered camel gave a thick, startled cough, then plunged squealing to his feet; then another and another. Shrouded shapes of men leaped suddenly into view in the midst of the confusion, and hoarse, whispering gutturals passed sharply back and forth as the shapes closed in.

Haviland did not pause. Certainly he did not give a thought to the circumstance that Mohamma Sani was not worthy. With a single word that commanded the Fulani to follow, he plunged straight for the gateway. And Mohamma followed. He clutched at Haviland's shirt in a choking frenzy of fear, missed it the first time, and then sprang in pursuit of it, more terrorized than ever because he had nothing to hang on to.

The camels wheeled wildly at the end of their halters, and squealed and bit and kicked, while other miscellaneous live-stock joined their several startled voices to the pandemonium. In the midst of all this, there was a scuff and patter of rushing naked feet, the dull flash of knives and the spectral forms of men leaping in to close the way to the gate.

Time was not measured by seconds or space by inches then. But Haviland's straight, unhesitating rush for the gateway —a rush that took no thought of the artificial confusion staged by Awudu and his companions—was worth at least a second or two, and several extremely useful inches.

A figure to Haviland's right and another to his left, seemed to solidify and leap and strike as if the same mechanism operated them both. Haviland stopped short, crouched, leaned well over to the left and his left arm shot straight out. A gasping grunt was his answer and a dusky brown knife-hand, drooping in mid-air, fell limply away into the deeper shadows at his feet.

Haviland did not wait to hear the knife fall. He spun sharply to the right and felt the cold flat of a naked blade—and a suggestion of its edge—sweep down his back from his neck to his waist and almost divest him of his shirt. He heard Mohamma scream as if in mortal agony and saw him go whirling past him toward the gate. Then Haviland jabbed sharply and sufficiently at the Hausa at his right and went on.

The tinkling fall of a blade at Haviland's heels was drowned by the Hausa's cry of pain, and by the chorus of ugly Hausa oaths that echoed it. And the ugliest of these oaths seemed to spring out of the ground at Mohamma's feet, scarcely a yard from the coveted gateway.

Perhaps the Fulani recognized the voice as being that of Awudu the donkey-driver. In any case, he did not even squeak; just stopped dead in his tracks, bent instinctively away and threw his arm shrinkingly up before his face.

Haviland laughed.

It was a perfectly natural sound, too; a sound of pure enjoyment; incongruous as it was at that time and in that place. As he cleared at a single leap the half-dozen paces that intervened between Mohamma's assailant and himself, it was almost as if it were the laugh itself that thudded into Awudu's ribs and bowled him over and over.

Haviland went down also, but rose instantly to his feet, only to see Mohamma's many-*tobed* figure, billow and sink into a queer, squatting heap, that sat upright for a second or two, then pitched sidewise with a little jerk and was still.

And then, in the queerer, jangling silence that momentarily followed, there came the sound of an English voice that asked quite distinctly in pidgin-English:

"What's matter, Yerro? What's trouble? Who's that out there? Looks like a white man? Where the ——'s that lamp?"

At once, there was a decided rush of shrouded shapes toward the gate; shapes that slithered away from the voice of authority and the threat of guns with a ghostly soundlessness that was equaled only by their speed. They slipped as wide of Haviland as possible, and Awudu, realizing the need for action quicker than any one else, in spite of his momentary shortness of breath, was the first to go.

Haviland observed all this plainly enough and made no move to stop it. He could find Awudu when he wanted him, almost any time.

Now, he stooped over Mohamma Sani a moment, slid the knife the Fulani had given him along the ground away from him as far as he could, then straightened and called out—

"That you, Tarlton?"

"Yes. Who's there?"

"Haviland. Bring a lamp, will you? I'm afraid they've got him."

"Who?" Tarlton came quickly down the courtyard.

"Mohamma Sani," Haviland said briefly, and added, while Yerro, a Hausa sergeant of police, brought a hurricane lantern:

"I wanted to buy a camel, and Mohamma thought he could sell me one of his. We came out here and ran into a lot of knives. My shirt's ripped, isn't it?"

"Good Lord! That was a close shave! And Mohamma——"

Again Haviland stooped over the still figure of Mohamma Sani, turning him gently over on his back.

And the terror of death that was in Mohamma's eyes almost made Yerro drop the lantern.

Also, though they found a long, lean knife sticking in the folds of Mohamma's many *tobes*, the most minute examination

brought to light no sign of a wound. Nor a single drop of blood.

SEVERAL days later, when officialdom had ceased to disturb itself about the whole truth of the matter, Haviland chanced to encounter Awudu in the Arab quarter.

Plainly, Awudu was doing his best to offer his services to a particularly villainous-looking Arab, whose caravan was on the verge of starting back to Tripoli.

Haviland grinned as he watched Awudu for a moment or two, then stepped softly over to him and tapped him on the shoulder with his riding-crop.

Awudu wheeled quickly and, at once, his all too ready knife-hand sprang swiftly to his waist.

"Peace," Haviland said quietly. "There is no need of knives or of going upon long journeys. The life of Mohamma Sani was not yours or mine. His blood was not spilled by any man."

Awudu gaped and backed away.

"And yet he died?"

"And yet he died."

Awudu's stare became more pronounced. It was mingled with puzzlement and unbelief; and, as a flash of understanding lighted up his eyes, he backed away from Haviland still farther, as from a dangerous and uncanny thing.

For, did not men say that when the *Bature* Haviland laughed, a black or a brown man died? And had not Mohamma Sani died—and without the loss of a drop of blood—at the very moment the *Bature* Haviland had laughed!

Haviland's dreamy gray eyes seemed to be turning Awudu's thoughts inside out. Slowly he smiled.

And Awudu dodged under the neck of a camel and fled.

THE DERELICT RANCH

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Barry Scobee

Author of "The One-Man Feud," "Sky, Land and Men," etc.

THE gray road stretched away over the rolling upland country to disappear in the far distance like a swimmer swimming out to sea.

In the big, swift automobile the young man spoke to his companion, the driver, who was garbed in the style of the Southwest big-ranch country with a peaked hat and high-heel riding-boots—

"How far would you say it is along this main stem to the next ranch?"

"Oh, fifteen, twenty miles," answered the cowman.

The young man, with an old brown war-bag between his feet, watched ahead through the dusty windshield. Presently he saw that the main road bent to the left and that a lesser used, dimmer road bent to the right, the whole forming a gigantic letter Y.

"Say," he asked, "don't you suppose I'd be more likely to strike a job at some ranch

off on a branch road than on the trunk highway? Not so many applicants back inland?"

"Wouldn't be a-tall surprized, seeing it's Winter and jobs are scarce."

"Do you know of any ranches on the branch road?"

"Well, I never been down that trail. But twelve, fifteen mile along is the Three Spot ranch. Big place run by a young fellow. Might pick ye off a job there."

"Might as well make my bow to the steers there as any place," the passenger decided. "If you'll let me out."

The ranch-country man brought his heavy roadster to a stop at the crotch of the Y.

"None o' my business," said he, "but seeing you are a stranger in this region—there's a norther comin' on."

"Yeah, I recognize the symptoms," replied he of the brown war-bag as he opened the door and kicked the kit to the ground. "I've been in this part of the old U. S. for a year or so."

He followed the bag out and turned back to close the door.

"Much obliged for the lift," he said. "Just so you'll know who you helped along the road—my name's Sidney Jenkins, Sid for short, an o. h. b."

"An o. h. b?" puzzled the man in the car.

"Ordinary human being."

"Oh! I thought you meant some kind of new disease the docs had wished on to us."

They laughed a little.

"An o. h. b.," added Jenkins, "that's got tired o' jammin' from pillar to post and being called Jenkins instead of Sid, and has come out here to hook up with people that have miles and sunshine and horses and steers for company."

He laughed, both in mild apology and mild derision of himself.

"Fired myself Saturday," he supplemented, "and here I am Tuesday forenoon, hikin' and picking up rides when I can."

"Well—seeing all that, I reckon you know what a norther is. Wouldn't lose any time arriving at the Three Spot. There's no place in between to stop at and get warm or get a hot lunch, and these no'ath winds sho' can get under the undershirt of—an o. h. b."

They grinned understandingly.

"Well," said the cowman, giving gas to the engine, "so long, Mr. o. h. b.—or Sid. Don't take any wooden money."

The roadster leaped forward and at once began to diminish in size down the gray line of road. Sid turned his attention to his own situation.

Around him, north, east, south and west, as far as the eye could reach, was a thin gray haze of impalpable dust, like a mist blown up from the sea. It was the forerunner that sometimes precedes the cold sting of a norther. Its movement was not perceptible to the senses.

As the blowing sea mists half-veil Angel Island and the more precipitous heights around San Francisco Bay, so this land mist hazily veiled clumps of stony mountains here and there, hinting at and hiding and making them mysterious. The sun was like a cherry-red stove-lid in the sky.

Nor was there ranch building or cattle or sign of civilization to be seen save the roads and a signpost at the junction. The sign bore in black scrawled letters—

To El Paso —— miles.

The number showing the miles had been shot out, as if some peevish traveler had differed with it radically about the distance.

Sid shouldered his old brown bag, with a blanket and his few personal articles well balanced in the ends, and struck southeast along the branch road.

The first perceptible stir of the wind drift from the north was arriving. Sid was well protected with a wool-lined mackinaw, heavy cap and thick, laced boots with woolen socks.

The walking was not bad. The road consisted of two wheel-tracks cut through the brown wild grass to the gray lava soil. The tracks were hard and smooth.

Sid set his pace by his old brassy wrist watch at three miles an hour. In the Army he had done more, but he was used to it then. Walk an hour and rest ten minutes until he arrived at the Three Spot; that was his plan. At that rate he should reach the place not later than three o'clock.

Before a mile of the road was behind him the wind had arrived and was licking up tendrils of the scant dust from the rocky tracks. It was spume, he ruminated, whipped up from the foam of whitecaps. The idea of the windy and misty sea kept recurring to him. He had crossed the Atlantic, over and back, as a soldier in the quartermaster's department in France.

When both hands of his watch were in a

line at XII he believed he had made six miles. It was cold. The wind was high by now, and the impalpable haze had given place to blown, biting dust. The gale scoured up dust from the brown grass land and whipped him with it or drew it out in long windrows across the open.

Sid rested a while, sitting in a rut with his back to the wind, and devoured two meat sandwiches that he had bought at breakfast time. Then he hurried along, maltreated by the storm. He did not think about anything in particular, except that he wished for shelter and fire and hot food.

The unfenced road ran over little hills or between them, and across rocky arroyos and tobosa-grass flats, making its easy way. There was no way to tell how many miles were traversed except by the watch and his pace, so that at last he came into sight of the Three Spot ranch house half-unexpectedly. He felt it must be the Three Spot, for there had been no other house or any road turning off.

Rounding a high and broken ridge of brown igneous rock, like a litter of wrecked freight-trains, Sid found himself on the brink of a deep cañon. The gray road followed the edge northward and to his right, up a gradual slope, to curve at last around the head of the cañon to the house.

Sheltered by the rocks, Sid stood and regarded the place.

The atmosphere in this rocky scape was clear. The house was not more than a quarter of a mile away. Sid could even see the lines of the weatherboarding.

The house was two stories and a half, a barn-like affair, painted white and trimmed in green. It stood in the embrace of a rocky *rincon*. This horseshoe of brown rock, which was a mountainside, sheltered it on the north, east and west. The front yard was the cañon itself and miles upon miles of southward distance.

To the right and rearward of the house from where Sid stood was the barn. To the left of the house, the high-fenced corral and a smaller building back of it.

Sid took in all this with a creepy feeling growing over him, for something seemed wrong up there.

Two huge black eyes kept blinking from the barn—the doors, upper and lower, swinging in the wind. It seemed to Sid that he could hear them bang.

The front door of the house was likewise swinging in the gale, blinking alternately black and white, black and white. Sid wondered why it did not click shut.

Despite the cold day, no smoke poured from the chimney. A windmill by a red-painted wooden water-tank raced as if the lifting-bar were broken or disconnected from the piston of the pump.

Obviously something was wrong, and, being an o. h. b., Sidney Jenkins was uneasy. And then something else thrilled him more deeply yet—a white cloth being waved frantically from an open window on the second floor.

"Somebody needs help," he thought.

He stepped out into the river of wind and went on rapidly.

II

THE road at the head of the cañon curved to the left toward the big, white house. In front of the house was a narrow strip of solid rock for a yard, with two pine-trees growing up out of the cracks.

When Sid reached the curve of the road he was to the eastward of the barn-like dwelling, and he received an even greater thrill, or shock, than had come to him on seeing the white cloth waving. For now he perceived that it was only a window-curtain being waved by the wind.

This made the mystery of the place suddenly thicker. An idea of complete abandonment came to him. Surely with the house standing open, with no fire, with the barn doors and a heavy corral gate slamming and banging and the windmill racing and shrieking, nobody at all could be about the premises.

The o. h. b. took in the surroundings carefully. As he had surmised, a vista spread grandly out to the southward, down the cañon, across open country, on to far-away mountains that undoubtedly were in Mexico. But no human being was about; nor even a horse, which he thought strange also.

The rattle and bang, the sway of doors—things loose and uncontrolled—grasped his thought. His mind reverted to the sea in comparison.

"Why, it's like a derelict ship in the middle of the ocean!" he thought. "If I go aboard what will I find?"

It has been said that no man can go upon

the sea without being altered by the experience. To some men the wide waters become a prison, an empty desert; to others, a mistress that they can not desert. For some landsmen the wide blue stretches or the gray white-capped heavings and tumult are fond memory. It was thus to Sidney Jenkins. Those brief, danger-filled days on the Atlantic, stories of the sea, the filmed pictures of ships and derelicts—they were a subjective part of him.

So strong upon him for the moment was the spell of the sea that in his nostrils was the odor of its saltiness, and in his legs the rise and tilt of the deck, and against his ears the swish of water at the prow, the creak of cordage and slap of canvas in the wind, the see-saw of a mast hanging overside, and the loose rattle of the wheel as the wave-tugged rudder worried it. And he beheld the tiltings of the distant, stormy horizon over the rail and through the braces.

Too, in this sharp imagining of his, he saw plague victims of a hell-ship scattered starkly about the decks with outspread, reaching arms—or pirates with earrings and red kerchiefs and bloody cutlases, all piled across one another where they had fallen in fight.

He drew away from this visioning with the realization that something real was at hand.

A derelict ranch!

Such a monstrosity! But here it was, loose and rattling like an abandoned ship on the heaving deep.

Abruptly he became tuned to the situation, alert, aware that possibly danger stalked, but grimly aware that he must go and investigate as any citizen would do, any o. h. b., be it man or woman.

He headed for the swinging front door, blinking there behind the pines.

Under the racing windmill, off to one side, the red wooden tank bristled with icicles, where a high wind had slopped water out at the top. Sid had known that it was very cold, for he was chilled to the marrow, but he had not thought of it as being so terribly freezing cold as the ice indicated.

There was a big porch on the front of the house, Sid observed, standing well up from the ground. As he drew nearer he saw that the wide front door was speckled with bullet-marks and splintered as if shots had been fired through it from both sides. But why, in its swinging, did it not catch and stay closed?

As if answering the question something on the doorsill obtruded itself on his sight. He stood petrified with one foot on the lower step.

For the something was a pair of feet, or boots, with toes down together and heels up and apart, making a wide-drawn V. A man sprawled out on his face inside the hall.

"Huh!" grunted Sid, then shouted—

"Hi, there!"

The hobnailed soles did not move. The door swung against the legs, but the body held its rigid position.

Sidney Jenkins, o. h. b., shrugged off his kit-bag and let it drop to the ground. Then, all ears and eyes, he went forward to investigate.

The figure wore laced boots, khaki pants, blue denim jacket. The black hair was thick and unkept. He appeared to be a Mexican. But what held Sid's eyes was the man's position—his arms and hands.

The body was stretched across the floor on its front at its fullest length, and the arms and hands were reaching out greedily, as if in the final second of activity the soiled fingers had been about to grasp some coveted treasure.

A bullet-hole or gash in the back of the head and another in his back, where the blue denim jacket puckered slightly, showed how the man had come to his mortal end.

"What," Sid asked himself, "was the bird reaching for?"

For no object lay beyond the eager fingers.

Sid shrugged, or shuddered, and turned his attention to the house.

III

THE house seemed as barn-like inside as it had outside. The hall was wide. A wide flight of stairs ascended to the second floor. On the right side of the hall, just beyond the reaching arms, was a door that gave to what Sid recognized as the main living-room of the ranch house. It looked as if looters had had their will in it.

Books, papers, magazines were scattered over the floor from shelves and cases. The library table was turned legs-up in the middle of the room. Pictures were smashed on the wall. And chairs were drawn up around a big brick fireplace, suggesting that those who had played such havoc had also toasted their shins before a blaze.

A telephone was attached to the wall in one corner, over a small table, but with receiver to ear Sid realized that the instrument was useless. The thing was dull, lifeless, indicating cut wires.

A hat-rack stood on the opposite side of the hall. Two old hats of the prevailing wide-brimmed, peaked-crown style hung on the hooks thereof along with a woman's feather-covered headwear that Sid believed was called a toque. As he caught sight of these things, the dainty toque moved as if shuddering. At the same time the black hair of the slain man's head lifted as if in horror.

Sid jerked back a step—and then barked out a raucous laugh of relief. The wind, eddying in at the open door, was causing the uncanny movements.

A door by the hat-rack gave into what evidently was the ranchman's office. A roll-top desk was rifled, with the contents of pigeonholes flung to the floor.

"Looks to me like somebody was searching for some object," thought Sid, "that was small enough to go into one of those little boxes."

Next was the dining-room, where little damage was manifest save that the round oaken table was shot full of holes. The kitchen was a wreck, with broken dishes, beans, flour and utensils on the floor. In one corner a stairway descended to the cellar. Below in a little cement room were a gasoline engine and an electrical generating outfit, an automatically working light-plant that Sid knew was in use on many big ranches. Also there were ranch supplies here—canned stuff, hams, bacon, potatoes, a case of eggs.

From the kitchen Sid found himself in a rear hallway. A door opened to the porch, another to a bedroom, and a third to a bathroom. The bedroom was torn asunder, the mattress slit and the cotton sticking out, and the dresser mirror was shot full of holes, or rather wholly shattered. The bottom of the bathtub had been perforated by a half-dozen heavy bullets.

Sid peered back into the kitchen at something which puzzled him—a stack of soiled dishes in the sink, stained with food and with dust that the gale had propelled through invisible cracks. Dishes sufficient for two or three diners. But where were the diners, and when had they dined?

There was something depressing here. Sid returned to the front hall, where the body lay. And there he saw something that he had overlooked. It was a blue automatic pistol between the arms of the corpse, close to the head, where the wind-blown black hair brushed it. It was as if the man had dropped the gun so that his fingers might be empty to seize the coveted treasure just beyond reach.

The o. h. b. thought of picking up the pistol for use in emergency, but hesitated, inwardly shrinking. He had never touched a corpse, not even in his Army experience. Yet danger urged now, and he stooped and took up the gun. Inspection disclosed that it was a .45 Colt's with a full magazine.

Sid ascended the wide stairway to the second floor. A wide hall with rooms on either side confronted him. A search showed ripped beds and looted rooms, shattered mirrors and another perforated bathtub. Articles of jewelry, if there had been such, had been taken from the dressers. Nothing of particular value was to be seen.

Sid caught himself walking tiptoe and with bated breath, clutching the butt of the pistol protruding from his big mackinaw pocket. He tried to relax.

He found the open window, from which the white curtain streamed, and closed it. Oddly the house at once seemed much warmer.

At the rear he discovered a narrow flight of stairs going to the third floor, and for the first time he hesitated. Danger could easily be lurking there.

A sense of some one near watching him, or listening tensely, came to him.

Out of patience with the fears that were getting hold of him, he abruptly began to climb the stairs, not trying to be quiet. With head and shoulders above the level of the floor he stopped. A small dormer window at each end of the long garret room gave some light. Old household gear was scattered about, such as a broken couch, trunk, bedstead, a three-leaf Japanese screen.

No person was to be seen. No sounds came save the roar of the norther, or its fine sifting whistle and whine through the interstices of the weatherboarding. He felt remote. The building vibrated under the pressure of the gale.

Nothing here. This finished the house. It certainly was a derelict! He went back to the first floor.

In sudden sharp curiosity he stooped to turn over the body. It turned stiffly, the *rigor mortis* that may endure from one to six days still holding the flesh. The face that was revealed was startling. Sure enough it was Mexican. Across it was a happy grin—a triumphant, greedy, gleeful grin.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Sid.

He went outside to continue his investigation.

IV

THE wind of approaching night blew higher and colder. The Winter sun was low. On distant ridges the dust rolled like the smoke of a battle.

The big corral to the westward of the house could be seen from the front porch. It was empty. A brief walk to a shed and a small house to the rear of the corral revealed—nothing, save that they too had been looted and damaged.

The barn, an unpainted structure, lay to the rear of the house and close to where the brown boulders of the mountainside began. Within it Sid found a makeshift garage. A stench of gasoline met him. Cans of the liquid and of oil, sitting on the dirt floor, had been shot full of holes, and a heavy roadster was likewise perforated, particularly the gasoline tank.

Sid ascended to an empty hay-mow and hooked the upper door shut, and then propped the lower one shut with a plank. Standing there outside, he looked around.

"That finishes it," he thought, "and nobody home. The Mexicans have raided this place. One more score against them. The people have just about fled across-country to another ranch."

His explanation had the fault however that it did not satisfy. The Mexican's body had been there for hours. There had been a film of dust on the garments, quite thick in the wrinkles, that had drifted in while the body lay there. Thus sufficient time had elapsed for the people to return with help had they been merely at another ranch.

The enclosing rocks, coming night, the stark loneliness and desolation depressed him.

Only one thing to do—stay alone all night in the big house.

He set out along a path that passed a woodpile and split and went both to the kitchen door and the front door. At the woodpile he stopped to gather kindling and chunks for a fire that he so much desired.

In the act of loading wood on one arm he found himself close to another body.

Sid instinctively sat still, like a partridge when danger threatens. The body was that of a white boy, dressed in rough ranch clothes. It lay on one side with the arms outstretched as if the boy had been carrying a burden, such as a woman or a child, when bullets overtook him. The suggestion was as definite as that of the Mexican reaching across the floor.

As Sid squatted there a new sound caught his ears, a startling sound that stopped his breath.

Music!

Or was it? It was like wisps of ragged, wind-blown smoke. He stood—and the sound was no more.

Some trick of the wind, he told himself, and went on to the house. He put the wood down and dragged the Mexican's body outside and rolled it under the porch.

"Can't stand you under the same roof all night," he said aloud for the sake of hearing a voice.

Sid went to the kitchen. A full woodbox of fuel was handy, but the stained dishes repulsed him. All at once he was very weary, longing for a bright fire and warmth and rest. The burden of the day and of his discoveries were pressing down on him. He went to the living-room and switched on the chandelier, which had not been damaged, perhaps because the looters themselves wanted light.

Presently a bright fire was going, and he drew up a deep chair. It was luxury to his bones!

Sid had no intention of sleeping, no thought that he could sleep under such circumstances with the bedlam of the storm going outside.

But he did sleep, to awake with a start and a sense of fear that sometimes grips a man in slumber—the fear or apprehension or feeling that a face had been peering at him through the door, and the further feeling that some person had withdrawn from the door on tiptoe.

He strode to the door, pistol in hand. The hallway was dark. He went on through and out to the porch where he had left his kit-bag, forgotten. From the bag

came a flashlight, and with this he lighted the hall and the stairs. Nobody in sight. He found the switch and lighted the hall chandelier.

His watch showed a few minutes past eleven. He had slept in the chair for hours. The fire was out. He went for more wood, ravenously hungry now rather than cold. Though the moon rode high and clear, he at first used his pocket flash until he saw how light it was; then he pocketed it. He could see a long way, could have made out a moving man down along the cañon road, he thought.

Another thrill was in store for him. When he stooped to get the wood he heard the sound of music again.

The wind dropped away for a few seconds as if on purpose for him to hear, and he caught the razzy, jazzy blare of an orchestra!

Without the possibility of doubt it was music, but where it was he could not make out. Somewhere in the rocks above.

He headed toward the rear of the barn, or garage, determined to climb the rocks if need be and find out what it all meant.

V

THE precipitous face of the mountain would have presented a stiff task of climbing to a man in daytime. At night, even with the bright moon, it was a real job. It made Sid clamber and twist tortuously.

Frequently he stopped to listen and to watch for movement. The house and barn were now below him. The norther blew through his garments and seemed to him to blow through his flesh to the marrow of his bones.

At the end of an hour his curiosity was worn pretty thin. At the moment of deciding that he would go back and wait for daylight he caught sight of something that made him stare.

A phonograph set down on the rocky shelf along which he was making his way!

He hunched down in the shadow of the rocks lest he be seen. There it was, not fifty feet away, an old-fashioned box with a big fancy horn. And silent. He kept motionless and watched.

He had a clear view, it seemed to him, of the narrow shelf. Not a soul was to be seen. He thought of going some roundabout way, like a fox taking in a trap-site, but a glance told him that it was impossible to go either above or below the shelf at this point. The only way was forward or back. After what he believed to be at least ten minutes of watching he chose to go forward.

As he approached the music machine he saw that the shelf widened by a yard or so, that there was a little jog in the wall on his left hand. As he came even with the jog, before he could look beyond it, a gun was poked out into his face and a voice commanded—

"Hands up!"

He did not have hold of his revolver in his pocket, as he had had much of the time. He jerked his hands above his head.

A woman's face was close to his. She stepped from behind the jog. She lifted his revolver and felt in his other mackinaw pocket, but, finding only the flashlight, drew back.

"Who are you?" came her demand.

"May I lower my arms?"

"Never mind! Who are you?"

Sid did not relish being taken prisoner by a woman or girl. So he made flippant answer—

"Oh, just an o. h. b."

"*What?*"

"Ordinary human being."

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" she insisted.

"I came from the house."

"You are the man who walked in this afternoon?"

"Exactly."

"Where from? Why?"

Sid was about to make further flippant answer when it came to him that she was a girl, just a girl in a difficult situation, hard put to it. He answered earnestly.

"I came from El Paso. I've got fed up on cities. The ranches look good to me. I'm hunting for a job, and that's the whole truth."

She did not cease with her searching gaze, but there was a change in her, as if she was trying a plan of subtlety instead of straight hammering.

"You know Jack then," she said.

"Jack?"

She ignored his uncertainty. She leaned forward, smiling a little, and asked with rich confidentiality—

"Do you wish to know where *they* are?"

"Who?" questioned Sid blankly.

She laughed, one quick unreadable note. Then the hardness came back to her face, and hardness into her words—

"How many Mexicans have been down there in the house with you?"

"Not one," he answered. Why?"

"You're a fool or you're blind! Haven't I seen them at the windows all day?"

"Have you?"

"Of course I have. I can't understand a white man hobnobbing with them. Are you in on the deal?"

"Miss, I'm not in on any deal. I had concluded that the house had been looted and the boy killed in a Mexican raid. When I came I searched the house from cellar to garret and did not find a soul except the body of a Mexican in the hall."

She studied him intently. His words had carried the calmness of absolute honesty. He saw that she was bareheaded, rather just now consciously took note of the fact, and that she wore low shoes and had a blanket around her for a coat. He saw in the shadow a nook, a kind of bear's den, behind the jog and under the rock wall. Blankets were heaped there.

"How long have you been there?" he asked.

"Ab-bout thirty hours."

She shuddered.

"I don't get it," said Sid. "Do you belong on the ranch here?"

She hesitated as if not liking to be questioned, then replied—

"Yes."

"Why have you been playing the phonograph?"

"To toll the Mexicans from the house! To capture them or pick them off from ambush here. Sounds cold-blooded; but they would have picked me off, or worse."

"And you got me!" Sid admired ruefully.

"And don't know what to do with you!"

She laughed shortly.

"Turn me loose. Put the gun away. If you are here defending your home and yourself I'm ready to stand by you. I'm on the square."

She did not give in much to this. He saw that he would have to give her substantial proof, and at once perceived a way—if it would work.

Her gun no longer pointed at him, but was held in readiness outside the blanket. His gun she had tossed back into the blankets in the cubbyhole.

Almost as he thought of this, before some undefinable movement about him could afford a clue for her sharp eyes, he struck out, knocking her gun clattering to the rocks. In the same movement he butted her backward with his shoulder as he stooped to snatch up the revolver.

She caught her balance and came up facing him, holding her ground defiantly.

"Pardon me, miss," Sid pleaded earnestly. "I had to prove somehow that I am on the square, so you will go back to the house and get food and find a fire. To prove it—here."

He presented her the revolver butt first.

"Why, I—" she stammered. "If that's the way you feel about it—there's your gun on the blankets."

"Think I'm your friend, miss—or madam? To help you out of this mess?"

"You've given ample proof. But at that I'm doubtful about accepting. You called this a Mexican raid. It is, but it's far from being an ordinary one. There's a lot involved, including danger. I hesitate to run a stranger into it."

"Huh!" retorted the o. h. b. "I eat danger."

"Then you may get a square meal of it! Is the house much looted?"

Sid told her the truth. She was regretful but not distressed, explaining that all personal valuables were stored in El Paso. He told her of the slain Mexican and how he had taken the body into the yard. He convinced her that the house harbored no Mexicans, she admitting that she had seen none after Sid's arrival.

"There could have been just one Mexican," she agreed. "And it is possible that he left to avoid meeting you. I can command most of the house and yard, but he could have got out of a window on the west side and got away without my seeing him."

"Shall we go down now?" he asked. "We'd better get some warm food. There's still a lot left in the cellar."

"I'll go," she agreed, "but I warn you to be careful—on the lookout. The Mexicans involved in this are the shrewdest and most relentless of any operating along the border. There is, I might say, a great deal at stake. But if you searched the house——

"The best way down is just here, a sort of path."

VI

THE slope of the east side of the *rincon* was not so steep, and there was a sort of path, so that the girl and Sidney made rapid headway toward the house and, to Sid's anticipation, a hot meal, which he craved. But at the bottom, in the shelter of the rocks not a stone's throw from the woodpile, the girl stopped.

"Frankly," she said, "I'm skeptical. There were Mexicans in the house—There's a lot involved— Well, the main man to deal with is the infamous Colonel Guala."

"That fellow!"

"That fellow! Cleverest smuggler in Mexico. An actor. Shrewd as forty other men. He could almost hide in a keyhole, he's so chameleonlike, so elusive and clever."

"I searched," he reminded.

He remembered too the feeling on the two occasions that a human being was near. Yet he was skeptical about such hunches. And he knew that she must get to the house for food and warmth.

She pondered, here in the sheltered nook. Her glance chanced to fall upon the spot where the boy lay.

"Poor Sammy!" she said. "He was a half-witted boy who wandered in when the war was on. He stayed with the people holding down the ranch for Jack and me—I'm Ruth Caloway and Jack's my brother. Afterward he would not go away."

"And they shot a kid like that!"

"Well—Sammy was getting ready to wash the dishes after supper when Jack called out that a raid was on. He ran back and told me to go while he covered my escape.

"I ran to the bedroom across from the kitchen and got a pair of blankets. We've been raided before, and I had spent one Winter night in the rocks half-clad. I didn't mean to freeze again. I told Sammy to get more blankets.

"I made for the 'wolf's den' up there where you found me. When Sammy came he had brought, instead of blankets, his most treasured possession—the old phonograph, with a jazz record. He went tearing back for blankets, and that was the last I saw of him.

"Later some of the Mexicans left, taking Jack along. I know, because he called out for my benefit. I thought all were gone and came down to the house. It was then I found Sammy, lying there, shot, with an armload of blankets.

"I went on to the house. The lower rooms were lighted. I stepped in at the front door—and saw a man sitting in the living-room by the fireplace. I knew him. I'd got a peep of him once at Ojo, down on the river.

"About the same time my arms were grabbed from behind. I—we—struggled for a minute. I saw that the man was Pasquale, a bad Mexican, Guala's sergeant.

"I managed to throw what I had in my hands, my gun and a little cube of wood, some little distance away from us. Pasquale let me loose then, his eyes lighting up like fire at that block of wood. He jerked out his revolver, and at the same time he dived for the block. Or else he caught his toe and fell headlong. He went down flat on his stomach.

"I dived, too, for my gun, which was nearest to me. I got it too, and I bounced up and away several feet, covering Pasquale. His hands were empty. He was stretched out reaching for the block with all his might. I shot, shot twice. If I had not got him he would have got me.

"Then to avoid the other man I ran out through the front door. At first I hid behind the woodpile, but it seemed dangerous there. I felt as if Mexicans were surrounding me. So I got Sammy's blankets and made back for the rocks.

"The reason I've told you this—I want you to understand, in going to the house, that there is real danger. For the man last night by the fire was Guala himself. But I'm ready to go on if you are."

VII

COLONEL GUALA—as Jack and Ruth Caloway, and the border, knew the story, and as Sidney Jenkins heard it—had operated in Mexico for five years, smuggling gems from the Orient and drugs and anything costly and not bulky.

But Guala was bigger than a mere swaggering border smuggler. He had managed to elude the Mexican officials and the American Secret Service until he was rich, a figure among the people, a sort of legendary friend of the poor, and an actor. That is, an actor in that he could assume various

characters. He could think as a gentleman and be a gentleman, or as a goat-herder and be a goat-herder. The romantic color attaching to him had it that he had been an actor in Spain and in Paris.

Guala had a captain named Callajan. The name brings a vision of an Irishman, for the name is pronounced Callahan. However, he was Spanish-Mexican without a trace of Irish. The name probably came around through Spain when the Irish and Spanish were pretty thick with one another a few generations ago. He was a big, bearded fellow, Guala's right-hand man.

About a year before the two men quarreled and split. Each managed to draw away with about half his gang, fifteen or so men apiece.

The quarrel came about by Callajan finding out that Guala had been cheating on the divvy. The captain set out to get revenge. He began by tipping off the customs and immigration inspectors on the United States side of the Rio Grande whenever Guala was in the vicinity.

A few days before, the customs men at Ojo had received a note from Callajan saying:

> Get a feather in your caps by capturing Guala. Watch for the fool with the wooden block.

This puzzled the customs men. They called on the Secret Service for help. Step by step a great smuggling scheme was uncovered.

Callajan had obtained from a trading Chinaman in Parral a little block of wood. It was described as having been sawed from the end of a four-by-four pine timber. It had a little hole in it and was strung on a pliable wire.

Callajan treasured this above anything he had ever owned. He set out to arrive with it at the Texas border, and he took precautions. He started alone in a donkey cart, but followed or preceded a few miles by his men. He had it arranged pretty well. He was dressed as a ragged *pelado.* and he beat his donkey into better speed frequently with the greasy wooden block on the wire.

Colonel Guala knew about the cube of wood and laid a plan to get it. He must have read Callajan's instincts of action. He began to harass the lone donkey-cart driver, not too obviously but sufficiently to make him a little apprehensive.

Callajan, in the long overland trip, usually managed, with the appearance of casualness, to camp in the camp of his tried men. One evening Guala arrived in the camp with a string of "beads" around his neck. That is he had two or three spools, a doorknob, a buckle or two and a harness ring on a wire around his neck. He was playing the simple idiot, giggling and squealing if any one paid him attention.

Callajan must have thought just what Guala undoubtedly intended him to—

"Here's a string of idiot's beads for me to string my precious cube of wood on."

Anyhow in the night the cube was strung on the wire while the "idiot" slept, and after that Callajan abandoned his donkey cart and took charge of his men. They always kept a strict eye on Guala. The reason they did not know their former colonel was because he was greasy and dirty, with hair down in his eyes, and with a twisted hand and foot and personal habits that were revolting. On the other hand it is possible Callajan knew him and had a trick of his own up his sleeve.

Guala had his men instructed. As soon as he was one of Callajan's party the Guala contingent began to harass it, compelling Callajan to hurry day and night toward the Rio Grande and a market for his block of wood.

Then when within two days of the border the idiot suddenly disappeared from the Callajan band. The story of Guala's trick at once became known. Perhaps Guala could not refrain from boasting. The Mexicans laughed loudly. They are fond of such plays.

But the man who is the victim loses face. He is likely to become desperate or cunning. He wishes to turn the laugh the other way. He swears vengeance.

The American operatives watched the border for Guala. The smuggler crossed as a goat-herder, a meek fellow driving a dozen goats. Around the neck of one goat was a tinkling bell. Around the neck of another was a dirty, black block of wood on a wire. It could hardly be seen for the goat's hair. At first Jack Caloway thought it was the tinkling bell.

Caloway got the cube, but Guala escaped. Caloway returned to his home, only to be attacked a few hours later by Guala and his band of trained outlaws.

VIII

WHEN Ruth Caloway and the o. h. b. finished a meal of ham and eggs, stewed corn, fluffy biscuits, canned peaches and coffee, they went to the living-room with the thought of building up a rousing fire and spending the remainder of the night in the easy chairs. Sid carried in the wood, and the fire was presently roaring with the wind. They turned the library table over to a natural position, shut off the hall lights and settled down.

"About Jack," said the girl. "He's been in many a tight corner and got out. But I'm always uneasy—you know. He's been gone too long now. I can't imagine what has happened."

She seemed extremely weary all at once. Her brightness was gone—the brightness with which she had evaded when he asked what the wooden cube contained or was made of; the brightness with which she had told of Guala's tricks. In a few minutes she was dozing.

Sid did not sleep, but he fell into deep reverie before the hot fire, to be plucked from his thoughts abruptly.

There had been a sound, a sound of cautious footsteps in the hall. He sat up, and at the same time the girl did also, alarmed, wide awake.

The sound came again, a dragging footstep.

The girl and Sid arose and with their guns ready, went side by side to the door. The hallway was dark. She whispered—

"Stand here ready to fire."

She stepped across the hall and switched on the light. In the flood of whiteness they beheld half-way up the staircase the back of a bareheaded man. He stopped. With slow mincing steps he turned around to face them. Ruth Caloway cried out—

"Guala!"

Weary eyes regarded them out of a gray face. Yet it was not this that held them fascinated. It was the strange physical attitude of the man. He stooped as if he bore an incredibly heavy burden. His arms, bandaged in white from wrists to elbows, hung heavy and motionless at his sides. They seemed to pull his shoulders down with the weight of lead.

The man minced around again, giving them his broad back. He set his right foot on the next step above and dragged the left up, so that they saw he was wounded also in the foot.

There was something ridiculously futile in his going away from them—as if he hoped to escape their bullets or their speed. Like an old man caught in a reprehensible act and trying to escape.

And as Guala went with Sid and the girl staring after him, another sound came—the rattle of hoofs over the hard road, shots, and shouts at the door.

"The Mexicans are back!" said Ruth. "We must escape. Come!"

She ran to the rear of the hall. Sid followed a few steps. A rattle came at the front door. With the thought of protecting her for a moment until she could get away, he stopped and dropped to one knee behind the hat-rack.

The wide front door of the wide hall flew open like a blast of wind. Sidney Jenkins, o.h.b., had never faced this sort of thing before. With an idea of self-protection he hunched against the wall, pointing his revolver out before him.

By the merest shaving of a second he did not fire. A white man stood in the doorway.

He was medium-sized, well-built, clean-cut. He wore the high hat and boots of the border and was in flannel shirt sleeves. His hands were behind him as if bound.

In the darkness beyond the door Sid caught glimpses of shadowy figures, the glint of a gun or two. From out of this darkness a big Mexican slid up behind the white man. He grinned over one shoulder and stuck out a revolver toward Sid.

The gun flashed, and a bullet cracked close to Sid's ears. Sid could not shoot for fear of hitting the American. To jump for the rear door now was to be shot in the back. Nothing to do but drop his gun, and he dropped it.

"You win," he called out, "using an American for a shield."

The Mexican shoved his human shield before him and advanced into the hall, other Mexicans pouring in behind him. The hall was filled at once amid much jabbering, and Sid was taken into custody by two of the captors.

The Mexicans, twelve or so in number, smelling of the night wind and of camps, noisy and rough, ganged around the fireplace, sticking out their hands and feet to the heat. In a minute or two they left

this to consider Sid, who leaned against the end of the library table. The big Mexican leader shoved the bound man over to Sid and barked out a string of words, whereupon the American addressed Sid—

"I'm Jack Caloway."

He regarded Sid in a mixture of warning and questioning. It was plain he was asking who this stranger in his house was.

"I get you," said Sid.

"This man," Caloway went on, "is acting captain. He wants to know where the two Mexicans are that were here."

Sid thought: "I suppose he means Pasquale and Guala. If I say that one's killed and the other's wounded, it'll be a fine dish to set before the king."

Aloud he asked—

"Do any of these birds speak English?"

"You bet!" spoke up one of the outlaws. "You no try tricks."

"Tell the boss," Sid instructed, "that I'm a stranger here. Happened in yesterday forenoon looking for a job. I didn't find a living person around the house when I looked."

It was evasion for Caloway to interpret as he saw fit. There was some talk between Caloway and the leader; then the former addressed Sid again—

"He wants to know where the square of wood is."

Before the o.h.b. could answer the Mexicans suddenly lifted their eyes from him and stared over and beyond. Sid craned around and slid from the table to his feet.

Guala stood in the doorway, gray-faced and stooping with the burden of his leaden arms.

IX

THE outlaw chief, the smuggler of gems and narcotics and other inducements to crime, dragging his wounded left foot, advanced farther into the room. He ran his glance over his men, circled there under the light of the chandelier.

They were a hard, wind-blown lot, garbed in yellow khaki and huge sombreros with thongs knotted under their chins to hold the headgear on. They wore *bandoleros* of cartridges, and three or four had their short carbines.

In the midst of the men was one who was handcuffed, a big, clumsy fellow twisting his hat, grinning sickly, half-scared out of his wits.

"Ah, Tomas!" exclaimed Guala in a danger-sweet voice.

A hush fell over the men more profound than it had been, a sort of forecast of tragedy. Guala in a more matter-of-fact manner spoke to Sid.

"*Señor*—ah——"

"Jenkins."

"Señor Jenkins; thank you. It is better when one can address by name. *Señor*, this man with the clinking wristlets is our good Tomas, the very best marksman in all of Mexico. At the same time he is the blindest of men. Last night in the darkness of the upper hallway he mistook me for a gringo and fired three shots. Tomas does not waste lead. I am wounded in both arms and one foot.

"When he saw his mistake he ran away, but my men have brought him back. I am glad of that because I may need an expert marksman this night. That will be a question for you to settle. You can shoot straight, eh, my good Tomas?"

The man twisted at his sombrero until it seemed he would destroy it, and grinned his fearful grin.

"Now, Señor Jenkins, I have plied a certain profession for years, assisted by my good friends here, more or less. It is such a profession as to cause your Government's Secret Service, and certain officials on the southern side of the Rio Grande, to desire my capture very much. The good Señor Caloway and his sister are perhaps the least known but assuredly the most efficient operatives of your S.S. on the border. He will substantiate my words that I am a coveted individual. Eh, Jack?"

Caloway nodded affirmation.

"So you see, Señor Jenkins, I do not wish to be taken by either side. I should be ground as a grain of corn between millstones.

"A pair of days ago my good friend Jack obtained from me an object that I prized very highly, a cube of pine wood four inches square. He brought it here to the Three Spot ranch, and when I and some of my men came after him to remonstrate, he spoke of Ojo. He offered to go there with us and do what he could toward proving that he did not possess the treasure.

"Jack did not convince me. I suspected

that his sister had the cube. Also I was wounded and did not fancy a ride of many miles with my arms as heavy as lead. I told my men to bring a physician, but it is plain they were prevented, and prevented also from returning within four or five hours, as was arranged."

Guala stopped to speak to his men in their tongue. One or two mumbled answers.

"Ah!" went on Guala in his danger-sweet voice. "They were *afraid* of the gringo cavalry.

"*Señor*, to prevent the girl getting away, my men drove off all the horses at my orders and shot up their automobile and gasoline cans. I kept with me my faithful sergeant, Pasquale.

"My shrewdness did not fail me. The girl did return to the house. She had the cube of wood. But she shot and killed Pasquale, just when he all but had his fingers on the block. Then she got away.

"I remained in the house throughout the day. Once it seemed that you had found me. I was behind a screen in the garret.

"The girl was here with you but a few moments ago, *señor*.

"I have told you this long and uninteresting story to impress upon you the importance of answering my questions. With that block of wood and what moneys I have saved I would have been able to retire—will be able to retire—to spend the remainder of my days in ease in San Antonio, New York, Paris, Madrid. That block of wood contained women, wine and song; the opera, travel and luxury; and peace and contentment for gray hairs.

"Jenkins—" and now Guala spoke harshly—"where is the block of wood? Answer or face Tomas and his gun!"

The o.h.b. looked at Caloway, wishing in his heart that there was help in this tight corner. Caloway was grim, tense.

Guala began to speak in Mexican to his men. Every one of the bandits got a gun ready. A pistol was handed to, or rather put into, Guala's right hand. He was able to hold it and to lift it up to a shooting position, but he dropped it down again, the pain plainly more than he cared to bear.

Guala spoke to Tomas, who stepped out, almost green with fright. His lips were drawn back from his teeth. At further curt words of the leader he went to the farther end of the room. The other men watched him with pointed guns, evidently intending to prevent treachery, for now a gun was shoved into the manacled hand—a heavy automatic. Tomas handled it with the clumsiness of a cub bear.

Guala spoke again, and two men seized Sid and backed him against the brick fireplace.

All at once Sid beheld a transformation in Tomas. The man, facing action in that which he perhaps did better than anything else in the world, the firing of a gun, was no longer a loose clown but a steady marksman ready, eager, for action. Tomas may have thought to reinstate himself with Guala by neatly executing an American.

"Jenkins," spoke the leader harshly, "at my nod Tomas will fire. Where is the cube of wood?"

"Colonel Guala," replied Sidney Jenkins, o.h.b., as earnestly as he knew now, "I know nothing about the cube of wood."

Guala minced a quarter of the way around and nodded to Tomas.

X

AS IN any man of courage and persistence, there was a quality in Sidney Jenkins that prevented his giving up. Facing the outlaw chief's threat and Tomas and Tomas's gun, he did not for a single second go into the process of resigning himself to a sinister fate. He was shocked, numb; circumstances were not wholly clear; but he strove to keep his head.

The shots roared in the room. Sid felt himself swaying, or at least seeming to sway, but at the same time he was aware that the bullets had struck the brick on either side of his head. He felt his ears and cheeks sprinkled sharply with chips of brick, and possibly of lead. And then from the silence he heard Guala ask—

"Did that loosen your tongue, gringo?"

"No," Sid choked out.

"Once more, where is the wooden block? Or the girl? Or where did she hide during the day? Will you answer?"

"No!"

And this time the answer was sharp and final.

Again Sid saw Guala nod to Tomas. Three shots blasted out, and Sid felt bullets nick his ears and press his scalp. Involuntarily he threw up a hand and felt for blood. There was none.

"How now?" demanded Colonel Guala.

Sid's answer was a glare. Guala nodded to Tomas again. But a bobble occurred in this ritual of terrorizing. Tomas, with two or three shots left in the automatic, hesitated for the fraction of a second. He may have had a dull thought that with a shot or two left he had a chance, but that with an empty gun he was defenseless. In his hesitation he gave one wild glance around.

Guala barked one word.

The room seemed to explode. The ready guns in the hands of the men had fulfilled their threat. Tomas, riddled with bullets, fell like a weight of clay to the litter of books and papers under his feet.

"It pays," observed the gray-faced Mexican, "to be careful about shooting Colonel Guala. But it is small revenge to shoot Tomas. His troubles are over in this world; mine are still upon me."

He looked down at his bandaged arms.

"But they may be assuaged," he added, "by the feel of the block of wood in my hands."

He addressed his men again in Mexican. Two of them threw themselves upon Sid, shoving him tight against the brick wall of the fireplace. A third man grasped in each of his hands two of Sid's fingers of the right hand and stooped and twisted about so that his back was against Sid's breast and Sid's arm over the Mexican's shoulder, the hand extended out and to the front, palm up.

Quickly another of Guala's henchmen stooped and with a sliver of wood took up a glowing ember from the fire the size of a woman's thimble. He held it over Sid's palm, and dropped it. Sid instinctively wrenched with all his muscular power, jerking aside the fraction of an inch and turning his palm, so that the ember fell to the hearth.

The captors threw their strength more compactly against him. Another ember was snatched up, half the size of a billiard ball.

"You may talk whenever you wish," suggested Guala. "What?"

"No!"

"The block? The girl?"

"No!"

"Very well then; the ember shall lie upon your palm until the stink of burning flesh——"

An interruption came, a sharply barked—"Look out!"

Two shots, close together, filled the room with their roar. Sid heard a revolver rattle to the floor—some *hombre* with a bullet through the hand, he thought as he caught sight of the person who had fired.

It was Ruth Caloway. She stood in the doorway of the living-room, a smoking revolver in her hand, eyes darting here and there, ready to fire again at a second's notice.

"Listen, Jack, Mr. Jenkins!" she called out. "There's another gang coming up the road. I heard their horses. They're pretty close. It might be soldiers, but it's more likely Callajan. Mr. Jenkins, take a gun and a knife from a Mexican and cut Jack's bonds!"

Sid worked rapidly. In a moment Jack's bonds were loose. In the same instant a fusillade of shots outside and the rattle of broken window-glass announced the arrival of the other band—and announced its nature, which was surely outlaw, else the house would not have been so fired upon.

"Run!" shrieked Ruth.

Sid saw her strike the push-in switch in the wall with the heel of her left hand, and then darkness.

Sid instinctively sprang away from where he had been. He rushed for the door, and found himself in a jam of bodies. The Mexicans jabbered and cursed and mauled at each other. There were more shots, and one of the loud-shouting ones in the throng suddenly squealed as if a bullet had found him.

The squeeze became tighter as the pressing bodies got between the doorway sides. Sid could not get his breath. Then all at once he bulged out on the other side and went sprawling on all fours. Instantly he was up and racing for the rear door.

Sid let himself out to the porch with the idea of heading for the barn or saddle-shed to get his bearings. However, he was greeted with shots that splintered wood and shattered glass close to him, and by shouts of:

"*Viva Callajan! Viva Callajan!*"

He got one startled look at the yard. Flashes of pistol fire were coming from behind an old farm-wagon and from the corner of the house.

Sid slid back into the house, preferring to risk the mêlée in the darkness and amid

numbers rather than remain outside where he was the sole target.

XI

 AS SID stepped within and closed the kitchen door he found himself in front of a jam of men making for the exit. He stepped to one side. One of the men opened the door. He yelped as if hit by a bullet and slammed the door shut.

There was a shout, and the men scurried. Though he could not see, Sid knew that they had lined up along the sides of the back hall for respite from the lead coming through the door.

Sid was in a cold sweat lest some one should find and turn on the electric incandescent. He felt naked and unprotected at the thought. He had the gun that he had just lifted from the scabbard of one of the bandits. He felt and found that it had several cartridges in the magazine.

Some of the lined-up men began to reply to the fire through the closed door—a blind and foolish proceeding. The shots were uncomfortably close to Sid. He eased into the kitchen.

There was a breath of warmth still here from the supper fire. The stove was still milk-warm. Two big sombreros were silhouetted against the west window. Stooping to avoid outlining himself against the light anywhere, Sid moved on to the dining-room. A man firing into the night was at the window there.

Sid got into the big front hall. The space under the wide staircase offered a measure of protection and a great deal of darkness. But he no sooner stepped into it than he found himself bumping another man. To his credit he neither grunted nor started back. His nose told him that he was elbow to elbow with a Mexican.

Sid got back against the wall. Where was Ruth, Caloway? This procedure of clinging to the house was not getting him anywhere, was not helping his two friends. What should he do?

Brisk firing was going on in front of the house. Bullets were thudding here and there. There seemed to be firing from the up-stairs windows.

When Sid had been prowling over the rocks looking for the jazz music he had inwardly cursed the piercing wind and cold, but now he longed for the freedom of the mountainside.

The imminent danger in the house, he realized, was that somebody might turn on the lights. It would possibly mean that he or the girl or Caloway would be shot down. He resolved to get to the cellar and cut the wires.

He was hastened into action by the man not a yard from him asking a question in Mexican. After two or three seconds of silence the man repeated sharply, suspiciously. But by then Sid was cat-footing it through the dining-room door.

The fellow was still at the dining-room window. Sid hoped that the two in the kitchen had moved, for when at the west window they were standing on the trap-door that let down to the cellar. Peeping in, he saw that they were gone.

Sid lost no time. In a pinch of seconds he was in the cellar with the door closed above his head. When getting up things for supper he had found two electric lights. He tried to snap on the one at the foot of the steps now, but no light came. After a moment of fumbling it came to him that the current had already been shut off.

With the realization of this came also the awareness that another person was in the room. He began to retreat up the stairs, only to hear heavy feet tramping on the door. The Mexicans back at the window! Sid got away from the stairs quickly.

A door at one side opened to a set of shallow steps on the outside of the basement wall, almost under the back porch. Sid had noted the door and its bolt when locating a ham and canned stuff. He felt for and found the door now and slid the bolt.

Then with the unexpectedness of lightning the two lights came on, went out. They did not illumine the sacks and cans and machinery for a second. Sid saw no one, yet he instinctively ducked. No shot came, but the voice of Jack Caloway—

"Say, you didn't miss by more than the thin edge of nothing getting a bullet through you!"

"Whew!" Sid blew out. "I came down to shut off the current."

"So did I. You seen Ruth? Did she get out, do you know?"

"I don't know. The house is surrounded."

"I think she's out. She had time. She wouldn't have stayed inside unless—do you

know whether she had the cube of wood concealed in the house or not?"

"She didn't say anything about where it was."

"Well, we've got to find her. Outside first. This is a whale of a mix-up. We're between two fires."

"They're yelling, '*Viva Callajan!*' outside."

"Sure. He's been watching the Guala outfit like a hawk. Awful bad blood there. Let's get out."

Caloway led. The pit of the outside steps made a breastwork for them when they stepped into the windy darkness. The night was duskier than it had been. The moon was almost gone behind the rocks on the west. A sniper was plunking away industriously from the wagon near the barn.

Two or three persons were scuffling near the saddle-shed. Suddenly a cry came from them:

"Jack! Jack!"

"It's Ruth!" shouted Caloway.

His shout was like a command of "Forward!" Both men sprang out of the pit and started on the run to answer her cry.

XII

THE distance from the house to the saddle shed was about the equal of that from the home plate to second base of a baseball diamond. As the two Americans sped along the sniper behind the wagon yelled out a warning.

Sid saw that two Mexicans had violent hands on Ruth, trying to compel her to go somewhere—toward the rocks evidently. At the warning the two men jerked around, still holding the girl. They drew out their guns and began to fire at Sid and Caloway.

At this fusillade Caloway went jumping sidewise and ducking and charging on, making himself a difficult target. He dared not fire at the men for fear of hitting his sister. Sid understood and followed the more experienced man's example.

One of the girl's assailants emptied his revolver, evidently, for he made a gesture or two of firing without any flash coming. He broke away and ran for the protection of the old wagon.

The other assailant hugged Ruth to him as a shield and began a backward retreat, firing sparingly.

The girl showed her gameness. It made the darting, charging, watching Sid remember what Guala had said of her—that she was in the Secret Service. Her courage was a credit to the service. Struggling, twisting, harassing the enemy as any good prisoner should, she got hold of the Mexican's gun arm. She threw her weight to prevent further firing.

Sid and Caloway leaped forward. The man saw them coming and quailed before the charge. Letting loose the gun, he started for the wagon, but one shot from Caloway doubled him up. The ranchman stripped off two *bandoleros* from the body.

Without a word, mutually understanding, Caloway and his sister got inside the shed. Sid followed. They ran on through and down the slope to the corral. The snipers fired after them.

When the three were behind two or three heavy fences in the corral they stopped to get their bearings and take invoice.

"Where is the wooden cube?" asked Caloway of Ruth.

"Up in the 'wolf's den,' " she answered. "And listen, Jack. They know it!"

"They know it! How do they know it?"

"I told them."

"Told them?"

"When I got out of the house and came running to the shed," she went on hurriedly, " a man came running after me. I thought it was you. I blurted out— " 'The block's up there in the blankets in the rocks where I've been hid all this time.'

"But the fellow, instead of you, was that dressy Mexican, What's-His-Name, at Ojo. Has a peaked hat and boots like you and speaks perfect English. That was he who ran away when you and Mr. Jenkins came up. He'll tell Callajan, of course. He's Callajan's man.

"Just as I finished saying that, before I saw he was not you, he struck my gun out of my hand and grabbed me. He called another man from the wagon, and they tried to make me lead them to the hiding-place. So that's how they know."

"That makes it bad," said Caloway quietly. "You couldn't help it though, Ruth-girl. We won't let 'em get that block after all this. We've got to make our getaway before they leave off attacking the house and come hunting us."

Caloway, then the other two, climbed part way up the fence to get a look at the

yard, to see what was going forward. Frightened horses, evidently Guala's, were huddled below the corral. A bugle-call arose above the sounds of shooting to the east of the house.

"Old Callajan!" exclaimed Caloway. "He blows that bugle himself. They'll be after us in a minute."

Most of the firing seemed to drop away at the notes of the bugle, as if startled into quiteness. Caloway said it was because the men were answering the summons, leaving only Guala's men inside the house still firing. The three dropped down from the fence.

"We've got to make a getaway," said Caloway. "We've got to get that wooden block and hit north for the railroad."

"I haven't much ammunition," said Sid, "in case of a fight. Less than one magazine full."

Caloway divided between Sid and his sister the fuller of the two *bandoleros* he had taken from his victim.

"Now let's go while the going's open," he said, and led the way.

XIII

THE Three Spot ranch house sat to the eastward of the center of the rocky horseshoe that opened to the southward. The so-called "wolf's den" where Ruth Caloway had hid was in the northeast curve of the horseshoe, northeast of the house.

The corral was west of the house; and Sid, Ruth and Caloway went to the westward of the corral to reach the rocks. The distance for them to go to arrive at the hiding-place and obtain the cube of wood was something short of a quarter of a mile.

Through the centuries boulders of igneous rock had broken off the mountainside and rolled down to the bottom. These boulders, some as large as motor-trucks, most of them considerably smaller, were the rocks that lay at the foot of the incline all the way around the *rincon*.

When Caloway, leading, came to the first of the rocks and tumbled monstrosities of the volcanic age, he stopped for a word of instruction.

"We'll stick together. In case of a fight we'd be more effective. Besides, we won't get lost from one another that way and lose time hunting."

He swung a pointing finger around the curving mountainside they were to follow.

"Look at that. Dark as night, with the moon gone. Rough—plumb badlands! They'll never catch us except by an accident. Come on!"

The climb at once became precipitous. So dark was it that Sid, in the rear, had to cling close on the heels of the others to be able to follow.

The ascent was swift and breath-taking. Watching as they went, they saw the Mexicans cross the yard, some riding and some leading their mounts; but when the gang got into the shadows of the rocks they were no longer discernible. Caloway signed for Sid and Ruth to stop and listen.

"Somebody, maybe Callajan himself," said Caloway in a moment, "is instructing the men to form a skirmish line up and down the mountainside and comb the rocks to the eastward. They'll be right after us, but by the Lord Harry they can't travel as fast as we can! Let's go!"

"Don't forget Guala's on the job too," Ruth reminded.

They hurried on, climbing over crags and rocks, sometimes clinging like goats, helping one another up and down or over gashes and cracks that would be roaring cataracts after heavy rains. Two or three times they heard the knock of a carbine against a rock, and then they got away from these sounds.

"We're leaving old bewhiskered Callajan and his men behind," triumphed the Secret Service man and ranch-owner.

"Not far to the den now," said Ruth.

They had not gone twenty steps after this when Sid cautioned them and hissed out:

"Look! The east side!"

There was a dim glow, a flick of light.

"An *hombre* lighting a cigaret," declared Caloway. "Now I wonder if that was a lone sentry or——"

His question was answered by the knock of a rifle on a boulder, on ahead and not to the rear of them.

"When Callajan came over to the corral and rocks after us," said Caloway, "he brought his horses and all. I doubt if he left men on the east side. It sure sounds as if Guala were maneuvering on the east side of the *rincon*. If he is we're due to be caught in the jaws of the trap unless we speed up faster than they."

Then their perplexity was answered unexpectedly. A shout sounded down below

them in the back yard or on the back porch. Sid did not understand, for it was in Mexican, but he comprehended a commanding note. The voice, loud and far-carrying, shouted a message.

"It's Guala!" thrilled Ruth beside Sid.

"Old Guala doesn't miss a bet!" Caloway praised ungrudgingly. "Animosity with Callajan wouldn't make Guala stand-offish if he thought big profits were at stake."

"What?"

Sid did not understand.

"Guala is down there shouting up to Callajan to join forces," Ruth explained, much stirred. "He says for Callajan's men to close in from the west and he'll close in from the east."

"Guala's got the advantage somehow, you can bet on that," Caloway said. "He may know that he is closer to the hiding-place than the other side is. May have seen you or Jenkins around the northeast corner here. He may think that the other gang will drive us to the hiding-place and his men will be close to grab the cube and kill us. Oh, he's slick! He's got a trick hid somewhere."

"Jack, we're in a tight place. We've got to hurry!"

"I'll say so!"

The voice below bawled out again, like a colonel drilling a regiment.

"He says to wait a minute, to look sharp," interpreted Galoway.

"Something about a 'great torch,' " Ruth added.

" 'Great torch.' What's the old eagle up to anyhow?"

Held by curiosity and apprehension, the three stood in a knot listening, trying to penetrate the night for some sign of action, their shoulders humped to the high wind that rolled down the mountain. Caloway tried his hand at cheeriness.

"Thrills of Government work, eh, sis? This is about as tight a little box as we ever got in."

She sucked in her breath hissingly for an affirmative answer, and he added reassuringly:

"But we'll get out! What's that? Look at the house!"

Lights were appearing rapidly in the windows—in the garret, on the second floor.

"Why, I cut the wires of the light plant," said Caloway, puzzled.

There came a puff of flame from beside the kitchen porch, out of the cellar.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Caloway. "They've set the house on fire!"

"To make a light to find us!" Sid whispered.

"That's their *hachon*, their 'great torch'!" Ruth cried. "Nothing can stop it. It will make these rocks as light as day!"

They took up their journey grimly, swiftly.

XIV

THE three Americans were to the rear of the barn at this juncture. Here were the most fearfully precipitous rocks that they had to pass over. They helped each other with word and hand and boosting up.

"We've got to get to the den and get that block," panted Caloway. "First there takes the block and goes on over the mountain if we get separated."

"What if I get it?" asked Sid.

"Reckon you proved yourself back there in the house. I'll trust you with it."

It seemed to the refugees that no time at all was required for the house to catch thoroughly afire. A terrific draft must have developed at once from the open basement door, from the open doors and shot-out windows on the first and second floors. Tongues of flame were soon licking like vipers' forks from the little garret window and through holes in the roof.

"The Government will have to pay us, Ruthie," comforted Caloway.

"Such monstrous destruction!" she stormed. "A shame, a shame!"

There crept over the rocks, over the yard, the woodpile, the corral, a light as of coming dawn.

At first this light helped them to make progress. Before they could see men below, or could be seen from below, they reached the end of the rock shelf or ledge on which, a hundred feet farther, sat the phonograph. They began to run stoopingly, on the last lap of the race to the den.

At this instant the flames broke fully through the roof, making the entire area within the horsehoe as light as if the noontime sun had broken out. There came yells from the Mexicans, yells scarcely surpassed by the war-whoops of red Indians in battle, and the blast of shots and the *whirr* and *spat* of bullets among the rocks.

They straightened up and ran. They arrived at the den. The jog in the cliff gave them security from the lead of Callajan's men far to the rear. By lying down in the blankets they were protected, for the moment, from Guala's men, closer on the east than the other men on the west.

The den was no more than a cleft in the cliff. It was shaped like the human mouth held open. Its floor sloped back from the shelf. When they had backed in, feet first, and lay flat on their stomachs their heads and shoulders were exposed.

Mainly their position was a strong one. The shelf under their chins dropped straight down ten or twelve feet. Its lip protected them in front. The cliff above them prevented shots being fired straight down, if men had been above. The danger points for them were the rocks that they had just traversed—bullets could be fired directly from there—and the rocks off to their left front. It was from here now that the Guala men were shooting.

Fortunately Guala's men had not yet got high enough to do effective work. As long as the three kept well down they could not be seen, yet could manage a shot now and then at some daring adventurer.

Bullets spat constantly against the smooth face of rock above them, chipping off fine particles or splattering down lead. To protect themselves the three got under the blankets and drew the ends up over their shoulders and heads.

In the course of this shift Ruth felt about in the blankets and drew out an object which she threw down on the rocky shelf before the eyes of the men.

"The cube!" exclaimed Sid.

It was a square block worn smooth and greasy and black. They let it lie there, too much occupied with self-protection to bother.

The Mexicans, Guala's men, became daring, and Sid and Caloway were kept busy for a little time. They were at least a hundred yards away yet, but getting nearer. Caloway got one or two. One surely, for when hit he rose erect, yelling, then collapsed.

The mountainside, the yard, the gray road down along the cañon, were now as light as day. The "great torch" of the burning house was rising with a steady roar. The mighty north wind seized entire flaming shingles and strips of weatherboarding and hurled them far southward into the abyss of the cañon. It was a spectacle.

Occasionally a bullet struck the old phonograph; and finally one cut through the horn near the small end, and the fancy piece fell to the shelf, rolling back and forth almost in reach.

By now Callajan's men had got nearer on the west. They were clinging to the rocks, firing, shouting. They were directly at right angles to the den, and the heads and shoulders of the Americans offered scant targets, yet their bullets played around, threatening, dangerous.

"The pincers are tightening," said Caloway.

Sid saw that the ranchman was white and grim. Until then the o.h.b. had not known how desperate Caloway was. He had been aware only of his own desperation.

"They're trying hard to close in," Caloway declared. "If we can hold out till the fire burns down a little and darkness comes again——"

"It will be growing daylight by then," said Sid.

"You're right. I'd forgot how near morning it is."

"And besides I've only four cartridges left."

The announcement caused the border man to stare in consternation. Sid sighted carefully at a man's head and fired, the muzzle of his gun kicking up. One of the four cartridges was gone. Caloway was staring at his sister. She answered his unspoken question—

"I have *one* left."

"And you're saving it for yourself! Good Lord! I've been so busy— I didn't know we were so bad off. If we only had ammunition——"

"Feed 'em the wooden block," said Sid. "That's what they want."

"They want us too."

Sid took up the block.

"Throw it away down in the yard," said he, "and let them fight for it."

"You couldn't throw it beyond the rocks. It would make them swarm down around us. We'd be helpless."

"But I've got a plan. Four shots left make a man think. I thought of the Bible story of David and Goliath. Dave had a sling and pebble. They came in handy in a pinch."

The look of expectancy that had come to

the man and his sister faded to weary helplessness. Fighting Mexicans with a sling and pebble!

Sid drew a blanket out in front of him. He dug out his pocket-knife. He nicked the edge of the blanket and tore a strip from one end about six inches wide.

"Now," he directed, "get hold of that phonograph horn for a megaphone. Tell the Mexes in the lingo they savvy that we will surrender the cube."

Caloway, wondering, brightening a little, wormed out until he could grasp the horn, and keeping down on his elbows he swung it aloft for the Mexicans to see, then brought it down and called through it. He repeated and repeated, turning the horn here and there, and when he had finished he elevated the horn again. There were no shots. The Mexicans were at least watching and listening, suspending hostilities for the moment. Sid began to crawl out from the blankets.

"You're liable to get shot," Caloway warned. "You better let me do what you have in mind. I get paid for this and you don't."

"Might as well get plugged now as an hour from now," Sid answered.

Sid got the cube in his right hand and straightened up. Not a shot came. He stepped to the very edge of the shelf, holding the cube aloft, as high as he could stretch. He held it lightly and with his left hand he displayed the strip of blanket in a wide gesture, like a magician about to perform a trick.

XV

IT SEEMED that the fire, the storm, the bandits—the whole outrageous night caught its breath and paused to see what amazing thing these white men were about to do.

Suddenly inspired by his act to whimsicality, Sid bowed graciously and continued with broad gestures for a moment to show his invisible and silent audience the block and strip of blanket.

Then he gripped the ends of the woolen strip in his right hand and made a long loop. Into the gullet of the sling thus formed he ostentatiously placed the cube.

He swung the sling about his head, trying it, getting the feel. It went faster and faster, climbing to a maximum of speed and reach. And when he was ready he gave one great heave and sent the block and sling together sailing out against the lighted sky.

As if in applause, the night let itself loose again. The wind howled with a louder voice. A corner of the house caved in, sending up a vast billow of sparks. Shots were fired.

At the peak of its upward curve the cube fell away from the sling and bent toward the ground, while the rag kept on, blown by the wind. The cube fell in the yard, equidistant from the woodpile, the barn and the rocks. It was a mighty throw. The wind surely had helped.

Sid dropped flat down on the rocks to watch.

A bareheaded Mexican popped up from behind the woodpile and ran toward the block of wood which could be seen in the brilliant light as a mere speck on the ground. Guns cracked here and there, but the runner kept on.

Nearer and nearer did the daring fellow get to the treasure. Almost to it, he extended an overeager arm. Then a bullet found him. He pitched forward, slid like a ball-player for a base and lay still, his arms outstretched like Pasquale's.

Sid heard Ruth exclaim in horror under her breath.

Another man appeared on Guala's side of the yard to make the run as the other had done. He had no sooner started than one was running from Callajan's sector. When each man was about fifty feet from the block they stopped and began to pump lead. The Callajan man went down first, and then slowly the Guala fellow collapsed.

"Bad blood," murmured Caloway.

Throughout this battle of the two, more than two were engaged, for the Mexicans all seemed to be shooting, evidently firing at their opponent's runner.

A vicious fight set in, a stalking, cunning battle between men behind rocks and other shelter striving to make headway toward a little block of greasy pine out on the ground in the light of the flames.

"They've forgot us," Sid exulted to his companions.

"Now is our chance to get away," Ruth suggested.

"No."

Caloway was positive.

"We can be seen as plainly as ever. The fire is just drawing to its height. If they see us start now they will send a few shots

our way, maybe more than a few. Why risk it? Wait till the fire goes down. It will still be shadowy then. Our chances will be much better."

There was logic in this. Nothing more was said.

The fighting below grew hotter.

The heat of the burning house warmed the air against the rocks, lent a degree of comfort to the watchers. The heat must have been almost scorching to the Mexicans.

The scanty grass over the rocky yard burned in a circle around the house, creeping backward against the wind toward the barn and the woodpile, being blown out by the gale, rising again. Sid thought of the oil and gasoline-soaked ground inside the barn, which yet withstood the heat because of the direction of the norther.

Ruth spoke once of her clothing that was being destroyed, of her cut glass and other dishes.

Without the least warning so far as the watchers knew, a charge developed. Before they knew what was happening eight or ten men on each side were running toward the treasure, firing, shouting like mad.

Both groups appeared to be trying to cover the attempt of one man to get the block. But every time a man rushed toward the coveted object he was shot down. Once Ruth cried out in protest—

"Evil, error, wrong destroying itself; but why do men have to kill so!"

"Human greed," said Sid.

"Animosity; hate also," allowed Caloway.

"Error destroying itself," repeated Ruth. "Human greed is at the bottom of it."

She plunged her face into the blankets and wept.

The men below stayed like wolves at the kill, plunging in, dropping down, yelling. Twice Sid distinctly saw a man shoot men who were down writhing in their blood. The ranchman made grim comment—

"Won't be many wounded left at that rate."

At last, sickened, Sidney Jenkins, o.h.b., turned his face away. Likewise did Caloway.

"I've never even heard the equal of it," declared the border man. "They won't stop till the last man's gone. This was a raw feud."

"Guala, I don't see him down there."

"Nor Callajan, so far as I can make out. Think he would be easy to recognize. He wears a heavy beard. Maybe they've been killed. Chances are that Guala was. He was terribly handicapped."

While their eyes were turned away the fight dwindled abruptly, ending in two or three quick shots.

At this there was not a man to be seen, nothing but bodies on the ground. Two that had not been there before lay so that the cube was no longer visible from the den.

"Is it possible?" asked Sid in horror. "Not a man left?"

"Looks that way."

Caloway could hardly talk.

All at once the house fell in, the flames flaring high.

"Greed and hate," said Caloway in awe. "I doubt that common Mexican bandits ever played for such high stakes before, or ever hated quite so much."

The fire dwindled away.

Ruth Caloway wept, or slept, there doubled up among the blankets.

Sid and Caloway kept a kind of dreary watch. But it seemed that the fight was over for lack of fighters. Frightened horses had fled past the burning house and down the road. One or two could be seen.

Possibly more than one Mexican had turned craven and found a horse down there to ride away on. But Sid and the border man doubted it.

Day began to break in the east.

The bed of coals that had been the house brightened in patches and waned, brightened and waned; and here and there little flames climbed up into sight to burn even the last splinters.

"There'll be some wounded anyhow," surmised Caloway. "When full day gets here so we can see any hostile move we'll go down and look around."

After a while Sid spoke.

"It's about light enough. The burning grass is almost up to the bodies. It might set the clothes of a wounded man on fire. Guess I'll go down. I threw the block down there. Wouldn't hurt if I brought it back."

The ranchman made no answer. He was very weary. It occurred to Sid that the man had likely been going without sleep for at least two days and nights.

Sid made his way down watchfully. And when he had got almost to the last scattered

boulders the crawling grass fire reached the inflammable moisture inside the slamming door of the barn, and the barn burst into flames with a *whoof!*

And from out of the barn, driven by the flames, stalked Callajan, limping. Sid knew it was Callajan by the heavy beard, by a bugle hung at the belt—knew because of Galoway's description.

Then a figure raised up from behind the woodpile. Guala. Stooping under the weight of his leaden arms, carrying a pistol in his right hand, he limped out and headed toward the block of wood that lay between two bodies.

Callajan too turned toward the treasure. But it did not seem that the two men were aware of each other. Yet they were bound to meet.

XVI

THE coming of morning brought no mercy from the mighty, flowing tide of the north wind. It beat upon the ancient boulders down here at the foot of the horseshoe like a heaving, hissing surf. Again the comparison with the salty sea was in Sidney Jenkins' mind; and the comparison flowed on as he saw old Guala, the smuggler, and Callajan, his captain, stalking to their doom.

They—these men beyond middle age—were like two old buccaneers of the pirate seas, cruel, greedy, vengeful, fighting to the end.

Beholding each other at last, they stood for a little time and stared as if unbelieving. Then they dragged on toward each other, like unbeaten and revengeful fiends.

Sid thought to interfere. He would call to them, threaten to shoot them down if they did not drop their weapons and surrender. He thought how foolish that would be. For there was something in their attitude, in their terrible stalking of each other, that said they would not stop for bullets.

Bullets, bullets to kill—that was what they had in mind above all things, above life and God. They would fire upon Sid if he interfered, or else pay no attention.

Sid could not think what to do. He drew out his gun with its three shots. But he could not shoot. It would be assassination. He decided to call out—

"Halt!"

It was talking to the wind. If the men heard they paid no heed.

Colonel Guala and his captain, Callajan, kept on. When Callajan, with the burning barn behind him like a tortured curtain, was so close to the wooden block that he could have stooped and picked it up, Guala was yet a half-dozen steps away.

The outlaw chieftains stopped, face to face. They raised their automatics slowly. Callajan got his to shooting position first and fired.

Guala, leaning forward, met the bullet. The impact straightened him upright.

Quick as a wink, after the bullet struck, Guala raised his wounded arm and fired. He fired that once, while Callajan fired twice again.

The two stood teetering in their tracks.

A thought rode through Sid's painful mind—

"Error destroying itself—wickedness and sin and human greed finding its end in agony."

Sid had never seen a man killed before this night. He was only an o. h. b. He dropped down behind the boulder on his knees and like an idol worshiper bent his face into his arms to shut out the hideous sight of the two men falling across the bodies of their men.

Sid was aroused by a touch on the shoulder. Ruth Caloway stood beside him, her face unsmiling, serious as the night had been.

Sid looked up at her. She said nothing.

Sid got up. He remarked something about wounded men and started to the place of carnage.

"Better be careful," Ruth warned. "May be a man lurking yet, waiting to get the block."

Sid went on. He remembered that the grass fire had been about to reach the bodies. He saw that it had burned out within a foot of a coat.

As he moved among them he stooped and shook the bodies. None responded to him. Guala and Callajan were likewise in the last sleep.

Sid picked up the block of wood and went back to the girl.

Together they started up the slope of the rocks, where they could see Caloway working his way down.

Sid gave the cube to Galoway when they met.

"What in the world," he asked wearily, "is there about that block of pine to be the cause of all this?"

Caloway may have seen the necessity for cheeriness, for he answered:

"Oh, it isn't so bad as that, ol'-timer. The gangs along the border frequently shoot themselves up severely. This between these two crowds was inevitable. Bad *hombres*. The wickeder they are the harder they fall. The border is rid of some tough ones by this night's doings. It just happened that this block was the immediate cause. Pretty soon we shall go down and look for wounded—then get to a telephone."

"What will you do with those bodies?"

"Umm—I don't know; get 'em clear away, though. We'll want to rebuild here. Eh, sis?"

"A modern house," she said, but without a great deal of interest, which seemed natural under the circumstances.

Caloway gripped the block in one hand and struck it against a rocky projection. Three times he did this without effect.

"Tough," he commented. "Chosen for that very reason, I suppose. It was split once and glued back together, else it wouldn't contain what it does—or is said to."

He laid the cube down and drove the big blade of a jack-knife into it with a stone. The block split neatly.

A puff of white cotton was exposed in a globular cavity of the cube. Caloway shook the sphere of cotton to a smooth place on the boulder where the three had sat down. He was curious, excited. His fingers trembled.

"I've never seen these," he said.

But he let them lie, tantalizing his sister and Sid. He grinned at their impatience.

"Why hurry now?" he asked.

"So that," observed Sid, "is what Pasquale was reaching for, whatever 'that' is. That is why you stayed up here in the cold, Miss Caloway, and wouldn't risk a trip down for fear of Mexicans. That is why you mistrusted me, why you fled the house, why——"

"Why everything," she replied. "That, and the fact that I was doing a little work for the Government again. But I'm through with such work from now on. And Jack too. Aren't you, Jack?"

"Umm—maybe."

Suddenly eager, Caloway reached out his trembling fingers and pulled the cotton apart, and held on his outstretched palm three brilliant-cut diamonds, all of a size.

Ruth exclaimed in ecstasy. To Sid's astonished gaze the beautifully matched stones looked as large as English walnuts.

"The Mandarin Diamonds," Caloway announced as if introducing a personage. "The Mandarin Trio, worth a fortune—a hundred thousand dollars, two hundred thousand; I don't know how much. Whatever a man could get for them. How a Parral Chinaman came to possess them is more than I can imagine."

Ruth sucked in her breath hissingly in the way she had when much stirred.

"Get them to El Paso as quickly as you can," she urged. "They are danger stones."

Caloway still held them out on his palm, fascinated. The red sun, just above the horizon, made the diamonds flame with golden fire. Caloway dreamed momentarily; Sid dreamed.

What a treasure! More tempting than a woman's eyes, richer than wine, as precious as eternal peace. No wonder Guala wanted them. To take them and sell them and have money— Sid shuddered and dragged his gaze away from the tempting glitter.

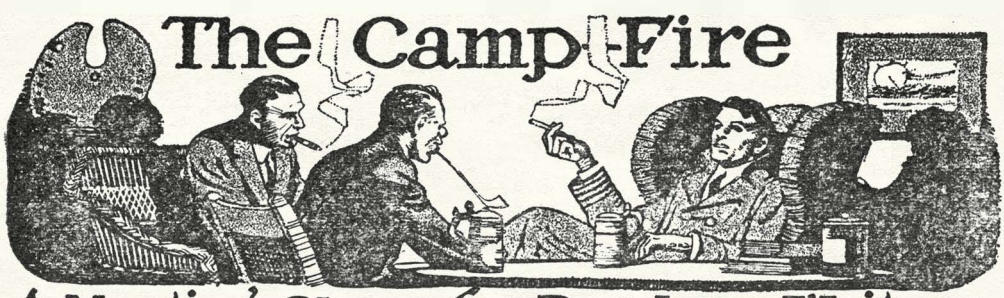
He looked away over the landscape. Such a place! That southward distance, the blue sky, the hills. Already he loved it. Even under the pressure of the frigid wind he loved it. How could he have ever thought of it all as a derelict ranch, an abandoned hulk? Why, it was alive with sunlight and the wind and—the future!

He spoke to Caloway, keeping his eyes away from the flaming seeds of sinful greed.

"The Mexicans can fight for the diamonds if they want to," said he. "All I want is a job here on this ranch."

"Sure," answered the ranchman, hastily cramming the stones into his sister's hands. "You can have anything you want, from foreman up to cook or chore-boy."

"Make it just a common hand for a while," answered Sid. "I'm only an o. h. b."



A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

LONG ago Ramsey Benson followed Camp-Fire custom of self-introduction on the occasion of his first story in our magazine, but that introduction missed connections with his first story, doubtless through the fault of us here in the office. Anyhow, here it is:

Wishart, Missouri.

Where a fellow is descended, through both his parents, from nine or ten generations of farmers who farmed personally and not by proxy—where a fellow is so descended and is a chip of the old block to the extent that he enjoys nothing so much as working in the soil, why does he try to write stories?

There are some things past finding out.

But though I try to write stories, I am nevertheless a farmer in a small way. I own and till exactly an acre of land, and, while there are no doubt other acres more abundantly productive of the material fruits, I am convinced that none yields more fun.

Speaking of adventures, have you ever tried to get a strawberry-bed started in July in a country where it is sure to rain when you don't want it and sure not to rain when you do want it?—RAMSEY BENSON.

THE following is issued by the U. S. Revolver Ass'n, 14 West 48th Street, New York City. Copies of this bulletin (No. 9) and other printed matter may be obtained from them by those who believe the ill-judged anti-weapon laws now being urged all over the country should not be passed. Uniform legislation is desirable but not legislation that curtails the rights of American citizens under the Constitution or that makes decent men, women and children defenseless while leaving the crooks still armed.

Remember, however, that the Revolver Ass'n itself admits that *any* prohibitory law operates in favor of the criminal

and against the law-abiding citizen. They advocate the law they do because it tends to uniform legislation and to common-sense instead of fanatic restrictions. It seems at least better than the other laws proposed. Personally I resent any such law as contrary to the spirit of the Constitution of the United States which assures citizens against infringement of their right to have and bear arms. While *Field and Stream* admits it is the best of the lot, still it is open to improvement, and they do not support this bill advocated by the Revolver Ass'n, feeling that the highly possible chances of its being amended, modified and so on in the various State Legislatures would destroy the better features as originally drafted. I give you the U. S. R. A. bill because every American should be familiar with all efforts against the anti-weapon fanatics, supporting whatever campaign seems to him the best.

Remember that *Field and Stream*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City, is conducting a systematic, organized campaign against these obnoxious anti-weapon laws. Write to them and give them your support.

Make it difficult for criminals to obtain pistols or revolvers.

Provide severe penalties for the criminal use of these weapons.

But don't restrict proper ownership by law-abiding citizens.

THE fundamental purpose of any law dealing with the sale, possession and use of pistols and revolvers should be threefold:

1. To make it as difficult as possible for criminals to obtain and personally dangerous for them to use weapons of this character:

2. To stop as far as it can be stopped, the unauthorized carrying of such weapons on the person:

3. To place no undue restrictions in the way of the law-abiding citizen who desires to keep a pistol or revolver in his home or place of business for the protection of life or property or for other proper uses.

Laws which do more or less than this frequently operate to the disadvantage of the citizen for whose benefit they are enacted and in favor of the criminal at whom they are aimed.

IT IS conceded by the police and others who have studied the subject that no law can be drafted which will absolutely keep pistols and revolvers out of the hands of criminals.

Even a law prohibiting the manufacture and sale of such weapons would be ineffective because the criminal would smuggle them from another country or, failing that, make his own.

That being the case, the best that can be done is to pass laws providing greatly increased penalties for the use of a weapon of this character in the commission of crime.

The criminal has no regard for the law but he does fear punishment. Make it plain that the mere possession of a pistol or revolver by a criminal will add years to his sentence and shootings and homicides will be greatly reduced.

ANOTHER thing which will greatly reduce crimes of violence is the strict enforcement of laws against the unauthorized carrying of pistols or revolvers concealed on the person or in a vehicle.

Aside from the police and certain other peace officers, any person in civil life who desires to carry such a weapon on his person should be required to procure a license to do so.

Such licenses should be granted by designated authorities only upon the presentation of convincing evidence of necessity and of the good character of the applicant.

In all cases where a weapon of this description is carried without a license a severe penalty should be imposed.

THERE should be certain restrictions placed on the sale of pistols and revolvers, but these should not be so stringent as to defeat their own purpose.

The sale of these weapons should be in the hands of licensed dealers, and would-be purchasers should be personally known or properly identified to such dealers. A record of all sales should be filed with the proper authorities.

Such precedure would make it difficult, if not impossible for the criminal to purchase a weapon, but the citizen could buy one with little trouble.

The knowledge that citizens may and presumably have armed themselves for protection is a great deterrent to housebreakers and robbers.

LAWS dealing with this matter should be uniform in all States in order to obtain the greatest possible benefit. The United States Revolver Association is now endeavoring to have a Uniform Law containing the following provisions enacted by the various State legislatures:

"None but citizens, personally known, or properly identified to a licensed dealer in firearms, are permitted to purchase pistols or revolvers. A record of sale must be filed with the police.

"No pistol or revolver may be delivered to the purchaser until the day after the sale.

"Owners of such firearms are not permitted to carry them on their persons or in a vehicle, without a license from the police.

"Dealers are not permitted to display pistols or revolvers, or imitations thereof, where they can be seen from the outside of the store.

"Possession of a pocket firearm by a person committing or attempting to commit a felony, is regarded as prima facie evidence of criminal intent, and is punishable by a mandatory sentence of five years' extra imprisonment.

"Heavy penalties are prescribed for second and third offenders. Fourth offenders may be sentenced to life imprisonment.

"Manufacturers' serial numbers or other identifying marks on pistols or revolvers must not be altered or erased.

"Aliens and persons who have been convicted of a felony are not permitted to possess a pistol or revolver.

The uniform Law is endorsed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and leading criminologists and newspapers throughout the country.

A WORD from Talbot Mundy concerning his story in this issue:

Having grown a little tired of always seeing the hero of a story win hands down, and reason confirming record that no human hero can be found without some human weaknesses, I have trusted the reader to be patient while the hero, *Ommony*, sustains a rather sharp defeat—although poetic justice deals fairly by him in the end.

Another thing: I'm sore with the theory that rich men must always get the worst end. They don't in real life. So I've invited you to dislike *Meldrum Strange* as heartily as you see fit, but to concede him elements of manliness, even as *Ommony* has his streak of venom. The weight of *Meldrum's* moneybags is too enormous for him to have emerged anything but a winner, at least to some extent.

Chullunder Ghose is a bad, fat rascal, but I like him. *Zelmira Poulakis* has appeared before in "A Secret Society" and it seemed unfair to leave her in the horrible predicament she was in when that story closed. As *Lady Molyneux* she may rise like the Phœnix from the ashes of an awkward past. *Kate Ommony* is new. The *Ommony* I used to know in real life had no sister, but he should have had.

It is not an unknown thing for temple nautch girls to be sent to entertain distinguished strangers; nor for Hindu priests to play off Codlin against Short.—TALBOT MUNDY.

THOUGH the sixteen writers of the following letter duly signed their names, for obvious reasons they are not given here. Though this formal document from the Committee of the Kangaroo Court sings loud praises of one of our writers and of our magazine itself, it is too good to be mutilated by heavy cutting and appears as it was written. The original was decorated with a pen and ink drawing of the finish of a horse race, just under the stationery heading of R. R. Veale, sheriff of Contra Costa County, California. Comrades, here's hoping that long before you see your letter in print you are outside Sheriff Veale's hospitable walls and once more free of foot. If you were so lucky as to have attained that state before my answer reached you, let me at least state here that there was an answer and also a letter from W. C. Tuttle to that and all future Kangaroo Courts of that jail.

We of Camp-Fire are of all kinds, truly. Tramps and bankers, convicts, priests and ministers, soldiers of fortune and bespectacled scientists, T. T. T.'s and staid men of affairs, but at Camp-Fire we meet on the common ground of interest in the world's outdoors and, well, what are a jail's walls between friends? It's good for us, this meeting together. Humanizes us, gives us a real taste of the democracy that is becoming not so plentiful in this democracy of ours, helps us realize we are all not so different after all.

When you come to think of it, being out of jail or in it is not a satisfactory test or proof of morality or its lack. Those inside, to be sure, have for the most part been immoral on at least one count or they would not be where they are. But of those outside some have in the past been inside and others undoubtedly will be there in the future. And who of us hasn't been seriously immoral on at least one count?

And what do we mean by immoral? If violation of law, well, has any single one of us the nerve to claim he never violated a law? I know of a lawyer, a deservedly respected citizen, who, after walking past a penitentiary and doing a bit of thinking, reviewed his own past and found that he had committed seven penitentiary offenses.

Technically and in strict accordance to law, he should have served seven terms in the penitentiary. Yet these offenses were the kind he could state in detail to his friends without losing their respect and liking. Let some of the lawyers among you review their pasts in the attitude of a prosecuting attorney and see whether they don't find quite a few technical penitentiary offenses.

If when we say "immoral" we do not concern ourselves with technicalities but go to the meat of the matter, regardless of whether or not a specific law covers the case, there will be serious indictments against nearly every one of us if not all. In addition to graft and betrayal of public office, "big business" practises, the crimes of capital and labor against the people as a whole, there is a long, long list of more personal crimes that, however serious and ugly, do not seem to weigh unduly in our estimates of ourselves and others.

Immorality, crime, what are they? I'm no philosopher and can venture no attempt at final answer. Perhaps, whatever the bearing of made laws, it may be that the essence of immorality is injury to the happiness of others. Essential to happiness are life, health, general welfare—and many things not so easily classified. More than twenty years ago I read Stevenson's "Christmas Sermon" and when there is discussion of morals certain bits of it come back to me with their soothing breadth of

vision and unfailing humanness. Here is one that the Prohibitionists, for example, would do well to ponder:

"A strange temptation attends upon man: to keep his eye on pleasures, even when he will not share in them; to aim all his morals against them. This very year a lady (singular iconoclast!) proclaimed a crusade against dolls; and the racy sermon against lust is a feature of the age. I venture to call such moralists insincere. At any excess or perversion of a natural appetite, their lyre sounds of itself with relishing denunciations; but for all displays of the truly diabolic—envy, malice, the mean lie, the mean silence, the calumnious truth, the back-biter, the petty tyrant, the peevish poisoner of family life—their standard is quite different. These are wrong, they will admit, yet somehow not so wrong; there is no zeal in their assault on them, no secret element of gusto warms up the sermon; it is for things not wrong in themselves that they reserve the choicest of their indignation. The sight of a pleasure in which we can not or else will not share moves us to a particular impatience. It may be because we are envious, or because we are sad, or because we dislike noise and romping—being so refined, or because—being so philosophic — we have an overweighing sense of life's gravity; at least, as we go on in years, we are all tempted to frown upon our neighbor's pleasures. People are nowadays so fond of resisting temptations; here is one to be resisted. They are fond of self-denial; here is a propensity that can not be too peremptorily denied. There is an idea abroad among moral people that they should make their neighbors good. One person I have to make good: myself. But my duty to my neighbor is much more nearly expressed by saying that I have to make him happy—if I may."

And so, when I am not hasty to look down upon the morals of those in penitentiaries I am doing no such foolish thing as condoning murder, theft and such like, but only wondering whether many of us on the outside might not, before a tribunal of perfect wisdom and justice, be found on the whole no better or even worse. Will any one of you who takes violent exception step forward and state honestly how many times he has brought hurt tears to the eyes of a woman or a child, an ache to the heart of a man who deserved no ache, shame and sorrow and pain where none was merited? All the "little" occasions along with the big ones? And when he is through his long recital will he still insist that he is more moral than a man in the penitentiary about whom he knows nothing except that one single immorality put him there? Perhaps he is. But how can he be sure enough to make the claim? Perhaps he isn't. Who, short of God, can know?

Anyhow, when it comes to our cheerful comrades in the Contra Costa County jail, which one of you is going to look down upon them as his moral inferiors and just what is your justification for doing so?

As, to "social inferiors," there are no social distinctions at Camp-Fire and if the lack of them distresses you, our Camp-Fire is completely surrounded with exits and I think no one will block your path to any of them.

Incidentally, it seems to me that there is always one easy and very sure test of good-breeding, and good breeding is the only sound basis for a claim to real social standing. I have noticed that the really well-bred feel no need of advertising any claim to good breeding or social standing, least of all by sneering at others or looking down on them. It is the snob who advertises. That's what makes him a snob. He may be "well born," but he himself is a throw-back, and somewhere down inside him he must realize that he is—which makes him throw out a smoke-cloud of assumed superiority over his fellows.

Will you join me in a hearty greeting to our comrades in the Contra Costa County jail? We are in their debt for an amusing letter:

Contra Costa Co., Cal.
June 12, 1923.

"It's —— to be poor!"

So sighed *Checkers* in the famous play of that name. But he was no selling-plater. He shot out from under the wire like a thorough-bred when "Opportunity's" pistol cracked. "Opportunity" came to him in the guise of a tip, the same as it's coming to you. And here's the tip: Don't fail to enter "Another" (sired by Tuttle out of imagination) with *Hashknife* up, in the next month's sweepstakes. You can't lose. Doubtful? Toddle over here to the paddock with your ears open. Didn't *Hashknife* pilot home his other mounts "Tramps of the Range," etc., easy winners? With *Hashknife* in the saddle "Another" is a cinch.

This tip is offered gratis. It comes from a committee appointed by the Kangaroo Court of the Contra Costa County Jail, especially to offer it. Erstwhile ramblers all, our rambling is at present restricted to the corridor outside our cells and to

the pages of the two hundred or so current issues of magazines with which the jail is bestrewn. While the covers of many of these retain their news-stand freshness, all the *Adventures* are crumpled and torn—and some busy Tuttleite, considerate of some future inmate's enjoyment, has patched and sewed in place the first few pages of "The Ranch of the Tombstones," which were damaged. We all hand it to W. C. in *Adventure's* kitchen, where are prepared the most savory dishes of red-blooded magazine fiction. He is the *cordon bleu chef*. May it please him to know that we have had the gnawing hunger pains that remain in our stomachs after scoffing jail-house slum rendered more endurable by the humor and convincing humanity of his tales.

Look! the entries in the July Sweepstakes are at the barrier.

"Crack!" goes the starter's gun.

A flurry of hoof-beats. A shout from the grandstand. They're off!

Is that "Another" leading the field?

With best wishes, we hope so.—KANGAROO COURT OF COUNTY JAIL.

THIS goes back to a plea last year at Camp-Fire for better treatment of our Indians:

Los Angeles, California.

I have lived amongst and worked (nursed) with the Indians most all my life and what Mrs. Jennie B. Durham says is true, not only with the Black Feet, but the Sioux as well.

I could go on to great length and tell enough to fill a book about them, but that is not my line and I can't express on paper what I want to, or the way I want to, but what I want to say is this: It is not the Government at Washington, D. C., that means bad by the Indian, but the Government Field Employee (I was one of them myself at one time). I think the solution to this trouble is: Acquaint the U. S. public with the facts, let them learn the American Indian, and the only way this can be accomplished is through the press.—MRS. B. H. FIRMMING.

DON'T forget that we are selling our cover originals by a new system. Covers will be auctioned by mail as heretofore, but instead of holding all bids until the end of the year, we can send each cover to the highest bidder one month after the issue of the magazine bearing that cover has appeared on the news-stands. Thus bidding on the cover of the September 10th issue, out August 10th, will be closed September 10th. Minimum bid, ten dollars. All covers will be sent to the highest bidders express collect. In case two or more bidders offer the same amount for one cover it will go to the bid first received.—A. S. H.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading over the map. Help make them grow!

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station hall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilitie as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Alabama—50—Fairfield. Percy E. Coleman, 405 Forty-fifth St.
Arizona—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.
California—44—Oakland Lewis F. Wilson, 836 7th Ave.
28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
38—Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Wa hington.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Enges er, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
114—Mill Valley, Louis F. Guedet, Restawhyle Knoll.
115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sabastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham. Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
186—Santa Ysabel. William Strover, Santa Ysabel Inn.
201—Los Angeles. Herbert P. Eaton, 128 West 109th St.
Colorado—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
176—Denver. Elmer S. Burrows, 3407 Larimer St.
Connecticut—103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.
142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.
D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St. N. E.
Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
129—Clearwater. E. E. Preston, 504 Vine St.
139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Courier*.
179—Key West. William McCarthy, 201 Fleming St.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.
Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.
Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.
Illinois—47—Peoria. B. H. Coffeen.

66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.

Kentucky—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.

Louisiana—191—Neita. Wm. P. Stephens.
202—New Orleans. W. Bailey, 1116 Chisville St., Cor. Basin.

Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.

Maryland—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke. 1200 E. Madison St. at Asquith.
82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer. Frederick St.

Michigan—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.

Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—Brainerd. F. T. Tracey, care Brainer Gas & Electric Co.
181—Ortonville. T. Glenn Harrison. *The Ortonville Independent.*

Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.

Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt. 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.

Nebraska—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart, 119 No. 16th St.

New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.
203—Elephant Butte via Engle. Henry Stein.

New Jersey—17—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard. Box 13.
164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
1 —Bayonne. J. D. Gray, 92 West Sixth St.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, P. O. Box 254.
146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.

New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club. 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
93—Rochester. Thomas C. Murphy, 62 Swan St.
107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.
140—New York City. L. D. Montgomery, U.S.S. *Utah.*
147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
165—Saratoga. Wm. Marshall, Office No. 9, Chamber of Commerce Arcade.
171—Albany. 224 Greene St.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs. Chas. H. Black.
204—Buffalo. Joseph T. Rozar, 198 Madison St.
205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.

North Carolina—92—Asheville. B. Taylor and C. M. Gravatt. The Southern Spar and Mica Co., 322 Haywood Bldg.
133—Pine Bluff. N. Steve Hutchings.
159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.

North Dakota—160—Fargo. James E. Cowan, Central Garage, rear Grand Theatre.
206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.

Ohio—58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson, Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, 329 W. Fourth St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Carey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
207—Columbus. Tod S. Raper, 77 Taylor Ave.

Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.

Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.
187—Portland. W. J. Belduke, 29½ N. Ninth St.

Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach. 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 3201 Brereton St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
121—Philadelphia. Don L. Brown, 3444 D St.
152—Harrisburg. Mrs. L. H. Wistrand, Box 1027.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.

South Dakota—179—Fairburn. Jesse K. Fell, *Custer County Press.*

Tennessee—195—Knoxville. C. G. Pruden, 2024 Rose Ave.

Texas—33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 4805 Oakland St.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.
134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
135—Mexia. Charles O. Harley, M. D.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
208—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West 8th St.

Utah—157—Salt Lake City. Ned Howard, 127 N. St.

Vermont—56—Fort Ethan Allen. E. Worth Benson, Box 10.

Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building

Washington—1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
153—Monroe. Ed. L. Carson, *The Monitor.*
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
19 —Arlington. F. T. Herzinger.

West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.

Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, 401 Gay Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. V, 1305 Cedar St.
138—Tomahawk Lake. Mrs. J. S. Hughson, Hughson's Resort.

Africa—173—Sinkat, Red Sea Province, Sudan. W. T. Moffat.

Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, 52 Emmaline St., Northcote; and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Victoria. Chas. M. Healy, 30, The Avenue, Windsor Post, Dist. No. 8.
130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.

Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Rue Chapelle de Grace 4.—Grate Kapel-straat, 4.

Canada—31—Howe Sound. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ont io. T. M. Waumsley, Jocelyn Bookstore.
4—Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 172½ De Meurons St.
30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy St.
62—Woodstock, Ontario. George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St.
85—Oshawa, Ontario. J. Worral, 6½ King St. E.
102—Amherst. Lloyd E. MacPherson, 5 Belmont St.
124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.
178—Moncton, N. B. Chas. H. McCall, 178 St. George St.

Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.
156—Ancon. Arthur Haughton, Box 418.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominquea, 7 Cerro.
175—Miranda, Oriente. Volney L. Held.

Great Britain—65—North Wales. William J. Cooper, "Kia-Ora," Plastirion Ave., Prestatyn.

Hawaiian Islands—170—Leilehua, Oahu, Château Shanty.

Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos. Buckly Taylor.

India—197—Calcutta. Wm. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
136—Tampico, Tamps. Jack Hester, care of T. D. El Humo, Apartado 238.

Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona.* Elmer E. McLean.

Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.

Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.

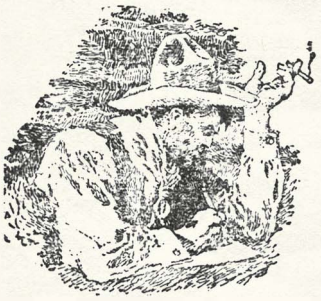
West Indies—199—Santo Domingo. A. W. Wells, Estate Consuelo, San Pedro de Marcoris, R. D.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualification and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 3633 New Hampshire Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage ten cents.*)

7. South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., P. O. Box 308, San Francisco, Calif. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
FRANK MORTON, care *Triad* magazine, 19 Castlereagh St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage ten cents.*)

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage ten cents*).

11. Philippine Islands.
BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
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★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with ten cents in stamps NOT attached)*

13. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, c stoms.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
CAPTAIN C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure*. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

17. Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 41 Rue de France, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.

18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ✠ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

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CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

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GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

23. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

24. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

25. Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. MOFFAT, 38 Bessborough St., Westminster, London, S. W. 1., England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

26. Turkey and Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

27. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

28. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, care *Adventure*. History, politics, c stoms, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

29. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
LIEUT. WILLIAM JENNA, Plattsburg Barracks, New York. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

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31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
FRED F. FLERSCHER, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. History, pol tics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

32. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
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33. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 424, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

34. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 424, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information.

35. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

36. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, l mbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

37. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, So. Pac. Extra Gang 21, S. P. Depot, San Francisco, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan; Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

38. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewati . Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

39. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

40. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
GEORGE L. CATTON, 94 Metcalfe St., Woodstock, Ont., Canada. F sh g, hunting, trappi g, canoeing. *Postage 3 cents.*)

41. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. P. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

42. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
ED. L. CARSON, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

43. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

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JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

45. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1436 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

46. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

47. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

48. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. ROBINSON, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, cam - ing; history, early and modern.

49. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agric lture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

50. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oi -fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

51. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

✠ (Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps—in Mr. Beadle's case twelve cents—NOT attached)

52. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

53. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
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54. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
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56. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

57. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs fresh-water pearls, herbs.

58. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
HOWARD A. SHANNON, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
HOWARD A. SHANNON, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 424, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Box 432. Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 66 Broad St., Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury Street, Boston, Mass.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 424, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

MAJOR W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., General Airways System, Inc., Duryea Bldg., Connecticut Ave. at L. St., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—STANDING INFORMATION

For Camp-Fire Stations write J. COX, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santa Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii.** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba.** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Pitch Lake

WHERE asphalt comes from:

Question:—"Last Spring I wrote you for information about something I am very, very much interested in—the Asphalt Lake on Trinidad.

First: Could you give me the address of the people who operate this lake?

Second: What type of men do they have in their employ?

Third: What wages do they pay them?

Any further information you may care to furnish regarding climatic conditions and language will be

gratefully appreciated by me. I am enclosing seven cents in stamps, and I'm hoping that I'll hear from you soon."—CECIL V. WRIGHT, Denver, Colo.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—I replied to your first letter many months ago. Your recent letter might have reached me sooner had you cared to look up a recent copy of *Adventure* for my address. It is never safe to assume that men of the type who handle "Ask Adventure" will stay put. I have been out of Bermuda since May, 1922.

The Pitch Lake at La Brea, Trinidad, was leased to the New Trinidad Asphalt Company, who were to work it until 1930. I am fairly certain no change has taken place. Their center is Brighton, where the ships are loaded with the pitch.

Negroes and East Indian coolies are the laborers; but what wages obtain now is beyond my knowledge. All labor is high and getting higher; but this type of labor is scarcely likely to reach very great heights.

The climate of Trinidad is warm, but agreeable; English is spoken, of course, the island being British. Conditions of living are good, and refined, as they are likely to be in any British colony.

The full statement of the sections in this department, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

How to Act in Australia

AND how not to:

Question:—"I hope I am not overstepping any privileges as a reader of *Adventure* when I ask for information that may interest only myself.

My subject of inquiry is, business opportunity for a young man in Australia. I desire to know whether a person such as I would have sufficient opportunity to succeed in the field of business to induce him to leave his home and people and start in a strange land, with strange people and perhaps different customs and habits.

I am twenty-four years of age with a college education, having also spent two years in a medical college; am of average address and appearance. Incidentally I shall have credited to my bank-account about two thousand dollars. Although my actual business experience has been sparing, I have the college man's optimistic point of view, in that I have confidence in my ability to cope with all difficulties and all new situations. (I hope this does not prove a liability instead of an asset.) I am at present a musician in the U. S. Marine Corps.

With these facts in mind, will you be kind enough to advise me whether my prospective journey will be a 'fool's errand' or not? Knowing as little about me as you do, can you inform me in a general way what phase of commercial life in Australia I can fit into, or whether the small sum of money I have will assist me in beginning a business career?

I sincerely hope I am not imposing on your valuable time."—CHARLES L. WHIZIN, Cape Haitien, Haiti.

Answer, by Mr. Morton:—No reason that I can see why you shouldn't do well in Australia. Americans of the right sort are well liked here, and in Australia there is an increasing demand for men of ideas who will *work*. If you are an American of that sort you will speedily find our people your people. If you have two thousand dollars and are discreet, not to be lured by wildcat schemes, you should be solidly on your feet in no time.

I can best make clear to you what is the right sort of American from our standpoint by suggesting what the wrong sort is.

If an American comes here delirious with hot air reacting on a merely perverted or inflated patriotism, he is not wanted.

If he assumes that America is the earth, and that all of the rest of us are outsiders and rank amateurs, he is likely to find more kicks than ha'pence.

If he talks to Australian girls the sort of claptrap sentimental googoo that is talked to American girls in average American fiction the Australian girls will tickle his vanity, squeeze him dry and make a holy show of him.

If he goes about telling how America won the war, he will have three fights a day, for on that point about a quarter of a million Diggers in Australia are sensitive and irascible as scalded cats—if you can depict to your frenzied fancy a scalded cat that wouldn't lower its *pattes* to a rogue elephant.

But the right sort of American is a good fellow, and we love him. His chivalry appeals, and his brightness allures. He is cordial and alert and companionable: he lets in the air. We are a young people, hot with a young people's crude enthusiasms, and he respects our prejudices and wins our regard. Australians in the average are a little tough and rough, but they are stanch pals that nothing can dismay.

If you want detailed information backed by official authority, write to my friend Sir Joseph Cook, High Commissioner for Australia, Australia House, London. Tell him I'll be glad if he'll advise you. He's an honest man, and you can confidently build on anything he says.

Prospecting in Southeastern Alaska

TAKE your rod and gun along too:

Question:—"Would you please tell me what part of the West would be the best for prospecting and hunting combined? I understand that the northeastern part of California has a lot of small streams and that quite a bit of gold is found there. My two brothers and myself want to get back out in the open next Spring and want to get in a place where we can hunt, fish and prospect for gold, although we don't know a thing about prospecting.

What kind of outfit would be best and approximate cost; also climate and rifles? I am afraid I'm 'way out of your line, but I'll be thankful for whatever information you can send me.

Please don't put my name in *Adventure*."— ——, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Shaw:—Your reply has been delayed because of my absence on a business trip. Hope you will pardon what is unavoidable.

After reading over your letter, I at once think of southeastern Alaska because that country satisfies all the requirements you have stated. To be sure,

the northeastern part of California has some alluvial gold yet, and the climate is fine, with quite a bit of game as well. Coupled with that is the fact that it is not very hard to get to.

When the placer fields of this section were stripped of the richest values in channels and bars and were too lean for the miners to work on a small scale they began to look for the source of the gold. This process is similar to following the hoof-prints of a horse on the ground until you come to the horse, only you use a miner's gold-pan, pick and shovel.

The method is like this: Hunt up a gulch or creek where your panning shows colors. Then begin panning as far up as you can find a trace of gold. This establishes a limit. Then try each side of rising ground until you get colors, and once on the trail continue panning until you cease to obtain gold colors. In other words, establish your limits until you are fairly certain of the area. Then begin to dig and trench to bed-rock, for that is where the "pocket" will probably be. It requires persistence, but the reward may be large.

You can see that it is pretty tough graft, and if you went after it in a way to get any results you'd have little time for hunting and fishing. You'd really need pack outfits, which would cost $50 to $75 for the horse, around $25 or $30 for your pack-saddle, sling and lash-ropes, etc., to say nothing of a riding-animal.

Now if you go up to southeastern Alaska the fare from Seattle to Ketchikan is only $35, meals included, and the steamer lands you right on the threshold of the biggest game and fish country in North America. Plenty of black-tail deer in season; bear as thick along the salmon streams as cottontail rabbits in the brush of the middle-West States; every sort of duck that flies; the streams jammed with trout and salmon; clams squirting from every little beach along the coast; big, juicy crabs for the netting; all sorts of berries in late Summer; to say nothing of the mountain goats up around timber-line on all the higher hills and moose back from the coast among the inland swamps and lakes.

Say, man! Perhaps you may think I am laying it on thick; but I've been there, and I know what I'm talking about. All you need to pack in are a few staples like flour, sugar, coffee or tea, bacon, beans, salt, soda, etc., which you can pack on your back, if you select a camp-site back in from some river leading down to tide-water, as I'd advise you to do. So much for game.

Now the best of this wonder country is the fact that anywhere you may go, if you keep your eyes open for signs you may run on to a rich gold deposit. You look in all streams you cross for "gold float." If you find some, you trace it up till you find the ledge.

Your best scheme is to plan to buy—or perhaps rent—a boat about twenty feet long, having a sail that can be stepped when there is a favorable wind. Then skirt along the shores looking for any streams that enter salt water.

You search them for float, and follow your float up. Often the white quartz veins show plainly above the mossy ground, and you can look them over carefully for the yellow glint of gold. Sometimes a moss-covered lump, if the moss is removed, will disclose what you are after. I can give you all the data you'll need if you decide to tackle this country, and I advise you to do so.

Your best bet, I think, will be to have the steamer land you either at Ketchikan or Loring—about 30 miles farther on, up around and into the Behm Canal—and purchase an outfit there. Then you can go with your boat clear into the Behm Canal as far as the Unuk River, or perhaps around to the Chickamin River. Make your way up these streams as far as you can—you can't enter the Unuk with a boat, but you can go up the Chickamin.

When you are far enough inland locate a lake to camp on. I know that along the upper reaches of the Chickamin lies a grand game country; and it is prime prospecting country, as well.

Farther back from the salt water lies a section that the Siwash Indians do not hunt and trap over. It is an irregular strip covering miles in width. It is not hunted over by the "Stick" Siwashes who inhabit the farther interior either, for there is more or less of a feud between the two kinds of Indians, and they are so careful not to run over into each other's hunting-country that this strip is the result, and game animals are thicker because unmolested. You can no doubt take in traps and make enough during the Winter season to run you for a Summer's prospecting with perhaps a good bit over if you have a lucky season.

Tell you what you'd better do. Think this thing over and decide where you'd rather go. Then let me know and I'll outline a route and give you an outfit list, with approximate cost. If you care to go north, your outfit will differ from that required by a trip into northern California. I am quite sure you'd vote for the Alaska trip if you only realized what a chance there is up there.

Let me know what you want to do, and I'll also give you a line in detail on how to prospect. You've a bully chance north to really make something, beside having a whale of a fine trip; and the climate is excellent—not cold even in Winter, on account of the warm winds from the Japan Stream. I wouldn't mind going up there again, and it was my own foolishness that prevented my making a big stake in 1898. It was *there* for me! You have plenty of time to decide, for it won't pay to start from Seattle until around the middle or last of April.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Canoeing Down the Great Egg River

THOUGH it's in New Jersey between Atlantic City and Philadelphia, with millions of tourists streaming past only a few miles away on each side, nevertheless the scenery remains wildly beautiful, the fishing is excellent, and deer thrive:

Question:—"My friends and I have taken several canoe trips down the upper Delaware River and have thoroughly enjoyed them. We found the fishing to be excellent and especially enjoyed the 'fast water,' the absence of dwellings along its banks and the beautiful natural scenery. But now we feel that a change of scene would be desirable and would like you to answer the following questions in order to help us with our planning:

Are there any other rivers not very far from the State of New Jersey that offer the attractions to a canoeist and camper that the Delaware does? If

there are, where can we obtain maps and data regarding them?

Please suggest some canoe trips in or near New Jersey that would prove enjoyable.

What lake, river or seashore sites in New Jersey or on Long Island would make good locations for a permanent camp?

Are there any canoe or camping clubs in New Jersey or New York City really devoted to the out of doors and athletics and not merely to social activities? If so, please let me know how to get in touch with some that you would recommend.

I know that you could write a book without straying far from these questions, but would appreciate all the information you can conveniently give me."—J. MERQUELIN, Indianapolis, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Shannon:—Your letter dropped in on me today; and, not having maps and data available, I can only give you indefinite information concerning your proposed canoe trip.

There is a trip in New Jersey which is well worth making according to the information I have received. You can go to Philadelphia *via* the canal and Delaware River, cut into the creek just below Gloucester, paddle up to the vicinity of Blackwood, haul across about ten miles to the headwaters of the Great Egg River and run down to Egg Harbor and Ocean City.

A friend of mine made the trip some years ago and was quite enthusiastic about it. Said Great Egg River ran through the wildest section of country he had ever seen east of the Mississippi. Stated that he saw plenty of deer and other wild life and touched at only one town *en route*, May's Landing on the lower reaches.

He said that fishing was exceptionally good and the camping locations ideal. I have never made the trip but intend doing so some day.

Egg Harbor with Ocean City near should furnish a good location for a permanent camp for the remainder of the Summer. Surf fishing is good down there, and bathing too. You could ship back to Elizabeth, or buck the outside if you want some really strenuous work. I wouldn't advise doing the latter although it can be accomplished.

As to canoe clubs, I never belonged—too much talk and too little real effort. When the madam and I hit the trail we forget there is any such thing as civilization and live as our ancestors did—off the country, so to speak.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

The U. S. Army Air Service

BEST and cheapest way to learn aviation:

Question:—"I am twenty years old and want to go into aviation. Have been considerably attracted by the U. S. Government aviation cadet school. In fact in my present condition financially it is about the only thing open to me on that subject.

What is your opinion of it?

What other schools do you suggest, or other means of getting into this field?

What are the opportunities for permanent positions, and what are likely future stages of development?" —NATHAN HALL, Danerch, Pa.

Answer, by Maj. Schauffler:—The very best aeronautical training-school in the United States is the United States Army Air Service. If you can pass the examination for entrance you will learn how to fly if it is at all possible to teach you, and besides that you will get a thorough grounding in motor and airplane mechanics, radio and the thousand and one small details that a good commercial or military pilot must know. The general requirements for eligibility for appointment as flying cadet and other information pertinent thereto are as follows:

(1) Enlisted men of the Regular Army and civilians are eligible for appointment as flying cadet.

Cadets must be, at time of application:

(1) Unmarried male citizens of the United States.
(2) Between the ages of 20 and 27 years.
(3) High-school graduates, or possess the equivalent of a high-school education.
(4) Of excellent character.
(5) Of sound physique and in excellent health.

Examinations will be held the second Tuesday in January and July. The educational examination may be omitted if the applicant presents documentary evidence of his graduation from a high school within two years immediately preceding date of this examination or of his attendance at a recognized college or university within that time. If such evidence can not be furnished the board, the educational examination will be given, the general scope of which is contained herewith.

The base pay of flying cadets is $75 per month, which includes extra pay for flying risk. The ration allowance will not exceed $1 per day; the other allowances such as clothing, equipment, etc., are those of a private first class, Air Service. Applicants from civil life will be required to pay all expenses incident to their appearance before the examining board for examination, and no claim for reimbursement of the expenses incurred prior to enlistment will be considered.

Application blanks may be secured from the Chief of Air Service, Washington, D. C., and must be submitted in triplicate, accompanied by three letters of recommendation, signed by persons of recognized standing in the community of the applicant.

The term of enlistment of flying cadets is three years, but they are discharged upon completion of or failure to complete the prescribed course, and are not required to serve the unexpired portion of their enlistment period. The courses of training normally require fourteen months for heavier-than-air and nine months for lighter-than-air.

Flying cadets who successfully complete the prescribed course of training will be commissioned second lieutenants in the Air Service Officers' Reserve Corps (inactive status) and, upon discharge, receive such travel pay and other allowances as are given other enlisted men when discharged from the service.

Examining boards are now located at the following stations:

Mitchel Field, Long Island, N. Y.
Bolling Field, Anacostia, D. C.
Langley Field, Hampton, Va.
Montgomery Air Intermediate Depot, Ala.
McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio.
Chanute Field, Rantoul, Ill.
Scott Field, Belleville, Ill.
Selfridge Field, Mt. Clemens, Mich.

Aberdeen Proving-Grounds, Md.
Kelly Field, San Antonio, Tex.
Brooks Field, San Antonio, Tex.
Crissy Field, San Francisco, Cal.
Rockwell Field, Coronado, Calif.
Fort Bliss, El Paso, Tex.
Fort Riley, Kansas.
Hawaiian Department, Luke Field, H. T.
Philippine Department, Manila, P. I.
Panama Canal Department, Cristobal, C. Z.

English. Questions in spelling and grammar. Short composition on designated subject. General questions in English and American literature.

Geography. General questions in world geography, particularly that of the United States and its possessions, boundaries, location of principal cities and manufacturing and industrial centers, important rivers and mountain chains.

History and Government. Questions will be such as to determine the candidate's knowledge of American history and the Government of the United States from its beginning to the present time. Brief questions on general world history such as the significance of important events may be asked.

Mathematics. Short problems in the fundamentals of arithmetic, in algebra to and including quadratic equations, in plane geometry and in the use of logarithms.

Physics. Questions and problems in physics as taught in high schools.

I am enclosing application blanks, which must be filled out in triplicate, and a franked envelop for your use addressed to the Adjutant General, War Department, Washington, D. C.

Any good text-books covering the subjects given in the educational examination will be all you will need, but if you want to get a little extra dope on aeronautics I would suggest your buying "The Aeroplane Speaks" by Captain H. Barber (McGraw) through *Aerial Age* and "All about Aircraft of To-day" by Frederick A. Talbot (Funk and Wagnalls).

There are plenty of private flying-schools in the United States, but the tuition is high and when you are turned "solo" you really have not had enough experience in the air to be rated as a first-class airplane pilot for a commercial operating company.

The Army will turn you out—if you have it in you—a first-class pilot and all-around aviation mechanic, and you will be paid while learning.

At the present time there is no great demand for pilots, but I think this will change in about a year, for there are some large aeronautical interests being developed in the United States at the present time.

Good luck to you and happy landings.

Wants a History of New Guinea

CONCERNING the subjoined inquiry and answer, Mr. Armit writes:

This bird doesn't want much! And he doesn't need any nerve nuts, either! I think he'd get on better in this wicked world if he weren't so shrinking timid.

Sooner or later, Mr. Armit, every "Ask Adventure" man runs up against the fellow who asks you to write him a shelf full of books "telling all about" your territory. Ignore him. In common mercy this inquirer's name and address are withheld.

Question:—"Could you furnish me with a brief history of New Guinea—and just what large game are found—also the habits and customs of its inhabitants

Enclose please find 6c U. S. Postage Stamps to cover cost of mailing

I am a reader of Adventure Magazine.

Thanking you for the above information

I Remain Respectfully Yours

Answer, by Mr. Armit:—Isn't your-inquiry a tall one? "A brief history of New Guinea and just what large game are found, also the habits and customs of its inhabitants."

My dear man, to answer that little lot would absorb about ten years, or about 360 issues of *Adventure*—and then the preface would be about complete. Have a heart! I will do my best for you, however, as it is a —— of a long way from your part of the globe to mine, and I hate to disappoint anybody.

New Guinea was first reported by two Portuguese mariners, Antonio Abreu and Francisco Serram, in 1511. They were the earliest westerners to land in New Guinea; but one Dom Jorge de Meneses, the Portuguese governor of the island of Ternate, is said to have landed there in 1526. Alvaro de Saavedra, a Spaniard, who was kin to Cortez, the discoverer and conqueror of Mexico, coasted the island in 1528 and 1529, trying to get back home to Spain. He found traces of gold on the northern coast and promptly labeled the island Isla del Oro, or Island of Gold.

The island was left to meditate—while the anthropophagi cheerfully raided each other and did their best to eat one another—until the Great Powers had annexed or stolen all the available land in the western hemisphere. Then they remembered New Guinea. An agreement between the nations of England, Germany and Holland partitioned the island amongst those Governments in 1884. Germany lost her section in 1914 when a force of Australians captured the colony, which is now administered by Australia under mandate from the League of Nations. Australia also owns the Territory of Papua (formerly British New Guinea); the Dutch still hold their section, about one-half of the whole island.

For other information I recommend your reading some of the following books: "In Far New Guinea," by Henry Newton, "Unexplored New Guinea," by Wilfred N. Beaver, "Papua or British New Guinea," by J. H. P. Murray, "An Outpost in Papua," by Arthur K. Chignell, "The Argonauts of the Western Pacific," by K. Malinowski. All of these are published in London. Any of them contain accurate information regarding the innumerable tribes and clans that people the great island.

A Good Time in Wyoming

WHERE you can make a living and work in a little outdoor stuff at the same time:

Question:—"I am writing you for information in regard to Big Horn County, Wyoming.

What is this section like as to climate, soil, minerals, fur or game; and what could a person expect as to making said section a permanent home

or as a place for a couple of years' outing? I have been in the automobile-repair business for quite a few years and am getting tired of the old grind and would like a change to the open air and hunting, trapping and a general outdoor life. I am married and have several children.

Could a fellow make a living and little more, and have quite a bit of leisure time?

Do not wish name and address printed."

Answer, by Mr. Middleton:—You ask in particular of Big Horn County. Now I am not thoroughly familiar with this county; but I am familiar with Park, Lincoln, and Frémont Counties, and I believe one of these would suit you just as well as, and possibly better than, Big Horn.

You want a place to recreate, where there is game, fish, etc. These three counties are the three big-game counties of Wyoming; Lincoln in the southeast, Frémont in the west and Park County, adjoining Big Horn, in the northwest. The climate is practically the same in all. No better water anywhere; and while the days get pretty warm in the Summer, one can always roll in under a pair of blankets at night and get up feeling like a two-year-old in the morning.

No minerals to speak of; likewise not enough fur to warrant one spending his entire time trapping it, although one might use this as a side line and pick up quite a little extra money. Don't know about Big Horn County, but in the other three there's a little of everything, from pine marten and skunk to mountain lion and bear.

This is essentially a stock and farming country, and there are plenty of opportunities for one to get into business, on a large or a small scale. You don't mention capital, but if you haven't any to speak of, why not a homestead? There's a lot of homestead land left in Wyoming and quite a bit in these three counties. Your knowledge of the auto business would come in handy during the Summer months, and you would still have all the recreation you wanted at your back door. There's no better fishing anywhere than in our Wyoming streams.

Have you thought any of northwestern Colorado? It looks just now as though that was the coming country, and if one can afford to mark time for a year or so I'd advise looking it over.

If you've a lot of time, and can afford it, why not look all of this country over this Summer, *via* auto? I know you would have the time of your life, and I'd lay a bet that you would go back home to pack up. I'll tell you more about Colorado if you are interested.

Your wish not to have your name published will be respected.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, Inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

DAVIS, ANDREW LESTER. Last heard from at Spirit River, Alberta. Age twenty-seven, height about six feet, ruddy complexion, blue eyes and black hair. Thought to be living in Michigan or Wisconsin. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. PEARL COUNTRYMAN, Route 3, Spokane, Wash.

JOHNSTON, ROBERT GORDON. Last heard from about twenty years ago from Seattle, Kings County, Wash. English. Served in the American Army and was supposed to have gotten some land from the Government. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his brother. —Address BRENDA WATTS, Oriente Hotel, Manila, P. I.

RILEY, CHARLEY. Served in the U. S. Army in France, P. W. E., No. 93, in 1918-19. Resident of Philadelphia, Pa. Any information will be appreciated by his buddy.—Address H. M. EAKES, U.S.S. *Maryland*, care P. M., New York, M. Division.

RAHILLY, RICHARD H. Irish by birth. Age forty-five years. Last heard of care of Bovers, 148 W. 14th St., New York. Artist. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. RAHILLY, 10 Marguerite Road, Glasnevin, Dublin, Ireland.

GWILLIAM, JOHN LODGE. Formerly of Cheltenham, England. Last known address 45 West Street, N. Y. C. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address P. H. GWILLIAM, 69 Clarence Road, Newport, Isle of Wight, England, or write or wire THE GWILLIAM COMPANY, 23 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

MITCHELL, BOB. Let me hear from you. I am sick and in need. Please send me a letter and some money to my mother in Frederick, Okla. She will send your letters to me.—JEFFI MITCHELL.

REED, TIFFIN. Any information will be appreciated. —Address W. M. WOLBRECHT, 2608 N. Franklin, Marshall, Te as.

DUCKWORTH, JOHN. Last known address was Hackley, Wisconsin. Any information will be appreciated. —Address C. M. TAYLOR, Box 850, Forest Grove, Oregon.

BAILEY, ROBERT W. Age seventeen. Left his home in Brooklyn, N. Y., March 17, 1923. Five feet eleven inches tall, brown eyes, brown hair, medium complexion, prominent nose and good teeth. Wore dark gray overcoat, gray and black or blue suit, white shirt, soft collar and button shoes. Carried a Winchester rifle with him, and grip initialed "R. W. B., Jr." Any information will be appreciated by his parents.—Address ROBERT W. BAILEY, 530 7th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

SCIARRA, BEN. F. Served with the Army in Honolulu, 1920. 1922 in the War Risk Insurance Office. Discharged July 2, 1922. Was then married to a Miss Ethel Locke. Letters sent to him were returned with Honolulu, Los Angeles and Seattle postmarks. Height five feet five inches, weight about one hundred and forty pounds, light brown hair and Roman nose. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address ANTHONY SCIARRA, JR., 307 E. 3rd St., Ubrichsville, Ohio.

ROBERTS, GEORGE L. Ship's steward. Five feet seven inches tall, gray eyes, dark hair, slight build. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—Address MARY ROBERTS, 4328 Oxford St., Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

PRICE, JAMES. Last heard of in Los Angeles, Calif. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOHN HOLDING, 2945 W. Fifth Ave., Chicago, Ill.

KIRSCH, MICHAEL. The general s alone, widower and would like to hear from you.

JOHNSON, DERCY and WILLIAM. Last heard of in Arkansas in 1881. Natives of Oil City, Pa. Father was A.I.O.U.W. member. Any information will be appreciated.—Address BEN P. KINNA, Route 4-A, Box 277, Houston, Texas.

CORP. NORMAN L. SIMPSON, formerly 4th Section, 5th Field Battalion, S.C. with 4th Infantry Oversea, 1918; CORP. HOMER TAYLOR, last heard of at Château Thierry, 1918; CORP. EDGAR E. SMITH, last seen in France, near Mont Faucon; PRIVATE MCCONOLOGUE; SGT. WM. A. PACE; CORP. WALWICK; CORP. MORROW and SGT. SELF, all attached to 4th Infantry. Last seen in action near Mont Faucon, France, October, 1918. Any information will be appreciated.—Address E. E. WILLIAMS, care of G. & S. I. R.R., Maxie, Miss.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

STEEL, WILLIAM. Born near Spring Mills, Pa., Feb. 13, 1846. Left there about 1856, settling in Iowa. Mother's name was Martha. Not sure of father's name, but think it was Daniel. Two sisters, Mary and Martha. Several brothers, one John who served in the 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry during the Civil War. Any information will be appreciated by his niece.—Address MRS. MARGARET E. WARREN, 2045 Champa St., Denver, Colo.

UBIL, GEORGE DURBRO. Age about sixty-five years. Left Philadelphia some time in 1875. Letter received from him from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, in 1880. Last heard from he was in Colorado. Any information will be appreciated by his sister and brother.—Address S. CATHERINE UBIL, Crozer Hospital, Chester, Pa.

THOMPSON, CHARLES, and son Charles. Left England in the Summer of 1884. Last heard from in 1896. Were then in Brooklyn, N. Y. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. LOUISA STODEL, 76A Whitehorse St., Stepney, London, E. 1., England.

NAVARRO, NEDRA. My letter returned unclaimed. Have good news for you. Please write and give address at once.—Address MRS. M. A. MONSEN, Cottage Inn, Lost Hills, Calif.

PRICHARD, WALTER (ZARK). Was in Manila in 1919; an acquaintance who reminded him of some one he knew would like to get in touch with him. Please wr te. —Address A. J. P., care of *Adventure*.

"MONTE" or "HASSAYAMPA." Am leaving for the Islands, July 27th. Write me at old address there.—"OLD BEN."

GARDNER, CHARLES H. Born in or near London, England in 1853 or 1854. Emigrated with his parents to Hobartown, Tasman a, Australia, in the early sixties. Dark complexion, short thick-set build, weight in 1883 about one hundred and eighty-five pounds. Wore beard. Was shipmate with me on American ship *Columbia* of Bath, Maine, bound from San Francisco, Calif., to La Havre, France, to discharge grain in 1883. Any information will be appreciated.—Address LLEWELLYN M. AMES, 339 Essex St., Bangor Maine.

LANTIS, WESLEY. Age about 30 years. Born in Jackson, Mich. Boyhood days spent in Red Lodge, Montana. Last heard from in the publishing department of a newspaper somewhere in Wyoming, about seven years ago. Any information will be appreciated by his aunt.—Address MRS. HATTIE SEAMANS, 229 W. Wesley St., Jackson, Mich.

THE following have been inquired for in either the August 30th or September 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

BAIRD, THOMAS GEORGE; Brown, Mary; Burke Ray; Carter, Nick and Chas. Schaub; De Vresse; Gildewell, R. R.; Gillam, Catholine; Grant, Carl L.; Griffith, Arthur Frederick or William; Hidinger, Leonard L.; Kenny, Albert; Langshaw, Robert Henry; Maloney, Roger O. Mills; Maule, Harry Almeroc; May, Mattie Mar e; Murrays, James; O'Neil, Arthur; Reynolds, "Diamond Joe" (John); Rogers, Bob; Spencer, Raymond; Streeter, Ray; Swauick, John Joseph; Wikstrom, Ralph Ronald Ludwig; Wirt, G. Williams; Wortley, J. R.

MISCELLANEOUS—D. B. K.; Lester; Passfield, Jack; Farnham, Charlie; Pyle, Sam.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

OCTOBER 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE HIGHWAYMAN OF THE MARSH — ***F. St. Mars***
A pole cat goes foraging.

TOO MANY CHAMPIONS — ***Charles King Van Riper***
Army and Navy discipline.

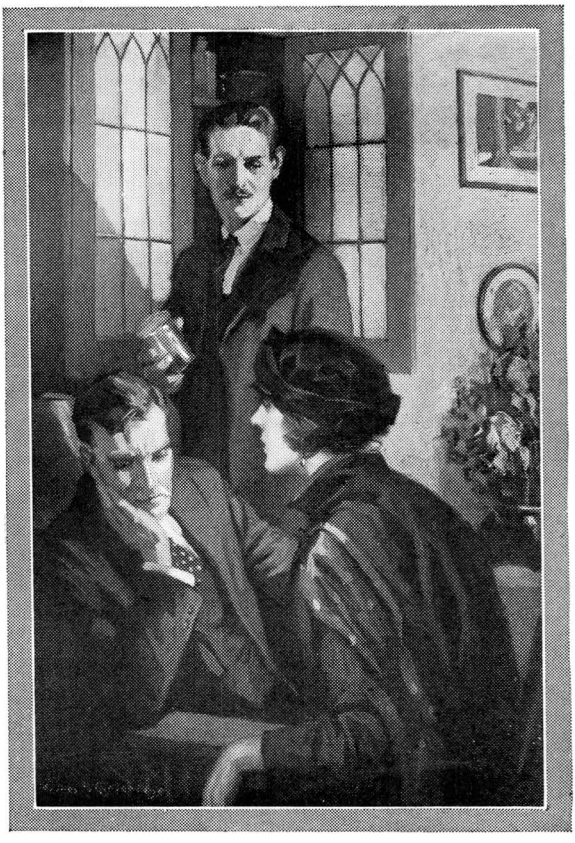
OLD MISERY A Five-Part Story Part IV — ***Hugh Pendexter***
The mountain man matches wits with "*Snake*" *Martin*.

THE MASTER'S TOUCH — ***James K. Waterman***
"The greatest whaleman that ever churned a lance" surprizes the skipper with an old trick.

GOLD — ***A. I. MacNamee***
"Danged funny thing, this here hunting for gold."

HAZARD AT DUSK — ***C. M. Sublette***
He was a bad-man, and he shot dogs.

PETRELS — ***Bill Adams***
The tale of the last clipper ship.



Can Shock Change a Man's Entire Personality ?

GRAHAM and Hasbrook, close chums, face death together trapped by the flood. One of them is killed, the other is rescued, unconscious—nearly drowned. When he is revived, he has Graham's body but Hasbrook's personality! Which man is he? What shall he do about Margaret, the girl to whom Graham was engaged? Can young Dr. Norton straighten out this mental tangle by psycho-analysis? Or did the spirit of the dead man actually enter the body of the other man when he was unconscious? Read this amazing story, "Top Dog," by William Almon Wolff in

FIRST IN FICTION

Well-known authors who have stories in Everybody's Magazine *for September:*

I. A. R. WYLIE
MRS. WILSON WOODROW
FRANCIS LYNDE
ARTHUR B. REEVE
WALTER DE LEON
W. CAREY WONDERLY

ON EVERY NEWS-STAND

Everybody's Magazine

Like Putting a New Film in a Camera

PUTTING a "Refill" Shaving Stick into Colgate's "Handy Grip" is very simple, and it is done in a few seconds.

The "Handy Grip" lasts for years. "Refills," threaded to fit it, cost you the price of the soap alone. There is no waste.

In addition to its *handiness* and economy, Colgate's makes a copious lather that softens the beard *at the base*, where the razor's work is done.

With hot water or cold, with soft water or hard, Colgate's lathers quickly, and makes shaving easy. It leaves the face smooth, cool and refreshed.

Send us 10c for the "Handy Grip," the metal container, and a trial-size shaving stick. Then buy "Refills" anywhere, as you need them, for the price of the soap alone. Three months' better shaving in each "Refill," for less than the price of a day's cigars.

COLGATE & CO. *Dept. C* **199 Fulton St., New York**

COLGATE'S

"HANDY GRIP" REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The Refill Shaving Stick